"Ethnic Solidarity" Unbounded:
Bangkok's Colonial Culture and the Underground Chinese Networks in the Wartime Thailand, A.D. 1927-1958

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-- **ABSTRACT** --

This article argues against the conventional understanding which casts the overseas Chinese community (and other immigrant ethnic enclaves) simply as the community of "middleman minorities" who were useful financially but constantly kept apart from their host society unless they chose to become fully assimilated. It contends that their solidaristic ties and actions go far beyond their standard recipes for success, i.e., their shared sense of belonging and economic ties, to include other aspects such as their reactive solidarity as a response to discrimination and political strategies. The article focuses on the formation of the underground Chinese networks in Thailand during the early-twentieth century—a time period when the rises of twined nationalisms in both China and Thailand occurred. It examines how the specific actors forged social ties among themselves and with other social actors in various spatial locations through their interpretive practices. The case study, composed of four historical cases/episodes (i.e., solidarity in prison, solidarity in school, solidarity at local marketplaces and ship docks, and solidarity in factories), eventually suggests the "network effect," specifically pertaining to how the concretely existing and overlapping ties forged by these actors in these underground terrains allowed them to emerge after the end of World War II with a victory to become a powerful force in the Thai radical politics. In additional to its contribution to the area studies and overseas Chinese studies, this article aims to contribute to the ongoing developments of the two specific sets of sociological literature: 1) the well-established literature on the ethnic solidarity since the work of an economic sociologist Alejandro Portes, his colleagues, and other current social geographers and 2) the literature that touches upon the relationship between culture and network that has begun to be consolidated in the last two decades, specifically from the works of Margaret Somers, Eiko Ikegami, Ann Mische, Mark Pachucki and Ronald Breiger, and etc.

Keywords: Ethnic Solidarity, Culture and Network, Overseas Chinese Studies

INTRODUCTION: A SITE OF THE UNDERGROUND NETWORKS IN THE MAKING:

After the World War II, the Chinese community has been considered as a significant force behind economic modernization in Thailand.[1] *Are we to conclude simply that the main recipe behind this success story lies in the community's well-organized, functioning, and long-lasting ethnic enclave that has been serving their members as a powerful gateway for their upward social mobility and successful assimilation into their host society?* The history of the Chinese community in Thailand is beyond an ideal-typical case of a community of sojourners evolving to become that of the settlers—

[1] See, for example, Hamilton and Waters (2006); Skinner (1957; 1958); Tagliacozzo and Chang. (2011); Unger (1998); and Wilson (2007).

or specifically, as a community of the "middleman minorities"[2] who were useful financially but constantly kept apart from their host society unless they chose to become fully assimilated. This paper touches upon another equally important aspect. The Chinese community in Thailand was also a strong force in radical politics. Forming, operating, and expanding underground during the first half of the twentieth century, these networks emerged after the World War II to play a significant part in the Thai politics. A careful examination of this neglected aspect of the Chinese community in Thailand is thus crucial for the understanding of their post-war socioeconomic life beyond their standard recipes for success.

The opening of the twentieth century witnessed the arrival of twined nationalisms in both Siam and China. After the collapse of the Qing dynasty and its vigilant empire that lasted for two thousand years in 1911, China experienced the rising tides of nationalisms from below within its own continent and among their expatriate communities around the world. These movements lasted until the end of World War II when Mao Zedong finally seized control of the power in 1949. In Siam, the Chakri dynasty ran into its major crisis also around the turn of the new century. The nationalist resurgences, in both pro- and anti-royalist variants, emerged and shook the foundation of Bangkok monarchy, which lasted for one and a half century until it was finally overthrown in the 1932's coup d'état. Amidst these ongoing twined crises, there emerged a site of the underground Chinese networks in the making in Thailand. A critical investigation of this emergent site provides preliminary answers to the question that touches upon a perennial concern about the peaceful coexistence between the Thai and Chinese communities beyond the conventional approaches to ethnic solidarity and assimilation.[3]

Scholars who follow conventional understandings describe the Chinese community in Thailand as an exemplary form of *ethnic solidarity* and one that also has successfully assimilated into the host society in Southeast Asia. The success of these claims relies on a combination of the two following approaches. *First*, the analysts usually begin by seeing such form of *ethnic solidarity* in terms of "ethnic enclave" in both commonsensical and

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[2] For the sociological concept of "middleman minorities," see Bonacich (1973).

[3] The peaceful coexistence between the Thai and Chinese communities is a conventional assumption usually made by laypersons and scholars about the relative absence of violence against the Chinese community in Thailand, compared to other Southeast Asian experiences of the same kind. A successful assimilation, whether voluntary or forced, is usually suggested by these laypersons and scholars as a key answer to this relatively peaceful coexistence between the two communities. See, for example, Landon ([1941], 1973) and Skinner (1957; 1958)

academic sociological senses.[4] According to this first approach, several observable characteristics such as spatial clustering, robustness, longevity, and economic achievement of the Chinese community in Bangkok are used as factual evidence to testify to those claims. *Second*, the analysts usually rely on the master narrative of the relationship between the Thai nation-state and it policies toward the Chinese populations in its territory to argue for the successful assimilation of their community into the host society. According to this second approach, the Thai nation-state's policies toward the overseas Chinese in Bangkok are used also as factual evidence to suggest the permutation of policies that range from the lenient and liberal treatment at the beginning toward forced assimilation leading to a complete assimilation of the Chinese community into the host society at the end.

This paper argues that, to understand the Chinese community in Thailand as a form of *ethnic solidarity*, the concept of *ethnic solidarity* must first be questioned and unpacked. Relying on a well-established literature of the ethnic solidarity in the Cuban community in Miami, I suggest that there are at least some possible ways to conceptualize *ethnic solidarity* beyond the original concept of "ethnic enclave." Then, I suggest that *ethnic solidarity* must be understood from the vantage point of relational sociology. According to this perspective, *ethnic solidarity* must be defined as "concretely existing and overlapping ties" that are, at the same time, constructed by the actors in their local practices. From this conception, I rely on the historical narratives about the underground Chinese networks in the wartime Thailand, A.D. 1927-1958. I argue that these underground networks were coevolving with the Bangkok's colonial culture understood more specifically as a system of classification of the subjects that constituted the Chinese subjects yet, at the same time, was immature and ambiguous in the sense that it allowed ample rooms for contingencies of meaning and practice to be deployed by the actors on the ground.[5] I begin first with the concept of *ethnic solidarity*.

"ETHNIC SOLIDARITY": CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION:

Ongoing debates on ethnic solidarity voice their concerns primarily over the problems of operational definitions and their concomitant analytical approaches. Ethnic solidarity was originally defined in terms of "ethnic enclaves," a concept coined by a sociologist Alejandro Portes (and his colleagues) in the mid-1970s to

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[4] "Ethnic enclave" is commonsensically understood as an enclosed or isolated space or area within a foreign territory or uncongenial spatial designation or environment. For a classical example of the academic sociological conception of the same term, see Alejandro Portes (1989), "What's an ethnic enclave: The case for conceptual clarity," *American Sociological Review*, 54, 929-49.

[5] Here, I rely on Pachucki and Breiger's (2010) concept of "cultural holes" to refer to such contingencies of meaning and practice.

study the Cuban community in Miami.[6] According to such original conception, ethnic (or immigrant) enclaves are referred to as the residential areas of ethnic populations, which also normally serve as the prime locations for their socioeconomic life. Although the degrees of cohesiveness or forms of internal stratification characteristically differentiate among ethnic enclaves, the main feature is always the spatial clustering of populations. Earlier sociologists who applied this concept to their studies of ethnic enclaves were interested in the possibility that such enclaves could produce upward social mobility for the newcomers to be assimilated into their host societies.[7]

Recent studies challenge the original conception and the basic assumption that comes with it. These are done in two specific ways. *First*, three works by social geographers Anderson (1995), Heibert (1993), and Zhou (1998) challenge the basic assumption by teasing out on the overlap between spatial locations and patterns of socio-economic life. Anderson (1995) suggests that social discrimination produces ethnic enclave. In her study of the social construction of Vancouver's Chinatown, Anderson argues that the White racialist ideology and discriminatory policies were the forces behind the practices of segregation which in turn created the specific spatial location for the Chinese immigrants and their district as well as structuring their business patterns in Vancouver. Heibert (1993), however, suggests the opposite by arguing that a specific pattern of spatial clustering is in fact the main contribution for the creation of an ethnic enclave economy and class structure within the Jewish communities. Zhou (1998) relies on her analysis of the inter-firm networks among the Chinese enterprises in Los Angeles to challenge the original assumption that the business patterns organized by an ethnic enclave is neatly patched and presumably taking place within the core in an inner city. Her analysis shows how the locational patterns of ethnic enterprises are much more organizationally complex, spatially widespread, and interconnected than one might imagine.

Second, Light et al. (1994) and Alberts (2005) are both concerned with disaggregating and providing more specific definitions and conceptual clarifications that might account for a better understanding of the ethnic enclaves in substantive cases. Light et al. (1994) suggest that we should begin by distinguishing between the two terms: ethnic economy and ethnic enclave economy. Tracing the genealogies of both terms, Light et al. point out

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[6] See Bundesen (2004) for Alejandro Portes' biography. See also Portes' (1989) for the concept of "ethnic enclave."
[7] Studies which relied on "assimilation" (and its twined concept "acculturation") were the important part of a major post-war paradigm in the social sciences. It could be seen to be associated with the modernization theory. See Alba and Nee (2003) for a current revival of this concept.

that they derive from the different sets of literature. Whereas the first term "ethnic economy" derives from the labor segmentation literature, the second term "ethnic enclave economy" derives from the middleman minorities literature. Using the data from their survey of Iranian immigrants in Los Angeles, Light et al. confirm that the ethnic enclave economy is only a special case of the ethnic economy which, while an older concept, is much more general and useful than the newer one. Alberts (2005) provides a very useful catalog of concepts and specific approach to study ethnic solidarity. In his review of the literature on the past studies of the Cuban community in Miami, Alberts encounters the contradictory and irreconcilable characteristics between those who perceive the internal division and those who see the cohesiveness of such community. Alberts suggests that in order for us to get out of this dilemma, we must be aware of two things. First, we must be more specific on what kinds and aspects of ethnic solidarity we are attentive to. As a way to disaggregate such concept, there are at least five specific ways in which ethnic solidarity can be defined, Alberts maintains.

1) <u>Initial Help to Newcomers by Previous Migrants</u>:

First, ethnic solidarity can be defined as the initial help that previous migrants give to newcomers. This exists in many forms, such as making donations, offering a place to stay, or assisting them in finding a job, etc.

2) <u>Bounded Solidarity</u>:

Second, ethnic solidarity can be defined as a sense of belonging together according to shared experiences. This is referred to as "bounded solidarity" (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993).

3) <u>Reactive Solidarity</u>:

Third, ethnic solidarity can be defined as an expression developed as a response to discrimination and alienation. This is referred to as "reactive solidarity" (Bun and Hui, 1995).

4) <u>Political Strategies</u>:

Fourth, ethnic solidarity can be defined as political strategies, for example, ethnic bloc voting or strategic alliances that enhance the community's political influence. Alberts (2005) suggests that these political strategies do not simply mean that members of the community agree on all political agendas.

5) <u>Basis for Resource Mobilization</u>:

Fifth, ethnic solidarity can be defined as a basis for mobilization of ethnic resources. Within the context of ethnic economy, this can include raising capital, hiring labor, and allocating resources and disseminating information through ethnic channels.

Although many scholars agree that ethnic solidarity can be a basic trait of immigrant communities, they hardly agree on the definition and approach to study it (Mahler, 1995). In addition, Alberts suggests that as a multidimensional concept, an ethnic community can show strong solidarity in one dimension and experience division and conflict in another. Second, Alberts (2005) maintains that ethnic solidarity is usually treated as a static system instead of a dynamic social phenomenon that transforms as the contexts in which it is embedded changes.[8] Alberts relies on the mix-embeddedness approach to address his two concerns above (see further in Alberts, 2005; pp. 232-233).

In this paper, I am specifically interested in ethnic solidarity in the third and fourth senses, as a reactive response to discrimination and as political strategies, though I maintain that all five definitions can be applied to my historical case. Furthermore, although I stay in the purview of network analysis in seeing ethnic solidarity as a more complex and interwoven process than merely the patterns of spatial clustering and business, I depart from Alberts' (2005) mix-embeddedness approach since my concern is not merely on ethnic entrepreneurial activities. Moreover, while I agree that ethnic solidarity is dynamic and is embedded within a historically specific context, I suggest that culture shapes ethnic solidarity through contingencies of meaning and practice that allow agents to devise political strategies and bridge structural holes. I return to this brief theoretical statement on the relationship between culture and network at the end of this paper.

THE EXPATRIATE CHINESE AS THE COLONIAL SUBJECTS IN THE 19TH-CENTURY BANGKOK:

The overseas Chinese studies has recently begun to gain currency among the interdisciplinary scholars (Reid, 1996; 2008; Tagliacozzo and Chang, 2011). Thailand is a perfect case to examine the socio-economic life and politics of the overseas Chinese (or *huáqiáo*) as they accounted for the twelve percent of the entire

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[8] On this second point, Alberts (2005) maintains that: "Another explanation for the contradictory descriptions of the Cuban community is that many researchers see ethnic solidarity as static, rather than as a dynamic social system that adapts to changes in the contexts in which it is embedded. This static perspective on ethnic solidarity in the research on ethnic economies is surprising, because scholars studying social relations in immigrant groups have emphasized that ethnic networks change over time. Just as some scholars have suggested that we should distinguish between ethnic networks that promote migration and those that support immigrants in their host societies, we must also distinguish among different forms of ethnic solidarity at different points in time" (Alberts, 2005; pp. 231-232; citations omitted).

population.[9] The Chinese peoples migrated to Siam since the beginning of its history. Whereas many originally came as sojourners, a majority of them chose to settle in Siam and never returned home. In the pre-colonial era, the Chinese-led trade accounted for the growth of the Siamese economy (Dhiravat, 1993; Kathirithamby-Wells, 1993; Ishii, 1993; Lieberman, 2005; Reid, 1990; 1995; Sarasin, 1977). In Ayutthaya, the earlier capital of Siam before Bangkok, there existed a robust Chinese community. Many became advisors at the court and later became ennobled. Many Chinese men married Siamese women and lived the Siamese life.

During the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, the new wave of Chinese migration to Southeast Asia occurred. One of the major destinations for these expatriates was Bangkok, a new capital of Siam. Many studies explained this new wave of Chinese migration according to the push and pull factors.[10] None of previous studies touches upon the pull factor with regard to the hidden agenda of the ruling elite of Bangkok toward the overseas Chinese in this period. I argue that the main reason for the advent of the new wave of Chinese migration to Siam should be understood from the vantage point of the Bangkok's colonial project. The late-eighteenth to early-nineteenth century (or the early Bangkok period) is a period of crisis and transition in Siam in which structural and cultural changes became strongly pronounced. In this period, the ruling elite of Bangkok, in their restorative attempt to build a new state, responded to the crisis by selectively combining the remnants of the classics with their newly found institutions. As a viable entrepôt located at the Southern tip of the Chao Phraya River basin, Bangkok relied on both trade and agriculture for its economic expansion (Evers, H., 1987; Kullada, 2004). The traditional social structure created for controlling the manpower became less efficient (Akin, 1969; Englehart, 2001). The traditional bureaucracy and legal system became outdated. Moreover, the ruling elite needed a new pool of labor and institutions in response to this crisis and global economic expansion.

In such period of crisis, the ruling elite of Bangkok began to initiate what Benedict Anderson (1978) refers to roughly three decades ago as a "utilitarian structure" (as an ideal type) that provided the interdependence between the Chinese subjects and the ruling elite in Bangkok. From the outset, this utilitarian structure was not peculiar to Siam. It existed in other colonial cities in Southeast Asia such as Johor (British

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[9] For a brief history of the term *huáqiáo*, see Pan (1993) and Wang Gungwu (1991a; 1991b; 2000; 2003).

[10] For a brief history of this new wave of Chinese in-migration, specifically on the push factors, see FitzGerald ([1972], 1993); Pan (1993); and Wang Gungwu (1991a; 1991b; 2000; 2003). For the history of Siam in this specific period in which this new wave of Chinese migration was concerned, see Lysa (1984) and Vella (1957).

Malaya) and Java (The Netherland Indies) (Anderson, [1983], 2006). The major difference was that the ruling elite in Bangkok took an equal position of power with other European overlords in other Southeast Asian colonial cities as long as Siam remained un-colonized. Thus, King Rama III began to encourage the massive wave of the in-migration of the Chinese population from the rural areas of Southeastern China (i.e., the *Nanyang* Chinese). The Chinese migrants in this period were characteristically young, male, mobile, and willing to work hard for minimal wage. They could serve as a perfect pool of wage labor since they stood outside the traditional structure of manpower (or outside the traditional Siamese society). This means that the Chinese migrants did not have specific obligations to the Siamese ruling elites, princes, and rural lords since they did not belong to any masters, unlike their Siamese counterparts. Furthermore, the Chinese migrants in this period were granted with special kinds of privileges that were, on the other hand, prohibited to the Siamese subjects. These included tax exemptions in some areas, unrestricted consumption of alcohol, opium, and gambling, unrestricted engagement with prostitution concessions, and unrestricted right to travel within Siam.

In the high colonial period of Southeast Asia (from the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth century), Siam remained the only one country that was not fully colonized by the European powers. This situation further created a specific condition for a relationship between the ruling elite of Bangkok and the Chinese subjects. In 1855, King Rama IV signed the Bowring Treaty to liberalize the trade with Britain (and subsequently with other foreign nations). The British and other European subjects were granted with concessions and extraterritorial privileges. Bangkok became in principle a "semi-colonial city" where the different kinds of subjects coexisted but hardly interacted among each other, as an ideal situation similar to what J.S. Furnivall (1980) refers to as a "plural society." The Chinese subjects, nevertheless, acquired a specific social position within Bangkok. Compared to other colonial cities in Southeast Asia such as Jakarta, Johor, Penang, and Rangoon, where the Chinese subjects were classified as the Asian subalterns, the Chinese subjects in Bangkok were categorically distinctive from the Asian subalterns in Bangkok who exploited the extraterritorial privileges of their European colonialists into the Siamese territory. In the nineteenth-century Bangkok, other Asian subalterns were "strangers" while the Chinese subjects were not conceived as such by the Bangkok government (Lysa, 2003; 2004).

It is within this peculiar situation that the Chinese subjects in Bangkok were believed to have more freedom for socioeconomic actions than the Siamese subjects and other Asian subalterns as they were not part of

the traditional Siamese society and European colonial concessions within Siam, both of which had specific legal statuses and obligations. I argue that the privileges that the Chinese subjects had within the utilitarian structure that the ruling elite of Bangkok created allowed them to stand in a position that could let them perceive and construct fluid boundaries between the subjects. Many Chinese subjects also exploited these privileges by crossing boundaries. Based on my research, I found many cases in which the Chinese subjects crossed their pre-defined social boundaries. Over time, these practices of boundary-crossing started to worry the ruling elite of Bangkok. As a response, more and more controlling mechanisms were instituted. The ruling elite began to survey the Chinese populations in Bangkok. The initial survey was conducted in the late-nineteenth century (Porphant and Yoshihiro, 2001). In my archival research, I found a large collection of the primary sources from the *Chinese Department* which contained minutes, surveys, and letters of correspondence between the Siamese local officials and the ruling elite of Bangkok. I argue that the boundary-crossing practices coupled with the regime of social control were what produced the ethnic consciousness from both the Chinese and Siamese subjects. Whereas conventional scholars argue that such ethnic consciousness did not crystallize until the rises of twined nationalisms in both China and Thailand in the early-twentieth century, I suggest that it began earlier in the nineteenth-century Bangkok.

The Bangkok's colonial project—the utilitarian structure that I mentioned above—created a specific kind of colonial culture with a premature system of classification of the subjects.[11] Compared to other Asian, African, and Latin American colonial settings in which the European colonialists instituted much more rigid colonial systems with the hierarchical categories of subjects (or racial hierarchy) and well-articulate native policies, the Bangkok's colonial culture was much more ambiguous. While the ruling elite of Bangkok borrowed the ideas of colonial system from the European colonialists, they instituted those ideas within their own territories randomly. The Bangkok's colonial project was "unfinished" and not expansive enough. The resulting premature system of the classification of the subjects left ample rooms for "cultural holes" or contingencies of meaning and practice. This, I argue, becomes a background context for what happened in the early-twentieth century in Siam—an emergent site of the underground networks in which the actors' solidaristic ties and actions were

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[11] This argument comes from my Ph.D. dissertation: "Tracing Colonial Entanglements: An Actor-Network Approach to the Colonial Encounters between Bangkok and Britain in the North and South of Thailand, A.D. 1855-1910."

forged. Before I turn to that research site, I discuss briefly on the earlier forms and dynamics of solidarity within the Chinese community in Siam.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EARLIER FORMS AND DYNAMICS OF SOLIDARITY WITHIN THE CHINESE COMMUNITY IN SIAM:

The forms and dynamics of solidarity within the Chinese community could be traced back to the earlier epoch and capital of Siam, Ayutthaya, which lasted from the fifteenth to eighteenth century. From the accounts of many travelers, missionaries, traders, and diplomatic emissaries who visited Ayutthaya in the seventeenth century, it is possible to reconstruct the social life of the overseas Chinese in this earlier period. The two European visitors, Jeremias van Vliet (1683) and Simon de la Loubère (1693), provided the most detailed accounts about it (cited in Skinner, 1957; pp. 12-15). The bulk of the Chinese population in Ayutthaya consisted of merchants and traders.[12] This is not surprising since we learn from many historians that the Sino-Siamese junk trade began much earlier and continued until the early Bangkok period (Dhiravat, 1993; Kathirithamby-Wells, 1993; Ishii, 1993; Lieberman, 2005; Reid, 1990; 1995; Sarasin, 1977). Beyond the Sino-Siamese trade circuits in which the merchants and traders were well-interconnected with the Siamese and Chinese courts, the overseas Chinese in Ayutthaya forged commercial relationships with the other groups of merchants and traders: the Europeans, Moors (Indians, Arabs, and Persians), Japanese, Ryukyu, and Koreans. Piyada (2004) provides a detailed study of the activities and relationships between the Ayutthayan Chinese and other East Asian courts. Skinner (1957), arguably, presents the most detailed analysis of these trade circuits based on the earlier works. He concludes that the Chinese merchants and traders were in a more advantageous situation and favored position to the Ayutthayan court than the other mercantile groups.

The Chinese community in Ayutthaya resembled a simple community of "sojourners" in which the merchants and traders as well as other occupational groups, such as pig breeders, physicians, artisans, actors, and scholars-officials, were represented. Most historical accounts depict the robustness and interdependence among these occupational groups and the division of labor within such community. The fluctuation of the Chinese imperial edicts on the overseas and overland trades as well as the crisis of the eighteenth century that led to the

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[12] See Polenghi (2009) for the same account of the Chinese community in Ayutthaya as given by Yamada Nagamasa, a Japanese warrior and merchant in the early-seventeenth century.

final collapse of Ayutthaya in 1776, after it was invaded and burnt down by the Burmese troops for the second time, gave rise to a new context for the overseas Chinese in Siam.

The fifteenth year of transition from Ayutthaya to Bangkok witnessed a new form and dynamic of solidarity in the making that, some Thai scholars argue, became a foundation for the Chinese community in Bangkok. King Taksin, a Sino-Siamese mixed-blood prince who came originally from the commoner background, restored the Siamese throne from the Burmese. Taksin the Great mobilized Siamese peasants and Chinese merchants who escaped from Ayutthaya and from the other outlaying towns to be his entourages. They settled on Thonburi, a town east of the Chao Phraya River about 15 kilometers away from Bangkok. Historians of Thonburi describe a strong connection between Taksin and the Chinese overseas and overland trade circuits, and explained that such connection was the foundation for the formation of the new city-state of Thonburi. Some historians go far enough to confirm about the elective affinity between the organizational structure of Thonburi and the elementary form of the overseas Chinese enterprise in Southeast Asia. They argue that the structure of such patrimonial realm was reminiscent of the overseas Chinese enterprise called *kongsi* as well as their triad organizations in foreign lands.

Kongsi is a Chinese term for an overseas Chinese enterprise that could be found everywhere in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Southeast Asia. Trocki (1987; 1997; 1999; 2002) provides a detailed historical account of this organization in the colonial Singapore and Java and then Southeast Asia in general.[13] He argues that such an organization was reminiscent of those of the craft guilds in the old-regime France although not entirely similar. His analysis of historical accounts tells us about a hierarchical structure within such organization. Pannee (2002), a Thai-Marxist historian, applies Trocki's analysis to the overseas Chinese community in Siam during the Thonburi and early Bangkok periods. *Kongsi* was an organizational unit in which the Chinese workers forged their interdependent relationship among themselves. The rhetoric of seniority among the superior members and inferior newcomers and fraternity among co-equals shaped the dynamic of solidarity within *kongsi*. In the early Bangkok period, *kongsi* became an organizational basis for the syndicate revenue framing enterprises among the overseas Chinese community. As I suggest earlier, the Chinese subjects were allowed to consume alcohol, smoke opium, gamble, and indulge in other kinds of consumptive vices. As a consequence, many

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[13] See also Butcher and Dick (1993) and Rush (1990).

Chinese took advantage of this distinctive opportunity to become tax farmers, organizing or operating within the syndicate revenue farming enterprises.[14]

The members of the syndicate revenue farming enterprises were closely connected with those of the triad societies in Bangkok and other regions. Although the Chinese triad societies (or secret societies) were not unique to Southeast Asia, they took a special characteristic as they were interconnected with *kongsi* in their reciprocal functions. In any specific territory, the triad societies provided protection and intelligent information to the members of the *kongsi* in return for their financial support. Although it is rather difficult to find primary sources that directly provide the explicit information about the organizations and activities of these triad societies, some significant inputs can be inferred from the records and source materials used by the historians who study the *kongsi*. The triad societies' members were reminiscent of mafias and gangsters who organized themselves into the chains of entourages and bosses in any specific territories.

In addition to *kongsi* and triad societies, the Chinese community organized different kinds of associations such as clan houses, the chamber of commerce and benevolent societies (Coughlin, 1955; 1960; Schrock et al., 1970). One of the duties that the Bangkok's Chinese Department performed was to survey and keep those associations under surveillance. In my analysis of the primary and secondary sources, I discover many cases and policies which elaborate the controlling mechanisms of Bangkok. The other two forms and dynamics of solidarity within the community were the Chinese presses and schools. The Chinese presses were a powerful vehicle to disseminate news among the members especially those that were about their homeland and other ongoing events that occurred in Bangkok. The Chinese schools were organized to teach Chinese culture to their offspring. They were also the venues for socializing the newcomers.

Lastly, solidarity among the overseas Chinese was constructed and maintained through a specific medium—the letters that the expatriates wrote to their families in their homeland which were sent along with their remittances.[15] One of the most important puzzles that the historians (including myself) who study these letters (*pueykwan* in Chinese) encountered was how the medium itself was constructed in the first place. How could the Chinese write such elaborate letters? The Chinese migrants to Siam during this period were primarily

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[14] For a detailed historical analysis of the tax-farming system in the early Bangkok period see Lysa (1983; 1984).
[15] Suchada (1989) provides a history of this remittance (and letters) among the overseas Chinese in Thailand.

from the rural areas of Southeastern China. They were largely illiterate. It is impossible for them to write such sophisticated letters. Arguably, someone must perform this function for them. As I found out, in Yaowarat, the Chinatown of Bangkok, there were many agencies, which provided the community with writing those letters along with a delivery service for both the letters and their remittances. Most of the time, we could imply from the contents of such media that they were the shared stories for the entire community. I spent two years studying these letters and learning that, in addition to writing and sharing stories, the act of reading these letters among the members was a significant practice that allowed them to understand and construct their own culture. Reading the letters, writing, and sharing stories, I argue, evoked solidaristic ties among them.

All of these forms and dynamics of solidarity within the Chinese community in the early Bangkok period represent a solid evidence to confirm how the Chinese subjects understood and construct themselves as a kind of subjects that most of the times did not coincide with how the *Chinese Department* of Bangkok understood and construct them as their colonial subjects within their utilitarian structure. The incommensurable worldviews and practices between the two sides of the actors represents a "cultural hole" (i.e., contingencies of meaning and practice) in which the possibility for new forms and dynamics of solidarity—an emergent site of the underground networks to crystallize later in a subsequent period.

CRISES OF THE EARLY-20TH CENTURY:

Both Siam and China experienced their own ongoing crises in the early-twentieth century. In Siam, the reforms by Rama V were unfinished and not expansive enough, and the state centralization program carried out by the royalists in Bangkok was short-lived. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Siam witnessed the rise of nationalist movements in two variants: royalist and anti-royalist. In principle, whereas the royalist-nationalists' aim was to restore the monarchy and created a nation, the anti-royalist nationalists' goal was to get rid of such patrimonial remnant. During the time period from 1910 to 1932 (i.e., during the reigns of Rama VI and VII), the battles between the two nationalist variants were intensely played out (Kullada, 2004; Vella, 1978). The 1932 revolution "from above" successfully ended the unfinished absolutist regime, and turned Siam into a regime of

constitutional monarchy. Siam finally became a nation-state, joining the League of Nations during the inter-war period; her name was changed to Thailand in 1939.[16]

In China, the last imperial dynasty, the Qing dynasty, collapsed in 1911. The early republican era (1912-1916), the era of warlordism (1916-1928), and other subsequent periods during the war and inter-war times followed until Mao Zedong seized control of the power in 1949, thus, the beginning of the communist era in China. During the early republican era, the two nationalist variants also emerged: the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Although both variants of nationalist movements shared two common enemies, the Chinese and Western (including Japanese) imperialisms, their political agendas, types of leadership, and strategies of mobilization, organizational structures, and locations of power were entirely different (Lieberthal, 2004).

It is during this period of intense domestic (and global) crises in both Siam and China that we could witness an emergent site of the underground Chinese networks in the making in Thailand. Its formative nature could not be understood apart from these rising twined nationalisms. A specific group of the expatriate Chinese who were the principal agents in such underground networks responded to these crises by forging social ties across localities, regions, and transnational terrains. As situated in Siam and was characteristically part of an urban movement, this emergent site of the underground networks was encapsulated and critically constituted by the legacy of Bangkok's colonial culture. I argue that the Bangkok's colonial culture—a system of classification of the subjects—was a cultural repertoire that provided actors with meaningful symbolic resources and strategies that shaped their social action. In their local practices, however, the actors employed and redeployed these symbolic resources and strategies through their understanding of the contingencies of meanings and their creative actions that could in turn reproduced or engendered new social and cultural milieus. The emergent site of the underground networks was constituted by those contingencies of meanings and creative actions. I return to this theoretical argument at the end of this paper briefly from the perspective of relational sociology.

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[16] For the history of Siamese foreign relations in this period, see Hell (2010).

SOLIDARITY WITHIN THE CHINESE COMMUNITY IN THE EARLY-20TH CENTURY: THE *LOOKJIN* COMMUNISTS AND THEIR UNDERGROUND NETWORKS:

As I mention earlier in this paper, I rely on Alberts's (2005) two conceptions of ethnic solidarity (i.e., reactive solidarity as a response to discrimination and political strategies) to inform my understanding of the ethnic solidarity within the Chinese community of Thailand. Whereas "reactive solidarity" can be defined as an expression developed as a response to discrimination and alienation, ethnic solidarity can be also be understood as "political strategies" that enhance a community's political influence. These two conceptions are interrelated in practice. Furthermore, I rely on a metaphorical and qualitative network analysis to examine these two forms of solidarity.[17] I define the emergent site of the underground Chinese networks in the early-twentieth century Thailand in terms of the "concretely existing and overlapping ties" that are, at the same time, constructed by the actors in their local practices. Moreover, I am specifically interested a specific group of actors called the "lookjins" and their underground networks (see below). In the two following sub-sections, I rely primarily on a series of works and source materials used by a Thai-Sinologist and historian, Kasian Tejapera (1992; 2001; 2011), with regard to his analyses of a specific category of the Chinese community in Thailand (i.e., the *lookjin*) and his narratives of the lookjins' communist movement in the early-twentieth century or during the wartime. In triangulation with other sources, I selectively use and further re-read his sources with my ethnographic sensibility. I also reinterpret his narratives for my purpose of the network analysis and as to illustrate my theoretical standpoint that I set out earlier in this article.[18]

The "*Lookjin*":

In this paper, I am specifically interested in a single category of the expatriate Chinese in Siam, the *lookjin*.[19] This Thai word was first registered in historical records during the early-twentieth century. I found the recurring usages of this term in various genres of the archival materials that I study for three years in the *National Archive of Thailand*, various research institutes' libraries, and from secondary sources. This term was also used in

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[17] Here, I am using "network" in a metaphorical and qualitative sense in the way both Ikegami (2000; 2005) and Somers (1994) understand and use the term. Both sociologists see "network" in terms of the narratives or "relational matrix." Also, for them, the construction and evoking of this metaphor in social life depend on narrativity.

[18] These narratives were considered raw materials for my preliminary sketch of network analysis in this paper. In the future, I intend to examine the primary sources that pertain to the same historical cases.

[19] There exist more than one category relevant to the Chinese community in Thailand. For example, "jek" is a highly derogative term to call the Chinese people or the people of the Chinese descendants in Thailand.

the Chinese, Siamese, and European newspapers. It was also found in the letters of correspondence and minutes written by the Siamese officials working under the *Chinese Department* of the Bangkok government.

As a Thai word, the *lookjin* is translated as an offspring of the Chinese (or Sino-Thai) parents (i.e., *look* means offspring; and *jin* means "Chinese"). *Lookjin* is a commonsense social and cultural category, not a legal or racial one in Thailand. It is also a practical category with a sense of ambiguity and contradiction. Such category can be interpreted in many ways by the actors in their local practices. One of the ambiguities arrives when the birthplace is concerned. A *lookjin* can be considered either as an immigrant (or an expatriate Chinese) or Siamese-born Chinese. Furthermore, a *lookjin* does not signify a political orientation of a person. Thus, there could be communist and non-communist *lookjins*. Unlike the Chinese populations in colonial Java, Malaysia, and the Philippines, which gained their separate legal categories apart from those of the other ethnic groups during their careers in the colonial period, the *lookjins* in Siam did not have a distinctive legal status and entitlement (Hooker, 2002). Moreover, the term does not suggest any specific kind of racial hierarchy as typically found in other colonial states in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, or Latin America. As I maintain earlier, apart from the European and Asian "foreign" subjects, there existed only the two separate categories of subjects, the Siamese and Chinese subjects, both were considered as the royal subjects at the same time. The category of *lookjin*, then, could be easily located in between the two categories of subjects. Hence, there is a room for maneuvering between the two opposite poles in practice.

A renowned Thai-Sinologist and historian, Kasian Tejapira, provides a series of significant studies on the genealogy of the *lookjin* including their social, cultural, and political characteristics (1992; 2001; 2011). Kasian (2001) relies on his own term the "ethno-ideology of Thainess" to refer to a specific cultural parameter that exists between the two opposite poles: the Thainess and Chineseness. Instead of relying on racial or legal characteristics, the Bangkok's royalists relied on this ethno-ideology of Thainess as their proto-nationalism in the early-twentieth century. To be a "Thai," one must, more than other things, be a royal subject of the Thai monarchy. If one could not be a royal subject, one was considered "un-Thai." After the 1932 revolution when the coup overthrew the Chakri monarchy, this ethno-ideology of Thainess was further politicized by the Thai elite-nationalists. When "Siam" was changed to "Thailand" in 1939, this ethno-ideology of Thainess found its fullest sense of articulation as an official version of the Thai elite-nationalism. I argue that this official

nationalism was a *negative* and *pragmatic* construction against the overseas Chinese community in Thailand, which was considered "the others" or the negative counterpart of being "Thai," and not all other ethnic groups or categories.[20] For this reason, the official nationalism in Thailand could not really be considered as an ideal form of "ethnic nationalism."[21] Specifically, it is a royalist discourse of proto-nationalism further politicized by the elite-nationalists after they overthrew the monarchy—specifically, the "ethno-ideology of Thainess" that is referred to by Kasian (2001). As a community, the Chinese in Thailand during this time period was negatively constructed as the otherness of the Thainess instead of an inferior race or minority ethnic group. The bottom line is that the expatriate Chinese, which hitherto were considered as the "useful" royal subjects, could be now discriminated against as the "foreign" counterpart to the Thais. The Thai official nationalism arbitrarily merged *xenophobia* and *Sinophobia* into one.[22] It was the first time in the history that the Chinese community in Thailand was constructed by the elite-nationalists as the "threatening foreigners" while they were just "foreigners" in the earlier times. This by no means implies that the Chinese community would understand and construct themselves as such.

The Underground Networks of the *Lookjin* Communists: the Overlapping Ties in the Making during the Anti-Communist Era of Thailand (1927-1958):

In this sub-section, I map out the *lookjin* communists' underground networks from the available historical sources. The five graphic illustrations (Figure 1-5) below represent the preliminary sketches of the overlapping ties and connective activities that were constructed by the *lookjin* communists in various social settings and locations.[23]

As Figure 1-4 below illustrate, I place the immigrant lookjin communists (LJC) at the center in each specific case/episode. There were, nevertheless, two groups of the immigrant lookjin communists in Siam during the specific time period that my study concerns: the Chinese and Vietnamese. The Chinese comrades were much larger, compared with their Vietnamese counterpart. In my historical context, they both merged into a single

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[20] For the same argument, see also Thongchai Winichakul (1994).

[21] The Thai nationalism is referred to by Benedict Anderson ([1983], 2006) as one of the three examples of the "official nationalism." The other two examples are Japan and Hungary.

[22] This might explain why there was no ethnic hatred crimes or ethnic cleanings by the Thais against the Chinese minorities in the Thai history.

[23] I expect to develop further using the social network software with a full data set to analyze both the ego-centric and socio-centric networks.

group through their shared political-nationalist ideology and aim and, thus, formed the underground Chinese networks—a central analytical focus of my paper.

Figure 1-4 further show the social ties that the LJC created both in and out of prison in each specific case/episode. I rely on four specific cases/episodes to illustrate my preliminary mappings of the LJC' network clusters and expansions. Though occurring in the four separate social terrains, these four cases/episodes were otherwise overlapping in space and time. The four cases/episodes are not organized in a chronological order. Nevertheless, they can be understood as developing from the most micro-scaled to most macro-scaled networks. Also, whereas the first two cases/episodes occurred during the inter-war period, the last two case/episodes took place within the period leading up to the Second World War until the end of it.

I.   Solidarity in Prison during the Inter-War Period: Brokerage across Political Subjects:

After the Anti-Communist Act of 1929 was fully enforced in Siam, the LJC were arrested and put in prison in Bangkok. Reading the available source materials with my ethnographic sensibility, I see in this episode of the social life in this prison how the solidarity between the LJC and Thai radicals was created. According to the narrative, the remnants of the LJC, after the collapse of the Communist Party of Siam in 1936, became the political prisoners of the Bangkhwang (a major Thai prison in Bangkok). They occupied a half of the first floor of the Area 6 which usually housed political prisoners and had a better facility and environment than those of the other floors or areas. The other half of the floor was occupied by a group of Thai political prisoners—the Bowaradej politicos (BP). The BP were charged with a criminal status by the government after they staged a rebellion against the People's Party who came into power right after they staged a coup to overthrow the Siamese monarchy in 1932. The Bowaradej Rebellion was considered the first radical movement in the modern Thai history. The LJC and BP spent their times together for about six years in the Bangkhwang. That would be long enough for them to get to know one another, interact, forge ties, and organize actions.

From a variety of primary sources, for example, diaries, memoirs, biographies, testimonies, and fictions, Kasian vividly describes how the LJC and BP became socially connected in the

Bangkhwang. For the LJC's half of the prison, a well-organized collective life existed between two groups: the more mature, educated, and polite Chinese members and the younger, more ideologically charged, and passionate Vietnamese inmates. The BP were once the members of the royalty and nobility. According to their high statuses, they were subject to lenient and liberal treatment by the prison guards. Based on this setting, Kasian suggests an open-minded atmosphere that allowed the possibility for communicative exchange and social interaction between the LJC and BP to occur from the beginning, since both shared a similar political orientation: the anti-royalism for the BP and the anti-imperialism for the LJC. Their communicative exchange and social interaction happened in various study groups, language classes, and informal conversations everywhere in the prison's common spaces. Sometimes, these communications and interactions were turned into organized actions. There were many instances in which these inmates organized work stoppages and hunger strikes in the prison. Nonetheless, one of the most important things that happened during this six-year period was that the LJC learned to speak, read, and write in Thai. They also learned about the Thai culture and politics from living and sharing stories with the BP. The BP learned the communist doctrine and radical politics from the LJC in return.

II.   Solidarity in School between Comrades and Newcomers in the Inter-War Period: Brokerage across Generations:

Out of the prison, a robust network of connectivity between the older and younger generations of the LJC was formed and expanded also during the inter-war period in Siam. The immigrant LJC connected the two generations of the lookjins. This episode took place in various Chinese schools in Bangkok. The remnants of the LJC (who were not arrested and put in prison) were concerned with training and recruiting the members of the new generation of the Sino-Thai (or the Thai-born Chinese) to be part of their underground networks at their tender age. The LJC were seen to connect with the teachers, broads of directors, and staffs who worked for the three major western-established mission schools in Bangkok: 1) Assumption College, 2) Bangkok Christian College, and 3) St. Gabriel College. The LJC were also connected with the parents of the young lookjins, who, after finishing their education from the local Chinese schools, were sent to study in these mission

schools (unless their families were wealthy enough to send them to study abroad). Though not perfect, the young lookjins learned to communicate in English. They were able to read, write, and translate in English (and other foreign languages).

In the early-twentieth century, the ruling elite of Bangkok came to recognize a threat that the local Chinese schools could possibly become. If allowed to continue to operate, they could become a breeding ground for radicalism from below. The Bangkok government took an effort to suppress those schools through a legal measure. However, they could not find a rationale to close down the western-established mission schools. This possibly explains why the western-established mission schools became the robust nodes for training and recruiting the youngsters to become part of the LJC. The newcomers became part of LJC' underground networks through these social ties.

III. Solidarity at Local Marketplaces and Ship Docks during the Second World-War Period: Brokerage across Occupations:

During the outbreak of the Second World War, the LJC, like their compatriots during the period of warlordism in the mainland China, shifted their political orientation from being ultra-leftist, anti-Western imperialist to being anti-fascist, anti-Japanese imperialist. This happened right at the time when the domestic politics in Thailand entered its new chapter. As the Japanese troops entered the mainland Southeast Asia, the imperial government asked for a peaceful cooperation with the Thai government in order to allow them to build some infrastructures that supported their passages from Indochina (the French colonies at the time) to Burma and India (the British colonies at the time). The Thai government, right at the beginning of the war, declared Thailand as a member of the Allied Power against Japan. Seeing a possible violent consequence coming to their door, they officially shifted their position to part with Japan and the Axis Power against the Allied Power. A group of Thai bureaucrats started to worry about another turbulent outcome. They organized an underground anti-Japanese movement called the Free Thai Movement. It was within this critical juncture that the Free Thai Movement merged with the LJC underground. They both now shared the same enemy and ideology, the Japanese troops and anti-fascism.

During this period, the LJC members organized themselves into smaller study groups. These groups were formed based on the support of the central organ called "Kang Lian" or the *All Siamese Overseas Chinese United Front for Anti-Japanese Resistance and National Salvation.* This underground united front brought together the pro- and anti-Kuomintang members outside of the prison in Siam together. Through their local, regional, and transnational ties, the Kang Lian's members were the main agents who solicited various forms of symbolic, material, and manpower supports for the Chinese Communist Party's anti-Japanese war in both China and Thailand.

In a major episode that took place in Thailand (as well as in other Southeast Asian countries) called the boycott of Japanese imports, the Kang Lian's members successfully organized public campaigns among the local Chinese and Indian merchants in Bangkok to boycott Japanese imports at the various ports.

The operation of Kang Lian's members, their public campaigns and executions could not be successful without their connections with other groups and organizations. Kang Lian's members cooperated with the Chinese artisans and coolies who worked at the ship docks around the ports of Bangkok. They forged connections with the local merchants and business elites through their established ties with various clan associations, craft guilds, and benevolent societies. Finally, Kang Lian relied on the protection of the Chinese mafias and gangsters through their connection with the various Chinese secret societies in Bangkok and other regional locations. A secret intelligence and terrorist organization called "Chu Jian Tuan" or the *Siamese Overseas Chinese Nation-Seller-Eliminating Association for Anti-Japanese Resistance and National Salvation* was formed out of the eighteenth existing Chinese triads to cooperate with and under the direction of "Kang Lian." These campaigns and their executions became highly successful because of the ties that bound the various groups and organizations together.

Figure 1-4 below illustrate the above four cases/episodes.

LJC = *Lookjin* Communists
BP = *Boworadej* Politicos
◯ = *Bangkhwang* Prison
•– – • = New Ties
•——• = Pre-Existing Ties
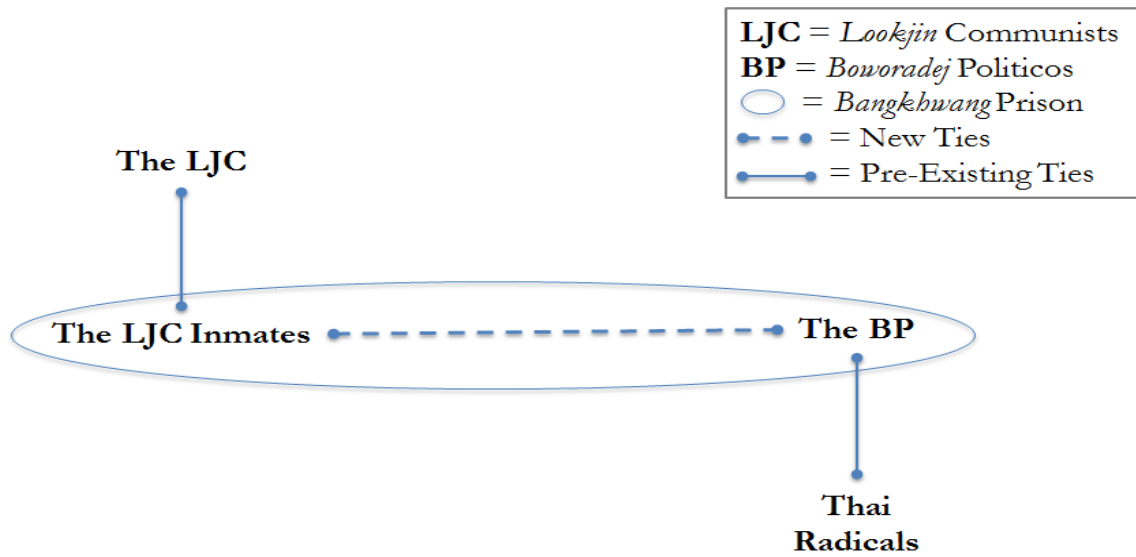
Figure 1: Solidarity in Prison: Brokerage across Subjects

LJC = *Lookjin* Communists
S-T = Student-Teacher Ties
◯ = Mission School
•– – • = New Ties
•——• = Pre-Existing Ties
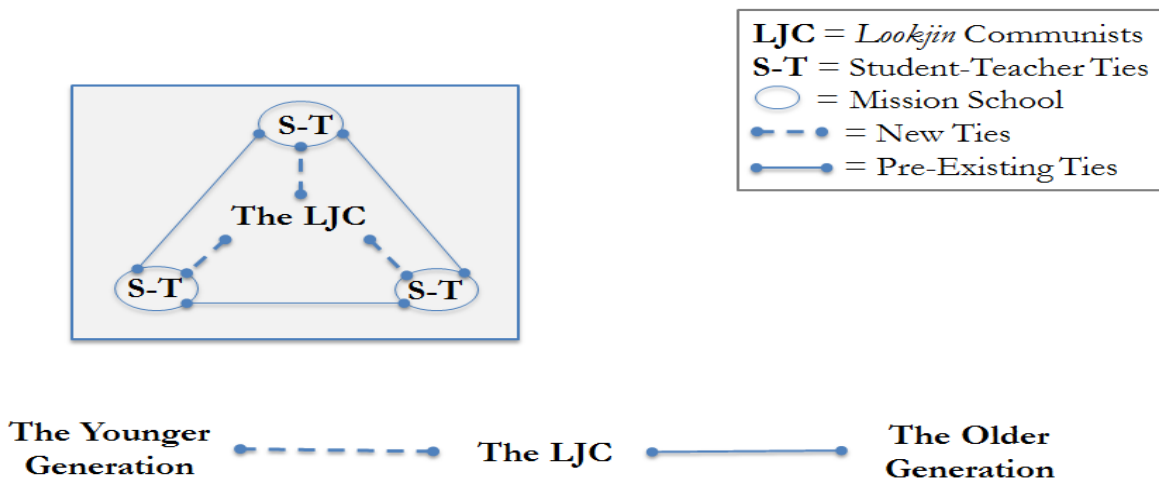
Figure 2: Solidarity in School: Brokerage across Generations

LJC = *Lookjin* Communists
◯ = Occupational Group
●– – –● = New Ties

Local Coolies

Local Chinese Merchants

The LJC
("Kang Liang")

Triad Societies
("Chu Jian Tuan")

Local Indian Merchants
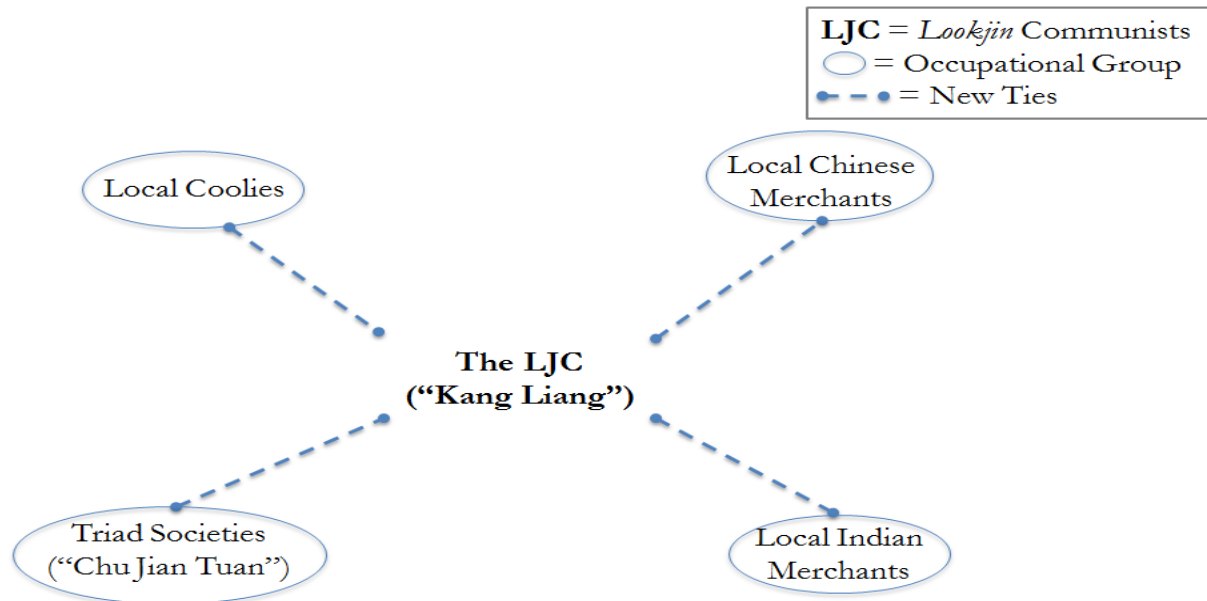
Figure 3: **Solidarity in Local Marketplaces and Ship Docks:**
Brokerage across Occupations

LJC = *Lookjin* Communists
◯ = Chinese Industry
●– – –● = New Ties

Rice-Milling Workers

Naval Docks' Workers

Tobacco Factory Workers

The LJC
(Workers' Welfare
Associations)

Railways Workers

Shipping Industry Workers

Tramways Workers

Land Transportation Workers

Timber Industry Workers
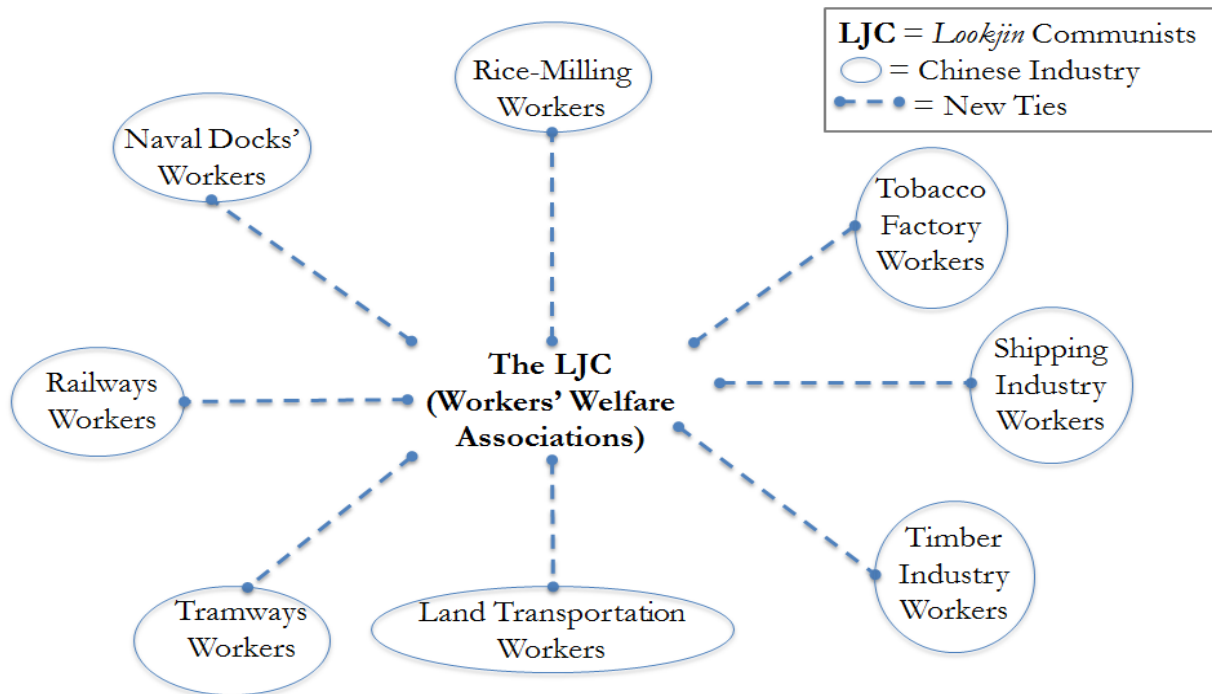
Figure 4: **Solidarity in Factories: Brokerage across Industries**

IV.   Solidarity in Factories during the Second World-War Period: Brokerage across Industries:

One of the most powerful underground networks of the LJC was arguably a semi-clandestine organization that embraced all the underground anti-Japanese activities right after the Japanese occupation in Siam. It began with a series of Workers' Welfare Associations (Samakhom Songkhrao Kammakorn) in Bangkok in 1942. These welfare associations connected the workers among various industries in Bangkok. It began with the tobacco industry then spreading to the shipping, land transportation, rice-milling, timber, railways, tramways, and naval docks. The general aim of these welfare associations was to organize mutual aid among the workers and others who suffered from the Allied air raids. But, clandestinely, they planned and organized the workers in strikes, slow-downs, and sabotage of Japanese war-related industries and military equipment. Included among their clandestine activities were producing defective boots, contaminating canned food, throwing away war materials, stealing vehicle parts, damaging factory machines, booting supplies out of goods wagons, and perforating or unloosing cargo boats from their convoy.

In the mid-1945, a semi-clandestine organization emerged out of these Workers' Welfare Associations (numbering approximately around 30-40 associations at the time). The emerging organization was called the Bangkok Workers' United Association (Sahasamakhom Kammakorn Krungthep) or the Bangkok Workers' Union (Sahabal Kammakron Krungthep).

The most striking outcome of this episode paved the way for the eventual victory of this semi-clandestine organization and the LJC after the end of World War II. The LJC emerged from the various locations in and out of prison with their organizations, followers, and friends—Chinese and Thai, old and new generations, from various occupational backgrounds and across classes—those that they had made through their ties along the way.

The upshot was the creation of a nationwide central labor organization called the Central Labor Union (Ongkan Sahaachiwa Kammakorn Haeng Prathet Thai). The underground Chinese networks emerged from "under" and "below" to play a major part in the post-war Thai politics.

Brokerage across Social Terrains and the Rise of Overlapping Ties:

The Siamese Anti-Communist Act was strictly enforced by the Bangkok government from 1929 to 1946. The Bangkok's ruling elite worked in tandem with the European colonial advisers to put this anti-communist legal measure in full force. During this period, the official party organizations and propagandistic activities of the lookjin communists in Siam were constantly suppressed and eventually put to an end. Many lookjin communists were arrested and put in prison during this time period. The remaining members either fled or lived among their compatriots with their political agendas or identities hiding. However, their social and political activities did not end there. Their social and overlapping ties were forged and fought for in the various underground social terrains. According to the four case/episodes I just present above, the lookjin communists were, thus, the "brokers" across the four different underground social terrains.

Ronald Burt coins the term "structural holes" (1992) and "brokerage" (2005) as the two prime heuristic concepts for social network analysis. "Structural holes" simply refers to as an absence of ties between the two (or more) components of a network. "Brokerage" refers to the mission and action of "brokers" who serve as the intermediaries between the two or more components of a network. In a simple scenario, the brokers bridge structural holes, thus, allowing a network to cluster and expand through the flows of resources and information.

During the first episode, the core members of the lookjin communists were the brokers between the rest of the lookjin communists and the Thai radicals (or the Bowaradej politicos) in the Area 6 of the Bangkhwang. As I describe above, the core members, considered more educated, mature, and polite, were the ones who bridged the structural holes that pre-existed between the two groups of

political subjects, between the two groups of radicalists: the lookjin communists and the Bowaradej politicos in the Bangkhwang. During the second episode, which occurred simultaneously within the same inter-war period, the remnants of the LJC who were not in prison were the brokers across the two generations, between the immigrant lookjin communists and the new generation of Thai-born lookjins. This episode took place in the four western-based mission schools in Bangkok that I describe above.

During the third episode which took place right at the beginning of the period leading up to the Second World War until the end of it, the lookjin communists were the brokers between various occupational groups and organizations across the class lines. Through their local campaigns against the Japanese imports around the ports of Bangkok (and other Southeast Asian ports), the lookjin communists bridged the structural holes that pre-existed between the local Chinese merchants, the local Indian merchants, the Chinese coolies who worked around the docks, the members of various associations, triad organizations, and transnational organizations who supported the anti-Japanese movements in China and Southeast Asia. During the fourth episode, the lookjin communists were the brokers among the workers across the major industries in Bangkok. They bridged the structural holes that pre-existed among their members in these industries in which the lookjins owned, managed, and were employed.

By putting together the four cases/episodes in the four social terrains in which the social ties were forged, we could see the overlapping ties that existed in the early-twentieth century (Figure 5). By scrutinizing these underground networks carefully, I see how these overlapping ties were connected with the ties that bound the Chinese community in Thailand within the long nineteenth century. It is safe to argue that the solidarity within the Chinese community in Thailand stretched over a long spanning period of time. It was, in fact, part of the new wave of the migration that began in the beginning of the nineteenth-century in Bangkok. We cannot just freeze history by simply relying on episodic narratives or events to account for their social and political activities in the early-twentieth

century alone. Solidaristic ties and actions among them pre-existed before the lookjin communists became the actors or the brokers underground.[24]
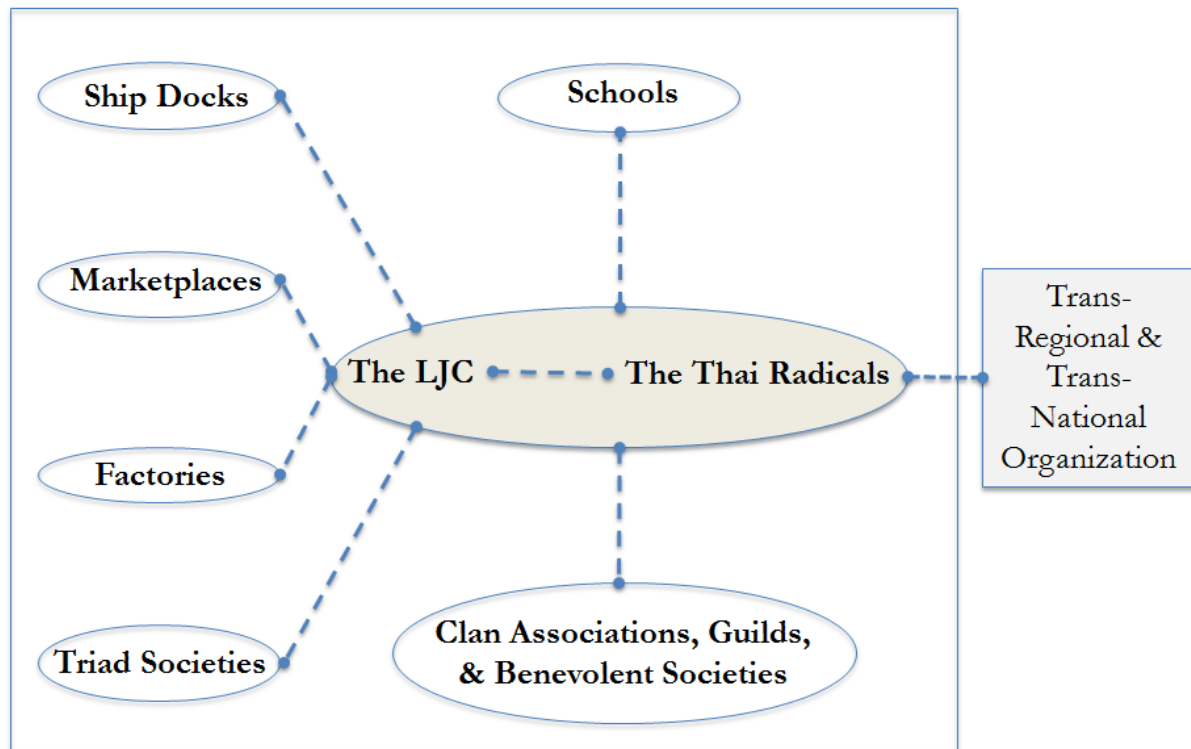

Figure 5: The Underground Chinese Networks = "Overlapping Ties"

BANGKOK'S COLONIAL CULTURE AND THE UNDERGROUND CHINESE NETWORKS: A COMPARATIVE ASSESTMENT:

If one could visit Bangkok during the nineteenth century, one could not resist a temptation to see it as a "colonial city" (Askew, 2002; Nidhi, 2005; Lysa, 1984; 2003; 2004). Although Siam was not fully colonized by the European powers during the age of high imperialism, her non-colonized status by no means qualified her as a sovereign nation-state. The ruling elite of Bangkok instituted various colonial measures within its own territories around the mainland Southeast Asia within the reach of Bangkok's expansionist policies (Loos, 2002). As I argue above, the creation of the Chinese community in Bangkok could be understood as one of the Bangkok's colonial projects. This was seen in the

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[24] As Bruno Latour (2005) would argue on this point: "Rather than assuming that we have actors first and that their ties result from individuals' agency, we should recognize that social ties may in fact precede actors. …" (cited in Pachucki and Breiger, 2010; p. 219) (see also Law and Hassard, 1999).

utilitarian structure in which the Chinese migrants, the young, male, and mobile free wage labor, came to provide to the ruling elite of Bangkok.

Apart from such utilitarian structure, the ruling elite of Bangkok created its own system of classification coincidently based on the kind of colonial culture it embraced (i.e., the "semi-colonial culture"). The extraterritorial privileges that Siam lost to the European powers provided a background for the classification of various subjects. Standing at the top was the Bangkok's monarchy, followed by the nobility and their Siamese subjects who belonged to the traditional system of manpower until it was abolished in the late-nineteenth century during the reign of Rama V (Feeney, 1989). The various European subjects were classified according to various extraterritorial privileges and concessions they gained. The Chinese subjects were accorded with a specific position apart from the Siamese subjects and other Asian subjects who exploited the extraterritorial privileges of their European colonizers in the Siamese territories. Lysa (2003; 2004) calls these Asian subjects the "Asian subalterns" since they belonged also as the subjects of the European colonial powers.

As one can see in this system of classification of the subjects, the Chinese subjects remained a distinctive kind of subjects of the Bangkok monarchs. Unlike other Southeast Asian colonies in which the European colonial administrators created distinctive legal categories in order to classify and control their local Chinese subjects, there existed no separate legal category for the Chinese subjects in Siam. Moreover, unlike other colonial systems around the world, there existed no racial hierarchy in which the subjects were classified and ranked according to the hierarchical positions of their racial statuses. As argued by Thongchai Winichakul (2000), the ruling elite of Bangkok constructed their own discourse of civilization (i.e., *Siwilai* in Thai) not with their negative construction against their own subjects domestically but against other sovereign nations in the nascent pool of the international politics in which all sovereign nation-states were considered as equally recognized units. While they were busy promoting their own civilization, the ruling elite of Bangkok did not institute a hierarchy of civilization and discourse of "civilizing mission" within its own territories and to its own subjects. With its

immature system of classification, the Bangkok's colonial culture left ample rooms for contingencies of meaning and practice (i.e., "cultural holes") that allow the agents to devise political strategies and bridge structural holes.

It is within this "cultural hole" that the Chinese subjects could flexibly maneuver between the two opposite poles of subjectivity in their practice. This was explicitly shown in the first case/episode when the lookjin communists performed self-Thaification in prison in order to bridge the structural holes that pre-existed between the two groups of radicalists. In the second case/episode, by bridging the structural holes between the two generations, the lookjin communists performed self-Thaification by blurring the lines between their immigrant and the Thai-born Chinese statuses. Instead of reifying the two categories, they chose to blur them in practice. The other two cases/episodes also suggest how they performed self-Thaification as the Thai patriots who forged ties between various groups in various social terrains against the Japanese imperial force in Thailand. These overlapping ties would allow them to emerge from the underground after the end of World War II to become an important force in the Thai politics.

CONCLUSION: A BRIEF STATEMENT ON THE RELATIONAL APPROACH TO ETHNIC SOLIDARITY:

In this paper, I examine the emergent site of the underground Chinese networks in the early-twentieth-century Thailand. Not satisfying with the original conception of ethnic solidarity defined broadly as "ethnic enclaves" as well as their concomitant conventional approaches to ethnic entrepreneurship and assimilation, I choose to approach this site of the underground solidarity as well as their political strategies and influence from the purview of metaphorical and qualitative network analysis. The primary foci of my analysis are the patterns of relationships and relational settings understood here as the "concretely existing and overlapping ties." Thus, I put myself into a paradigm of sociological analysis that takes "relationships" as the fundamental unit instead of individuals, groups, attributes, or categories. As Mische (2011) argues: "More than just a set of analytical techniques, the

new relational sociology becomes a way of challenging the core theoretical and methodological divides in the discipline" (p. 17; see also Emirbayer, 1997; Somers, 1998). The new relational sociology provides both theoretical and methodological perspectives that overcome the conflict between *structure* and *agency* as well as between *positivism* and *interpretivism*.

Moreover, within the next step, I attempt to examine how *culture* and *network* are coevolving and mutually constituting (Pachucki and Breiger, 2010; Mische, 2011). In addition to depend simply on narrativity, which Eiko Ikegami (2000; 2005) and Margaret Somers (1994; 1998) both already maintain are intrinsically "relational matrix," I argue that the Bangkok's colonial culture—its immature system of classification of the subjects—which constituted the Chinese (and other colonial) subjects yet, at the same time, was highly ambiguous and full of the conditions of possibilities allowed the actors to devise their political strategies and bridge structural holes. This paper, therefore, initiates an ongoing dialogue with a recent scholarship that attempts to understand the affiliation between *culture* and *network*.

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