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**(Re)territorialising the field of Comparative and International Education in Malaysia:
Adventures in cartography through the fisher, the weaver and the shadow-puppeteer**

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Abstract

We present here our evolving attempt to map the field of CIE in Malaysia by reflecting on our experiences and findings in the 'CIE in Malaysia' project. Imbibing the metaphorical and biographical spirit of Silova & Auld (2020), we (re)territorialise the field of CIE in Malaysia through the bricolage of three vernacular figures: the fisher, the weaver and the shadow-puppeteer. We first articulate our intellectual trajectories as fishermen-in-training, attempting to capture elements of CIE that become the impetus for this project. We subsequently detail transnational social connections that enable our performance as weavers of CIE in Malaysia. As shadow-puppeteers, we then address the potency of the project's dissemination through social media, questions of language and the political dimension of knowledge production in Malaysia. Overall, we offer this chapter as a depiction of our public scholarship project—as a meta-assemblage—that reifies the field of CIE locally.

Chapter Key words:

comparative education, meta-assemblage, Malaysia, memory, collective biography, vernacular metaphors, public scholarship

Introduction

Comparative and International Education (CIE) as a distinct field in Malaysia remains elusive, though formal development in recent years is promising. Symaco & Chao (2019) highlight the establishment of the Centre for Research and International Education (CRICE) at Universiti Malaya in 2011 as a significant institutional gesture to formalise the field in Malaysia. As emerging scholars of CIE seeking to understand the tradition, practices and discourses in this field locally, we attempt to orient ourselves and our potential contributions therein. Our collective reading of the education landscape past and present—sharpened by postgraduate training outside of the country—suggests that components of CIE have long been percolating in Malaysia. It has been argued by Salajan & Jules (2020) that “CIE as a field is emergent and not merely the summation of the properties of components (sub-assemblages) but its history and visibility of its “processes of individuation” (DeLanda, 2016) is key to its properties.” (p. 140). Interested in such processes of individuation, we set out on a public scholarship project titled ‘Education is a living thing: Comparative and International Education (CIE) in Malaysia’ (Henceforth referred to as the ‘CIE in Malaysia’ project).¹ Through this project, we seek to trace the development of CIE knowledge and practices in Malaysia, while also applying CIE theories and methods to understand contemporary education issues in the country.

In this chapter, we chronicle our evolving attempt to map the field of CIE in Malaysia by reflecting on our experience and findings for the ‘CIE in Malaysia’ project. To guide this attempt, we asked:

¹ <https://ciedumalaysia.wordpress.com/>

What 'makes' the field of CIE in Malaysia? How is it reified locally as meta-assemblage(s) over time? Such questions are posed in dialogue with our own intellectual biographies. In a project that doubles as a learning journey to forge our academic identities in CIE, our personal stories become entangled in the assemblage that we attempt to map. In the process, we also become actors that (re)territorialise the field, utilising the 'CIE in Malaysia' project as our vessel. Drawing inspiration from Silova & Auld (2020) within the post-foundational fold of CIE, we foreground the metaphorical and biographical spirit as part of our cartography of the field in the Malaysian context. Prior to this, we had reflected on the progress of the 'CIE in Malaysia' project in reference to such metaphors elsewhere (Anuar & Balakrishnan, 2020). This chapter expands on that reflexive exercise. Without a doubt, the map of CIE as a field in Malaysia which we (attempt to) trace and navigate is constantly shifting. Its contours are contingent upon new information, encounters and discoveries that unfold over time. Thus, our map is "furnished with "multiple entryways" allowing it to be reversed or reworked by a variety of social actors or groups into limitless permutations of representations" (Salajan & Jules, 2020, p. 137). In this chapter, we take the CIE meta-assemblage to mean the configurations of various actors, scholarships, discourses and artefacts that are identified and documented as part of the 'CIE in Malaysia' project. While this project and the field of CIE in Malaysia writ-large are of course not interchangeable, we present the reflections below as an attempt to sketch a microcosm of an emerging field in Malaysia through an intentional, "meta" project of cartography. In order to represent this dynamic and at times dizzying work, we structure this chapter through the metaphor of three vernacular actors: the fisher, the weaver and the shadow-puppeteer.

Weaving in and out of the text, our three actors work in succession and collaboration. The fisher casts the net far and wide, hoping to capture actors, scholarship, discourses and other artefacts that we speculate to be part of the field of CIE in Malaysia. The weaver transforms what is caught in the fisher's net into a network, a rhizomic structure that changes shape and direction with new

entries and contingent connections; at times even surprising and evading the weaver. Therefore, CIE as an emerging field in Malaysia remains open to indeterminacy even as we seek to map it through the 'CIE in Malaysia' project. Meanwhile, the shadow-puppeteer performs *Wayang Kulit* (Shadow-Play) from behind a screen. Here, we comment on the project's dissemination efforts—indicative of scholarship and practice in the field writ large—tied to the realities of political pressure and public (non)consumption of knowledge. Together, we embody these vernacular actors to highlight our own role in the (re)territorialization of CIE in Malaysia, suggesting how this chapter stands as a performance that helps to reify the field of CIE locally, embodied by the microcosm of our 'CIE in Malaysia' project.

The fertile ground: Contemporary education discourses in Malaysia

In May 2018, Malaysia underwent its first political transition after democratically ousting the *Barisan Nasional* (The National Front), a political coalition that had ruled for 61 years since Malaysia's independence in 1957. Understanding that education is a fertile ground to steer the opinion of the public, the new coalition *Pakatan Harapan* (Alliance of Hope) appointed Dr. Maszlee Malik, a neophyte politician and a former academic as the Minister of Education (Lee, 2018), driven by the logic that he carried less political baggage to court controversies. Encapsulating the interests of all layers of society, education has always been a highly contested realm. With the political transition of 'New Malaysia', it was subjected to even greater scrutiny. Facing intense pressure and criticisms from the media and the general public, Dr. Maszlee Malik's appointment as the Minister of Education only lasted for 20 months as he was pressured to resign in January 2020. This happened in the aftermath of vocal public debate over issues related to black shoes as part of the school uniform (Abdul Razak, 2020), the race-based quota for pre-university matriculation programme (Tho, 2019), as well as the introduction of Jawi script that stoked racial and religious sentiments as part of the Malay language syllabus (Razali & Aziz, 2019), to name a

few. As the furore surrounding the Malaysian education system unfolded with the MOE at the center of each controversy, two Malaysians were on their own intellectual journeys of learning about CIE in two different Western lands.

In the autumn of 2017, months before the chaos of Malaysia's new education landscape unfolded, Aizuddin, a fisherman-in-training, abandons the corporate world and travels to the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom. Leading up to this decision, he had noticed interesting tides in the local waters. In 2016, the World Bank had set up its Global Knowledge and Research Hub in the capital city, Kuala Lumpur (World Bank, n.d.). International large scale assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) became more embedded in Malaysia's education policymaking in recent years, evidenced by its inclusion as part of targets in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). In the higher education sector, the minister's tagline 'Soaring Upwards' pointed to the centrality of international university rankings as indicators of quality (Martin, 2018). Yet, there was a paucity of CIE discourses relating to these international developments fermenting at home. Five years prior, while completing a Masters degree in Cognitive Studies in Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, he had taken an elective module in comparative education out of curiosity. Convincing himself that returning to graduate school would allow for space to reflect upon years of education work in corporate philanthropy and to make sense of recent education developments at home, he was eager to reacquaint himself with CIE. Although unknown at the time, the connection between CIE at the University of Oxford and Malaysia would prove to be significant to the cartography of the field. We revisit this crucial network in the next section.

Meanwhile, Pravindharan, another fisherman-in-training was about to set sail on a new educational experience to the United States of America, having secured the prestigious Fulbright scholarship for a graduate study programme. As he tried to read the seas of CIE, and attempted

to move away from the field of English language teaching, the fisherman-in-training was excited at the prospects of embarking on this journey in August 2018, just three months after Dr. Maszlee Malik's appointment as the Minister of Education. While he was unsure what to expect at Loyola University Chicago, the political transition in his motherland meant there was now a prospect to contribute new ideas for educational development.

Having completed his Masters in CIE and subsequently enrolled in a PhD in Education at the University of Oxford, Aizuddin returned to Malaysia in January 2019 to present the findings of his Masters research on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education at a conference organised in Universiti Sains Malaysia. Wandering in a secondhand bookstore in town after the conference, he discovered a book titled *Sejarah Perkembangan Pendidikan dan Persekolahan* (The Historical Development of Education and Schooling) which was first published in 1966 (Daia, 1973). The fisherman was struck by the expansive content of the text written in Malay, which covered ideas about education across various civilisations (Greek, Roman, Indian, Chinese, Jewish, Islamic), selected modern thinkers such as John Locke, Maria Montessori and John Dewey, as well as the development of education in pre and post-colonial Malaysia. Was it a CIE text, even if it did not declare itself as such? He did not give much thought to the matter at that time, but purchased the book as a keepsake.

As Pravindharan continued to grapple with his graduate studies, he noticed that in the 'New Malaysia', teachers seemed to have more say in public education. With CIE knowledge accumulated under the tutelage of his professors, Dr. tavis d. jules and Dr. Noah Sobe, he decided to write a short article focusing on how comparative research can benefit the Malaysian education system in the face of the nation's diverse population. In the article, he argued that equipping Malaysian teachers with a comparative perspective would enable them to understand the pluralistic nature of Malaysia which is often taken for granted (Balakrishnan, 2019). In order to

share the benefits of CIE to a bigger platform, the fisherman-in-training decided to send a beacon out into a Facebook group that gathered Malaysian education enthusiasts in the wake of the election of Dr. Maszlee Malik as the new Minister of Education. This article caught the attention of Aizuddin and became a crucial kernel for conversations that eventually evolved into the 'CIE in Malaysia' project. Thus, from fishermen-in-training, we began assuming the role of weavers, exchanging our knowledge and experiences related to CIE in the wake of our respective training in the field. The spirit of exchange and dialogue led Pravindharan to expand his aforementioned article for publication in the Annual Review of Comparative and International Education (Balakrishnan, 2020).

In the process of searching for elements of the CIE meta-assemblage through this project, we were also weaving and making knowledge in the field. Armed with new knowledge, we inserted ourselves into the rhizome as we attempted to understand its shape, considering that rhizomes are guided by the logic of becoming and emergence (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Nevertheless, it is worth noting here that both fishermen had travelled abroad to foreign seas in order to acquire the compass to navigate the CIE terrain back home. Although many developments which we will demonstrate show that elements relevant to the CIE meta-assemblage have been present in Malaysia, the reification of CIE as a field more broadly is in its infancy with respect to the formalisation of credentials in universities. Symaco & Chao (2019) observe:

In the academic setting, specialist institutions which award degrees in the field is lacking but nonetheless, some course electives are offered such as the recent introduction of the Comparative Education elective course (2015) at the undergraduate level at University of Malaya in Malaysia, while a course on *Comparative Education* is also offered at the graduate level at the Open University of Malaysia...(p. 221)

Indeed, the guidelines issued by the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) may point to the reason why CIE as a body of knowledge could be obscured by naming conventions. Elements of CIE knowledge may already be taught as part of curriculum for teachers under the broad umbrella of Foundational Components of Education as highlighted by the MQA. Additionally, the MQA guidelines also highlight how

different codes or subject titles are used by different institutions for courses that contain the same content. Subjects like comparative education, international education, global education or history and philosophy of education may be used interchangeably...(Malaysian Qualification Agency, 2016, p. 3)

To make sense of this practice of (non)formalisation of CIE, we must rely on the strength of other actors as we weave this CIE meta-assemblage. That is where our attention will turn to next. In this section, we have focused on our intellectual biographies and trajectories within CIE as a way of setting the scene for the germination of the 'CIE in Malaysia' project. We relay our academic histories-in-the-making against the backdrop of Malaysia's contemporary education landscape which presents fertile ground for the reification of CIE as a field of expertise. Here, we have demonstrated how fragments of the CIE meta-assemblage were picked up along the way as we assumed the role of fishermen learning the craft in international waters, all the while our concerns and attention remain homeward. Our paths eventually cross, and our journey of fishing and weaving become collective endeavours moving forward. The social dimension of the meta-assemblage—the strength of networks to reify its shape—takes centre stage in the next section.

The assemblage begins to take shape: (Socially) weaving the 'CIE in Malaysia' project

In *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Anna Tsing (2015) writes:

Assemblages are open-ended gatherings. They allow us to ask about communal effects without assuming them. They show us potential histories in the making... Thinking through assemblage urges us to ask: How do gatherings become “happenings,” that is, greater than the sum of their parts? If history without progress is indeterminate and multidirectional, might assemblages show us its possibilities? (pp. 22-23)

Such a notion of assemblages as unsettled and coloured by encounters and ‘gatherings’ aligns with our own experience of slowly carving the contours of the ‘CIE in Malaysia’ project. Following our initial exchange in the online space described in the previous section, our paths intersected in the homeland. Early in 2020, we found ourselves in the same space and time on the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia. The metaphor of the fisher is apt given the geographical focus on fishing as part of livelihood in the area. Aizuddin was conducting his PhD fieldwork in the region, while Pravindharan returned to teach in a secondary school in the area following completion of his Masters degree. We began by conceiving the project as a living archive, where we would weave together artefacts, discourses and scholarly outputs related to a number of themes within CIE. The idea of a living archive also points to how this meta-assemblage is in a constant state of *becoming*—modified and reshaped when new elements are added or removed. In order to learn more about contemporary archiving practices, we visited the Malaysia Design Archive (MDA), organised by a group of young researchers who were generous in offering suggestions and leads to other resources to support our aspirations. Learning that the project greatly benefited from the strength of networks and expertise beyond two fishermen, we sought to weave the fabric of the CIE meta-assemblage by reaching out to individuals who had been trained in the field. We would use the ‘CIE in Malaysia’ platform as an opportunity to establish such a network and feature these individuals and their works. Related questions of boundaries arose at this point. What counts as topics and themes within CIE? Beyond individuals who obviously trained in CIE abroad, who else

qualifies as a researcher or practitioner in this field locally? While we wrestle with these questions at home, we acknowledge the long-standing debates on definitions and boundaries animating the field writ large (Epstein, 2008; Little, 2010; Rust, Johnstone, & Allaf, 2009; Wolhuter, 2008).

Hence, as fishermen and weavers, we attempt to negotiate the boundaries of the 'CIE in Malaysia' project as a microcosm of the field in Malaysia and also globally. Relying on our instinct as comparativists, we looked to the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) for guidance on topics and themes included within the remit of this field based on the Special Interest Groups (SIG) of this society. In this process, we wondered if we were "performing rituals of allegiance" to an established international body for permission to carve the boundaries of CIE locally (Silova & Auld, 2020, p. 11). Once again casting our net, we come across an article in a Malaysian journal by Khadijah Zon (1986) titled *Pendidikan Perbandingan: Satu Catatan Awal Tentang Makna Ruanglingkup dan Tujuannya* (Comparative Education: Some Preliminary Notes on its Meaning, Scope and Purpose). Much like other foundational texts in CIE, this article presents the genealogy of the field by highlighting the role of its (Western) founding figures such as Isaac Kandell and George Bereday. Much less is said by Zon (1986) about the involvement of Malaysian scholars in CIE or the development of this field locally, despite our discovery of the earlier text by Daia (1973) that points to thinking aligned with CIE, mentioned in the previous section. In the absence of local histories to guide our process of territorialisation, we agreed on a compromise in order to move forward. The actors and associated works are considered for inclusion in the 'CIE in Malaysia' project if their research and programmes explicitly adopt a comparative approach in the methodology, or they address substantive topics of international concern in the field of CIE. However, such inclusion criteria remain unsettled and we continue to debate and discuss them. In effect, we are still negotiating the boundaries of CIE through this "meta" project, rooted in local concerns while staying abreast with global discourses in the field. Rather than presupposing a set design for what the project should look like, we remain open to

the possibility of responding to the evershifting national education landscape hinted in the previous section. This fluid approach to our project is represented by the prefix 'Education is a living thing' which is reflected in the following quote by Michael Sadler that we have foregrounded on the project website:

We cannot wander at pleasure among the educational systems of the world, like a child strolling through a garden, and pick off a flower from one bush and some leaves from another, and then expect that if we stick what we have gathered into the soil at home, we shall have a living plant. A national system of education is a living thing, the outcome of forgotten struggles and difficulties, and "of battles long ago." It has in it some of the secret workings of national life. (Bereday, 1964, p. 310)

Returning to the possibility of 'gatherings' of social actors to form networks which reify the CIE meta-assemblage, we looked into our own personal and professional connections. Beginning with our contemporaries who themselves pursued CIE-related research and education abroad, we featured interviews with these individuals on our project website under the headline 'People'. These scholars and practitioners who were featured became agents that helped us weave the meta-assemblage of CIE—some would connect us to colleagues who they knew had also studied CIE. Interestingly, many of our contemporaries we initially featured pursued their studies in CIE abroad following their experience as Teach for Malaysia (TFM) fellows, where they taught in high-need schools for two years. TFM, founded in 2010, is part of the Teach for All movement, which is a contemporary global education phenomenon studied as part of CIE (Thomas, Rauschenberger, & Crawford-Garrett, 2021). It seems here that the meta-assemblage of CIE in Malaysia is imbued with an international flavour not just in the CIE training gained abroad by many social actors drawn into our configuration, but also in the localisation of international

phenomenon such as the Teach for All movement, as well as international university rankings and large scale assessments such as PISA which were highlighted in the previous section.

Delving more into the recent institutional development of CIE in Malaysia through the setup of the Centre for Research and International Education (CRICE) at Universiti Malaya in 2011, a surprising discovery regarding its history pointed to a transnational connection that echoes into the present. We were fascinated to learn that CRICE was set up through the initiative of Dr. Lorraine Pe Symaco in consultation with three academics from the United Kingdom: Professors Colin Brock (Symaco's former PhD supervisor at the University of Oxford), Richard Pring (University of Oxford) and Michael Crossley (University of Bristol). Aizuddin, through his current affiliation at the University of Oxford as a PhD student, relied on this shared institutional network to connect the 'CIE in Malaysia' project with Dr. Symaco. Although she has since left Universiti Malaya to take up a position at Zhejiang University in China, she participated in the interview for our project and also suggested that we connect with a number of Malaysian academics who were instrumental in the founding of CRICE. She also recommended that we maintain connections with the current management of CRICE. On this front, we have reached out to CRICE to introduce the 'CIE in Malaysia' project and we elaborate more on future plans in relation to this centre in the next section.

Another connection facilitated by mutual affiliation with the University of Oxford is the project's connection with Dr. Chang Da Wan, formerly the Director of the National Higher Education Research Institute at Universiti Sains Malaysia. Like Dr. Symaco, Dr. Wan also completed his PhD at the University of Oxford. Our initial conversation with Dr. Wan has been instrumental on a number of fronts to further understand the genealogy of CIE in Malaysia. When we highlighted how it has been a challenge to locate Malaysian academics who were CIE scholars, he pointed out that although there may be scholars who would elsewhere be considered specialising in CIE,

this is less obvious in Malaysia. Referring to his own scholarly identity as an example, he positions his work within higher education policy, although he does adopt comparative perspectives in his research. He also highlighted how his background in economics initially proved challenging in terms of securing funding to undertake research in education, given the very rigid boundaries of academic disciplines in Malaysia. Given that CIE as a field finds its strength in interdisciplinarity, do such rigid academic practices add to the challenge of establishing CIE as a field in Malaysia? In response to our observation on the lack of formalisation of CIE as a specialisation in departments and faculties of education in Malaysian universities, he traces this back to the history of how these departments were set up as teacher training colleges. In contemporary times, advanced degrees in education in Malaysia largely focus on pedagogy and schools, with less emphasis on 'macro' level works of policy, systems or comparative analysis. Referring to CRICE and the work of Dr. Symaco, he highlights how the associated effort to set up the International and Comparative Education Society of Malaysia (ICESM)—which he was involved in the early phase—has since stalled. Our attempt to connect with ICESM has also been met with silence. The thread for weaving is cut short on this front, but another possibility looms. Dr. Wan hinted that seeing as we have initiated this project, perhaps we would like to revive the effort of establishing a local CIE society...

Dr. Wan also pointed us to Dr. Molly Lee, a retired academic who was active in CIE in Malaysia in the 1990s. Although Malaysia has yet to set up its own professional society in CIE, it has been heartening to learn about the role of Malaysian scholars like Molly Lee in the recent history of CIE in the region. For example, Dr. Lee was involved in the initial setup of the Comparative Education Society of Asia (CESA), based on this account by Mochida (2008):

The first major event leading to the establishment was the International Symposium on Development and Education in Asia, held in Fukuoka, Japan, in December 1994. The

symposium was organised by members of the special committee and others from the JCES. Participants included Lee Byung-jin and Park Jun-hye from South Korea, Wang Chia-tung from Taiwan, *Isahak Haron and Molly Lee from Malaysia*, Mark Bray from Hong Kong, Mohammad Fakry Gaffar from Indonesia, Sumon Amornviat from Thailand, Sureshchandra Shukla from India, and Dao Trong-thi from Vietnam. (p. 309, emphasis added)

Even in the absence of a professional society, Malaysia has once hosted the biennial conference of CESA in 2005 (Bray, 2008). Additionally, we have also learned that in 2014, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Comparative Education Research Network (ACER-N) was formed at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, followed by a series of annual conferences, most recent of which was held in 2019 in Indonesia. In light of this, our upcoming work of weaving connections with retired scholars such as Dr. Molly Lee and Dr. Isahak Haron, as well as contemporary regional networks such as ACER-N is crucial to better understand the meta-assemblage of CIE in Malaysia and the region. We continue to cast the net and weave connections across disparate researchers who do not obviously identify as scholars in CIE, within education faculties and departments where CIE is not formalised, and in the absence of a unified professional society at the national level. Within network relations, Williams (2002) describe “boundary spanners” as “key agents managing within inter-organizational theatres” (p. 104). In the Malaysian context, could the ‘CIE in Malaysia’ project—and our role as its fishermen and weavers—eventually serve as a ‘boundary spanners’ for the meta-assemblage of CIE, (re)territorialising an elusive field in the process? We remain open to this weighty possibility. Here, we have shown how the meta-assemblage of CIE in Malaysia is represented in our project, reified through social connections that beget more social connections. The sustained efforts to maintain these connections hold the assemblage together. Grounded in our background and education trajectories, some threads require us to look back in history, while others necessitate engagement

beyond the boundary of the nation-state. In the next section, we take on the role of shadow puppeteers to remark on our dissemination efforts in order to legitimise our position in the very assemblage that we seek to map.

Shadows, screens and silences: From weaving to performing *Wayang Kulit*

In recent years, social media has been utilized by researchers to establish new professional connections and maintain relationships with existing scholars (Komljenovic, 2019). For the 'CIE in Malaysia' project, establishing an online presence seemed to be a worthwhile endeavour to disseminate our work and seek a new audience. In addition to the website which hosts the living archive, our reflections on the project, as well as interviews with scholars and practitioners of CIE in Malaysia, we have also created a social media platform on Twitter (@CIE_Malaysia). Behind the screen of @CIE_Malaysia, we are puppeteers in a local performance of *Wayang Kulit* (Shadow-Play), relaying the contents of this project onto the online domain. Considering that this project is still in its infancy, a platform like Twitter—as a space to reshare content and expand on existing trending topics—is essential to gain virtual visibility. So far, we have used our Twitter platform to publicise new materials from the project website. We have also written 'threads' about contemporary education topics in Malaysia, such as the results from the Trends in Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS) 2019 as well as issues of de/centralisation of the education system. Our performance as shadow-puppeteers in this regard depends on being observant fishermen that pay close attention to educational tides gaining traction on Twitter and other social media platforms, to which relevant scholarship in CIE can be brought to bear. As resourceful weavers, we then connect and assemble these knowledge into meaningful and comprehensible patterns for dissemination on social media. For example, it was through social media that we became aware of a local postgraduate student researching the colonial history of education in North

Borneo, who we subsequently invited to contribute to this project. We have subsequently disseminated the output on our website and the @CIE_Malaysia Twitter (Noorta, 2020).

Language also becomes a central issue for disseminating the project. The majority of CIE-related scholarship we trace both locally and abroad are written in English, whilst the mainstream language in Malaysian public education is Malay (the national language). Nevertheless, we have observed that there is also a significant component of education discourse in English among the Malaysian public on Twitter. In a post-colonial society where English can be deemed as a marker of class and cultural capital (Wong, Lee, Lee, & Yaacob, 2012), we are aware of how performing this project primarily in English may foreclose engagement with local publics even as it promotes this initiative beyond the boundary of the nation-state. The writing of this chapter is a testament to that latter potential. Nonetheless, conscious of academic jargon, attention to language, tone and register in dissemination is crucial to ensure that our performance as shadow-puppeteers do not end up alienating the public. Therefore, in an attempt to balance issues of accessibility and visibility, we have therefore produced and disseminated content in both English and Malay. We are also exploring the possibility of translating materials published on the 'CIE in Malaysia' project into Malay as a means of localising the knowledge and reaching a wider audience at home. The metaphor of the *Wayang Kulit* as traditionally the entertainment of common-folk, rather than the elite, is a crucial one to remember as we grapple with issues of language in this project (Sweeney, 1970).

Even as we seek to promote the visibility of the project, there are instances where our own personal social media presence becomes entangled with the local education discourse in ways that point to the political nature of knowledge production and dissemination in Malaysia. In a separate incident, Pravindharan, a public school teacher, made critical comments on the country's online education policy through a series of tweets which gained traction on Twitter. As an

employee of MOE, he was reprimanded by his school administration as such comments went against the code of conduct for civil servants in Malaysia. He was subsequently instructed to remove the postings from Twitter. Given his positionality as a public school teacher, this meant that Pravindharan was silenced from providing critical commentary of the Malaysian public education system using his real identity. In this way, perhaps the 'CIE in Malaysia' project may also serve as a 'screen' behind which such critiques of the education system can be performed like a *Wayang Kulit*. With reference to scholarship and empirical research in CIE, the project thus serves as a critical intermediary that inflects one's affiliation with the MOE, circumventing risks of silencing. Notwithstanding, engaging in this terrain carefully is crucial given that the MOE is a crucial element of the CIE meta-assemblage in Malaysia. Within a highly centralised public education system, engaging with the government via the MOE is inevitable if we are to remain connected with issues of policy and practice affecting the majority of the population. Therefore, finding ways to navigate this political dynamic is a dimension of the project that we negotiate as shadow-puppeteers in tandem with the boundaries of the CIE meta-assemblage. While we seek to disseminate the work of 'CIE in Malaysia' project widely as a means of establishing the project's legitimacy within the meta-assemblage, attention to matters of visibility and accessibility in relation to language, as well as tact in negotiating the surveillance of the MOE remain paramount concerns.

Conclusion: The three vernacular figures forge ahead

In this chapter, we have sought to depict how our 'CIE in Malaysia' project represents a meta-assemblage and microcosm of the field locally. Introduced in succession, our three vernacular figures of the fisher, weaver and shadow-puppeteer navigate the contemporary education landscape in Malaysia, pull together actors and scholarship in CIE through our academic networks and disseminate the outcomes of the project, leveraging on the strength of social media

throughout the process. By first tracing our individual biographies that led to the formation of the 'CIE in Malaysia' project, what followed was the process of identifying artefacts, scholarly output and actors that together can be weaved into an assemblage. As CIE cartographers who seek to map the terrain, we are also *making* the terrain of CIE in Malaysia, thus becoming part of it. We return to Tsing's (2015) earlier question regarding polyphonic assemblages: "How do gatherings become "happenings," that is, greater than the sum of their parts?" (p. 23). Through this reflective exercise, we argue that the CIE meta-assemblage highlights the collaborative and contingent nature of knowledge-making in the field through complex and dynamic interactions as well as relations. 'Happenings', in this context, manifest through the collective act of the fisher, weaver and shadow-puppeteer attempting to piece together, while also being worked over by disparate fragments and actors of CIEs. The construction and strength of networks in the meta-assemblage of the 'CIE in Malaysia' project which we have described thus far lend tentative shape to the field of CIE locally, although this is contingent and subject to evolution with new discoveries, new coalitions and new commitments. If this chapter is a case of CIE as meta-assemblage represented in the Malaysian context, then indeed we echo Tsing's (2015) sentiment that "[a]ssemblages coalesce, change, and dissolve: this *is* the story." (p. 158). As emerging scholars in CIE from Malaysia, the very act of accounting for our biographies in the course of charting this project reminds us that knowledge-making in the field benefits from a reflexive attention to positionality. This in itself is "meta" level work—vernacular figures drawn from a specific cultural context honoured and brought in dialogue with a field concerned with matters that are international in scope.

Recently, we were contacted by a Malaysian teacher who will soon embark on her own journey to study comparative education at the postgraduate level in Japan. We recommended some resources so she is able to get a headstart. Perhaps she will be able to reflect on this learning experience and contribute to the 'CIE in Malaysia' project as she is also transformed, as we have

been in our own journeys. The emerging field of CIE in Malaysia—together with our account of it—continues to be (re)configured as more actors, artefacts, insights and aspirations are brought into its fold, consistent with Deleuze & Guattari's (1987) notion that reality is a moment-by-moment production of the encounter between people, objects, or ideas. Education is indeed a living thing. On our own, we present here but a small meta-assemblage nested within the field of CIE in Malaysia. Nevertheless, the very act of writing this chapter, performing the 'CIE in Malaysia' project as a text within this volume on CIE as meta-assemblages, echoes Thomson's (2018) call to view

texts as performative, then we do not see them as static, but as having an ongoing life in the world...And performative texts do not act alone, they are socially produced and socially performative...we might ask: What networks or assemblages does this writing join? (p. 79)

Thus, through a textual manoeuvre—writing the progress of the 'CIE in Malaysia' project into being—we offer this chapter as testimony and contribution of an instance of CIE meta-assemblage. Looking ahead, the fisher, weaver and shadow-puppeteer continue their dialectical dance as the field of CIE continues to be (re)shaped and (re)territorialised in Malaysia.

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