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Farmers in Singapore? Collective action under adverse circumstances

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ABSTRACT

How can individuals with contrasting interests in a declining industry, at odds with the country's identity, and facing an illiberal and sceptical government, band together to promote collective goals? This article addresses this question by examining Singapore's Kranji Countryside Association, one of Singapore's few civil society organisations to focus on community organising. To Association members, the material and time costs of organising were high, the odds of success were low and the material rewards of success were modest. The article evaluates two views that purport to explain collective action: the rational choice approach that focuses on selective incentives and the social-psychological approach that emphasises non-excludable collective incentives and collective identity. It is concluded that while selective incentives were necessary for attracting several non-active members to fill out the ranks of the organisation, the rational choice approach cannot explain the group's initial establishment or why some members have been especially active. For this, social-psychological factors were vital to both building and sustaining the organisation. The results illuminate collective action in Singapore's illiberal context and enhance our understanding of the state's dilemmas in managing civil society.

KEY WORDS

Singapore, collective action, social networks, land

After years of struggling against what seemed to be gradual extinction, worn down as their pleas for longer land tenures and other forms of support fell on deaf ears, one day in August 2005, a group of farmers met to form an association. These neighbours decided that as a united group they could better fight to promote agriculture, protect their interests and establish new business ventures such as rural tourism ("agri-tainment"). The association started out small – but with regular meetings and by building on early victories, it eventually quadrupled in size. More importantly, the members remained unified in the face of both setbacks as well as attempts to co-opt or divide and conquer them.

This story would not be especially remarkable except that this group formed in twenty-first century Singapore, an industrialised and urbanised city-state with about 5.6 million people sharing just 721 square kilometres of land. Understandably, land is one of Singapore's most precious assets, a resource that the state has carefully controlled and managed as a conduit towards development (see, for example, Gamer 1972, 34–52). Singapore's state prides itself on its rapid shift from Third World underdevelopment to First World modernity, becoming in the process a gleaming, modern city-state

and a model of development. Hence, these farmers are something of a remnant of what used to be in the Singaporean economy and faced an uphill struggle against a widely accepted vision of the nation, a national image within which they fit uncomfortably, if at all.

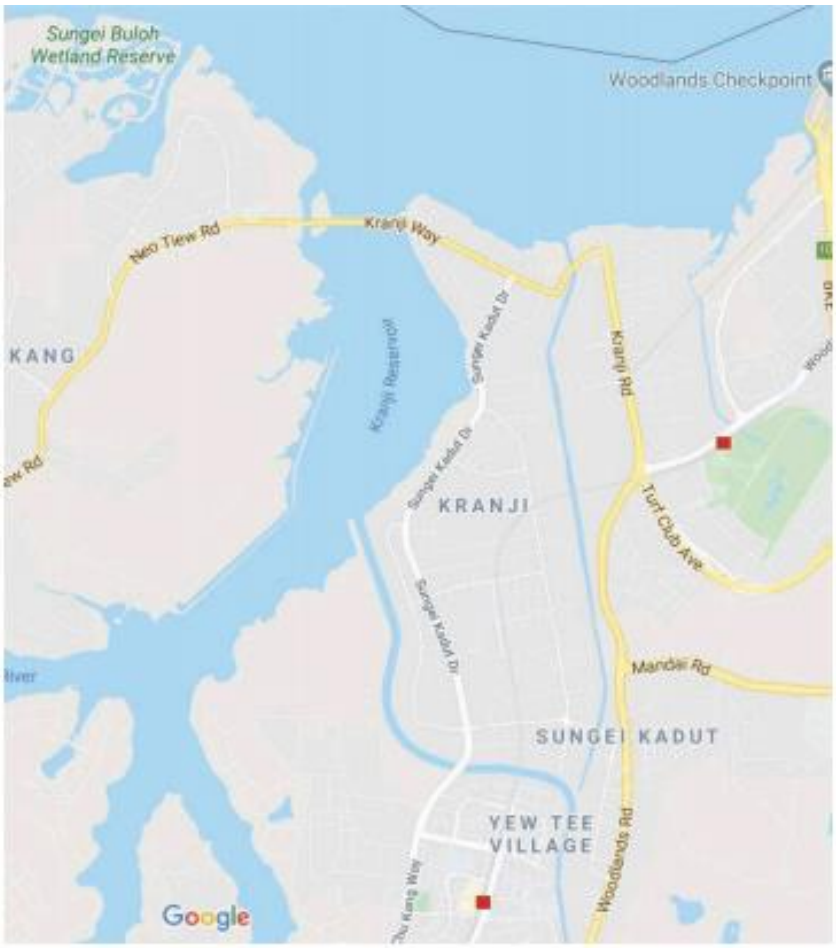
How can individuals with contrasting interests in a tiny and declining economic sector and facing a sceptical government co-operate to promote collective goals? This article addresses this question by examining an unlikely fraternity – Singapore's Kranji Countryside Association (KCA). As discussed below, the role of voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) – non-government organisations that focus on the needs of citizens and permanent residents – in Singapore is well documented. However, the vast majority of these organisations are focused on delivering services, while a handful advocate on behalf of others to champion policies to address the needs of specific groups, including women, the physically and mentally disabled, foreign workers and others. Almost non-existent are a third type of interest group – self-organised community organisations whose members advocate not on behalf of others but for themselves (Twelvetrees 1991). As the government mistrusts attempts to form organisations independent of the state and that advocate for needs at odds with government priorities, the KCA's establishment and its subsequent growth is puzzling.

The KCA is an organisation consisting of some of Singapore's remaining full-time professional farmers who are located in the extreme northwest of Singapore's main island (see Figure 1). More than just an advocacy organisation, the KCA is a community-based and community-led one, with farmers advocating for common issues and promoting a vision of protecting Kranji as one of the last vestiges of rural countryside. KCA members struggle for access to scarce land. Although the KCA promotes a vision of maintaining 1% of Singapore's land for capital-intensive farming and agri-tainment, it faces competing notions on how the land could be best utilised – for housing, industry, commercial or other use. The tenures on 62 farms are due to expire in 2021 and return to the state for re-development. Even this expiry date was the result of a difficult struggle – the original leases were due to expire in 2013, but were extended several times, in large part due to KCA lobbying (*Straits Times*, May 28, 2017; interviews). This dire situation is a marked improvement compared to the pre-2005 period. Prior to the KCA's formation, farmers generally felt helpless and isolated in the face of short-term land leases and the lack of land security. Individual appeals for basic services, such as being connected to the nation's sewer system, generally failed. The Singapore state's broadly accepted vision for its future seemed to leave no place for agriculture, with many farmers resigned to the prevailing perception of farming as a sunset industry. As the size of land allocated for farming shrank, farmers increasingly found themselves not only competing against farm imports from around the world, but also against each other for the remaining land that was allocated. Such competitive dynamics formed the harsh backdrop against which the KCA was formed.

Because Singapore's leadership emphasised urbanisation and industrialisation, at the expense of its countryside, since the nation's founding, the status of farmers has long been marginal (Deyo 1981, 53–54; Turnbull 2009, 301). Further, the government has long adopted an ambivalent attitude towards civil society – with a careful distinction made between "civil" and "civic" society. Wariness towards the development of a politicised civil society that is potentially disruptive has led the state to advocate for a "civic" society instead, with emphasis on citizen participation bounded by rigid institutional boundaries. In this way, even after the government claimed increased openness to public participation, it clearly defined the role for civil society, not based on a liberal conception of individualism and individual rights, but on a communalist view based on mutual obligations of citizen and the state (see Koh 2009). The government actively supports, encourages and generously funds organisations that deliver services of many kinds – as long as their activities remain within state delineated boundaries. Those boundaries have expanded over time. Whereas the Lee Kwan Yew administration showed little tolerance for interest groups, under his successor, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, the state provided tacit but uneven acceptance for some organisations. While such organisations include a handful, like AWARE and Transient Workers Count Too, that advocate for others, the state has shown little tolerance for self-organising groups that advocate for their own interests in a way that is independent of the government's corporatist system (see, for example, Koh 2009; Rodan 2018). This restrictive environment earned Singapore a score of four out of 12 for its associational and organisational rights

from Freedom House (2017). If, as Foley and Edwards (1996) suggest, civil society has two paradoxical versions – one that habituates citizens and the other that serves as a counterweight to the state – Singapore encourages the former while discouraging the latter.

Figure 1. Map of Kranji area.



Source: Adapted from Google Maps.

This political context, principally the suppression of independent civil society in general and the marginalisation of farmers in particular, should have deterred the bottom-up formation of associations that lobby for farmers' interests. Indeed, the costs the KCA faced for organising were high, its odds for success were low and the material rewards of success were modest. Moreover, benefits that extend to Kranji farmers as a group – such as those stemming from policy or access to land – would generally benefit all farmers, not just those participating in collective action. Despite facing such negative conditions, the KCA has not only survived but quadrupled its membership and shown some successes in its struggles. Given that the organisation's social context is the opposite of one in which scholars would expect collective action to succeed, the very survival and persistence of the KCA marks it as a hard case for understanding collective action. In addition, precisely because the organisation has enjoyed some success, examining the KCA can help further our understanding of how groups in an authoritarian context can form, maintain and grow an organisation in a sunset industry.

Explaining Collective Action

In order to solve the puzzling case of the KCA's formation and continuation, this article evaluates the explanations offered by two primary schools of thought that purport to explain the formation of such groups: the rational choice approach and the social-psychological model. To be sure, there are explanations of group formation that could also provide an alternative to the broadly rationalist and the more constructivist, norm-based social-cultural ones we test here. For instance, Marxian scholars would focus on class dynamics and divisions. However, the KCA, made up as it is of commercialised, capitalist farmers struggling against the state to secure long-term land rights, does not necessarily fit a Marxian vision of class struggle. Other research on collective action in Singapore such as that by Rodan(2018), does not address the formation of such groups, but rather seeks to explain the relationship between state and society that structures and constrains the ability of such groups to advocate for themselves. This line of research is more relevant in understanding the political environment of Singapore, an issue we consider below.

By contrast, scholars associated with the rational and psycho-social approaches make specific arguments regarding the factors that can overcome collective action problems and allow for the creation of associations such as the KCA. We can test these theories' explanatory power via the case of the KCA's formation and subsequent persistence, which allows us to contribute to the debate regarding the circumstances, if any, under which people act according to the assumptions of these theoretical approaches, and to understand the formation and continuation of collective action.

Rational Choice Approach

The rational choice approach, based on the assumption that individuals maximise their material interests, considers collective action difficult. Individuals have incentives to free ride on the efforts of others rather than bear their proportionate burden of providing for the collective good. The "strong" variant of this approach argues that the free rider problem is the most formidable barrier to collective action and can only be overcome by either: (a) coercion; or (b) selective incentives that exclude non-participants (Olson 1965). The "weak" version assumes that individual actors act within existing social and institutional constraints (see, for example, Taylor 1976; Miller 1992). Specifically, this variant suggests that a pre-existing community makes it rational for individuals to participate (Taylor 1988). Additionally, it contends that communal bonds or a collective identity actually represent pre-requisites for collective action (Calhoun 1988). Other pre-conditions include: individuals should adopt a long-term time horizon, participate in a long-term activity where benefits of co-operation can build up, know when co-operation ceases, and be able to punish non-co-operative members of the group (Taylor 1976, 151). Even as both variants of rational choice differ on the question of whether there are pre-requisites for collective action, they converge in arguing for the need for either selective incentives or external coercion to overcome the free rider problem in small groups.

Thus, the rational choice theory suggests that either external coercion or selective incentives are necessary to initiate collective action (RC1). If the rational choice theory explained the formation of the KCA, we would expect that one of the three following conditions applied. First, collective action could overcome the threat of free riders and rationally arises if successful coercion generated high participation rates within the community, with keenly felt repercussions for non-participants. Second, collective action could rationally arise if individuals had sufficient selective incentives for them to bear the cost of providing for the collective good. Finally, it could rationally arise if non-members were excluded from the gains generated by the group. The "weak" version of rational choice expects a fourth condition: that collective action could arise only in the presence of pre-existing social conditions, such as communal bonds between individuals.

Regarding the separate but related question of how to sustain collective action, the strong variant of rational choice would argue that, since free riders could still defect if the risk of detection is low, external enforcement that threatens to exclude free riders would need to remain strong. In contrast, the weak variant suggests that norms of reciprocity can sustain co-operation via shame and guilt (see, for example, Elster 1989; Ostrom 2000). According to the weak version's argument, the formation of these norms requires that: (a) the state recognises the organisation and provides sanctioning institutions, as well as nested levels of appropriation, provision, enforcement and governance; (b) the group's resource system is small with well-defined boundaries, simplifying the process of obtaining accurate knowledge about shared resources and facilitating collective management; and (c) the group is small, possesses clearly defined boundaries, shares norms, has experienced past successes, and possesses social capital, appropriate leadership, interdependence among group members, heterogeneity of endowments, and homogeneity of identities and interests (Wade 1989; Ostrom 1990; Baland and Platteau 1996; Agrawal 2003).

Derived from this, rational choice approaches suggest that norms of reciprocity sustain collective action (RC2). If this were correct, we would expect to see norms of reciprocity sustaining collective action within the KCA. Although the strong variant suggests that selective incentives and/or external coercion alone suffice in sustaining collective action, under the weak variant, social mechanisms (for example, social ostracism and peer pressure) are needed to deter unco-operative behaviour. If the weak variant holds, we would expect to see evidence of the above-mentioned four conditions.

The Social-psychological Approach

In contrast to the rational choice, social-psychological approaches contend that collective benefits or collective identity alone is sufficient for collective action. Collective benefits and collective identity fulfil a different kind of self-interest than that posited in the rational choice approach, thus obviating the need to eliminate free riders. More specifically, the term collective benefits refers to the expectation that participation will help to produce the collective good that brings about a valued social change. Given that individuals are often asked to participate when they do not yet know whether others will participate, their participation is contingent on: (a) a belief that a minimum number of people – a somewhat arbitrary number that is based on the (potentially flawed) judgement of the individual in question – will participate in the collective action; (b) that the individual's participation is important to contributing to the success of collective action; and (c) that collective action will be successful if many participate (see, for example, Klandermans 1984). Related, individuals who share a collective identity are constituted to think and act as members of the group, thereby driving participation in collective action (see Kawakami and Dion 1995).

Two hypotheses emerge from these arguments on the initiation of collective action. The first is that collective benefits are needed to initiate collective action (SP1.1). If this is valid, we would expect that collective benefits, or a belief in the social value of their organisation, drives members' participation. The three conditions listed above must be present for the promise of collective benefits to drive participation in collective action, unless a cause is especially urgent. Related is the view that a pre-existing collective identity is necessary for initiating collective action (SP1.2). Evidence for this includes the existence of a strong and salient social identity among members prior to collective action. In the absence of a pre-existing collective identity, we would expect activists to frame strategically such identities as a part of their attempts to recruit participants. Activists could make use of perceived collective disadvantages that distinguish "us" from "them." Individuals who identify more with the group should also exhibit a higher level of commitment and develop an obligation to the group. To sustain collective action, the social-psychological model suggests that social networks cultivate trust, which in turn facilitates collective action (see Klandermans 1984; Tarrow 1998). Collective rituals reinforce individuals' moral commitment to behave in terms of their level of group membership, which helps to maintain the group identity (Bosco 2001; Stürmer and Simon 2004).

Thus, according to this logic, a separate hypothesis is that social networks sustain collective action (SP2). If this suggestion is valid, there should be evidence of formal or informal ties between members, including collective rituals. Sustained participation could be mediated by the degree to which one feels obliged to behave in accordance with one's group membership (that is, as a committee or non-active member). Social ties are also intrinsic to the rational choice explanation, in that social networks can deter free riders via social sanctions, as the rational choice approach suggests. In contrast, however, in the social-psychological approach, social networks cultivate trust and solidarity, thus becoming an enabling tool for sustained participation, rather than a form of soft coercion.

Role of Political Environment

How does political context affect the prospects for collective action? Contentious collective action, such as that which occurs in social movements, arises when political opportunities and constraints change such that individuals can collectively challenge political elites (Tarrow 1998). Institutional change involves a framing contest. Opposing actors compete to frame the meanings of relevant issues to turn these into opportunities (Hargrave and Van de Ven 2006). Thus, changes to political opportunities and constraints are pre-requisites for contentious collective action (PC1).

Accordingly, social movements can initiate action – but they do not do so in a vacuum, but rather in a political context and in response to changes in the political environment. Most authoritarian governments, including Singapore's, see independent civil society as a potential threat to political control, and therefore move to limit and constrain the amount of leeway such groups enjoy. Yet, even authoritarian governments can signal a level of tolerance for additional participation in the public sphere (Tarrow 1998; Johnston 2015). For less contentious collective action, minimal recognition of the right to organise by the government is crucial (Wade 1989; Ostrom 2000). Governance regimes that empower local leadership help to trigger and sustain collective action given that market and social pre-conditions are in place (Salifu, Francesconi, and Kolavalli 2010). Regarding Singapore's political environment, Rodan (2018) argues that the city-state's government uses several institutionalised mechanisms to limit and channel participation into forms that are sanctioned by the state. He argues that while "civil society expression is generally suppressed under authoritarian regimes" such as Singapore, modes of representation that do not mount an electoral challenge, claim to represent specific social classes, or challenge the regime can be more tolerated (Rodan 2018, 36). In sum, such scholars suggest that at least minimal government support is a necessary condition for non-contentious collective action. Without this, attempts at collective action will fail. While rational choice focuses on the need for external enforcement mechanisms to be present, the political context underscores the necessity of some form of governmental support (PC2). If this view is valid, we would expect institutions, laws or other mechanisms that allow organisations' formal recognition and signs of government support for local leaders that helps to trigger or sustain collective action.

Researching City-State Farmers

To test the various hypotheses generated from the above three approaches as potential explanations for the puzzling case of the KCA, data was gathered in 2017 by combining observational study with 15 semi-structured interviews. KCA members can be segregated into three categories: (a) The Executive Committee (Exco) comprising the president, vice-president, honorary secretary and treasurer; (b) committee members; and (c) members. Unlike their non-member counterparts, KCA's members are distinct in that active members willingly provide public goods that help sustain the organisation and increase its effectiveness, whereas non-active members pay membership dues but do little else. To understand the different motivations of these groups of members, we interviewed three of the ten original founding members, six of ten active members, four of 30 non-active members, and four among dozens of eligible non-members. Interviewees, irrespective of their level of activity, all

held similarly small-sized plots of land located in the Kranji area and, like farmers in Singapore, the majority were ethnically Chinese. Reflecting the KCA membership, interviews came from a range of age groups, genders and educational backgrounds. Interviews focused on understanding why various types of members (leaders, active members, non-active members and non-members) chose to participate (or not) in collective action at different points in time.

We applied process tracing methods to search for the causal mechanisms expected for the hypotheses set out above (see Bennett and George 2005). Accordingly, we identified the causal chain and intervening causal mechanisms that explained the behaviours of different types of actors. To understand the contextual issues, such as state–society relations, we also reviewed the historical literature on Singapore. Despite interviewing several members from different groups, most of the information we gleaned was consistent across the different interviews. These findings generated a consistent story of the KCA's founding and continued development.

Phase I: The Formation of the Kranji Countryside Association

Although the KCA was formally established in 2005, efforts to form an association began in 2001 when KCA's founding President Ivy Singh-Lim established a farm, Bollywood Veggies, as part of her retirement plans. She found that farmers at that time faced several legal and financial restrictions. In 2001, Singapore's Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) guidelines did not allow for ancillary visitor amenities, such as restaurants or visitor centres, on farms (URA 2005; interviews). Because banks were unwilling to make loans to farms, most farmers relied on personal savings and networks for financing. Further, as land was leased for a period of only ten years with subsequent renewals on a case-by-case basis, land security was tenuous. The volume of land made available for agriculture was declining.

Considering the threat that farming faced, Singh-Lim advocated for farmers to unite and form the KCA to deal with common problems. However, of the 260 farms throughout Singapore, only nine other farmers (who subsequently became KCA founding members) responded to the invitation by joining and actively participating in the organisation. In 2004, all ten farmers gave a regional development presentation to the then-Minister of State and National Development on their vision for farm tourism. These efforts proved successful. The URA's 2005 regulatory changes to allow farms to provide ancillary visitor amenities represented a landmark moment (Lim 2009). It was also a quick first victory for Kranji's farmers, convincing the soon-to-be founding members of KCA's value. The KCA was formed in 2005 with two primary objectives: to increase the bargaining power of farmers when negotiating with the government; and to promote agri-tainment to raise the profile of farming in Singapore. Subsequently, the KCA grew to 40 members.

The form that the KCA adopted has been nearly unprecedented in Singapore: a grassroots, community-based organisation (CBO) independent of the government and formed by members who advocate for their own interests (see Twelvetrees 1991; Chechoway 1995). To be sure, Singapore has more than 1,800 community organisations (which the Singapore government labels as "grassroots organisations"), including residents' committees, community centres and community development councils. However, these organisations have, since independence, been intentionally embedded within Singapore's corporatist system (see Vasoo 2008). Whether or not Singapore's grassroots organisations serve to extend the reach of the state as some like Meow (1987) argue, unlike CBOs described in the academic literature, they certainly do not operate independently of government. By contrast, the KCA fits the key qualities of a CBO, one of a very few of which we are aware.[1] Its membership and other leadership positions consist exclusively of Kranji-based farmers; the sole non-member involved in the organisation is the part-time executive secretary, the organisation's only paid employee. An annual membership fee, set at S$600 in 2018 (approximately US$430), helps to fund KCA's activities and pay the executive secretary's salary. A core group of five people, comprising the Exco and the part-time executive secretary, proposes and manages the KCA's main activities. Active

members (including Exco and committee members) attend bi-weekly meetings to discuss and manage KCA-related issues. These meetings are open to all members: the number of committee members is not officially limited, and all members are invited to attend. Attending and participating in these meetings is a key characteristic distinguishing active from non-active members.

Based on our reconstructed narrative, we can evaluate the extent to which the rational choice or social-psychological theories explain the initiation of the KCA and the motivation of each type of member or non-member farmer (see Table 1).

Table 1. KCA's initiation and initial membership recruitment

	RC1: Either external coercion or selective incentives are necessary to initiate collective action		**SP1.1: Collective benefits are needed to initiate collective action**			
	External coercion	**Selective incentives**	**Belief that there will be sufficient participants**	**Belief in importance of one's participation**	**Belief in success if many participate**	**SP1.2: A pre-existing collective identity is necessary for initiating collective action**
Founding President	Absent	Absent	Present	Present	Present	Absent
Founding members		Absent	Unsure	Present	Present	Absent
Post 2005 Active Members		Present, but insufficient for level of activity	Unsure	Present	Present	Present
Post 2005 Non-active members		Present	Unsure	Unsure	Unsure	Present
Post 2005 Non-members		Deemed insufficient	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent
Conclusions	Not a factor for initiation	Key factor for less active members	Collective benefits were key factor for active participation			Collective identity was absent in the initial period

Explaining Phase I: KCA Initiation and Recruitment

Collective identity, selective incentives and external coercion

Given the lack of a pre-existing community among farmers in Kranji, the facts of the case are largely inconsistent with the weak version of the rational choice approach – farmers did manage to mobilise before they created their community identity, not after. Turning to the expectations associated with the strong version of the rational choice approach, to what extent were external coercion and/or selective incentives important to the KCA's establishment? The founding president, who mobilised

her personal resources and networks, was initially the main, if not sole, driver of the KCA's initiation. However, multiple interviewees suggested that neither selective incentives nor external coercion was present for the founding president. While she possesses a bold personality, by all accounts, her actions were group-oriented. Neither she nor anyone in the group possessed tools of coercion, and no one was offered selective incentives for joining the group. Additionally, although farming in Singapore is perceived as a sunset industry, no new crisis emerged in 2005 that would yield immediate substantial losses to farmers if they did not establish the KCA. The existential crisis farmers faced was long-term rather than a new phenomenon.

Moreover, the potential for the KCA to produce substantial material benefits remained uncertain. At the time of formation, the KCA's goals of enhancing the bargaining power of farmers, and redefining the act of farming, seemed more aspirational than practical. Founding members also understood that the KCA would benefit the entire farming industry, including non-members. Furthermore, the founding president had even fewer incentives to bear the burden of collective action. Relatively wealthy, Singh-Lim and her husband moved to the Kranji countryside in 2001 for retirement. The survival of the farming industry was of little material concern to her and she was not motivated by material self-interest. In short, farmers were not assured that joining the KCA would yield any benefits, let alone selective material benefits. It was only after the KCA was established that the group offered material benefits for membership. Thus, RC1 is inconsistent with the evidence, and cannot explain why the founding president and members would initiate collective action without external coercion or selective incentives.

The role of collective benefits

By contrast, the evidence is more consistent with the social-psychological approach's explanation of the formation of the KCA. With reference to the three pre-conditions that promise a chance of collective benefits (see Table 1), interviewees agree that a minimum number of participants were required for farmers to have an effective collective voice and Singh-Lim managed to persuade some farmers to share her view. Moreover, she also mobilised crucial resources and networks among the farmers to initiate the organisation. In short, the evidence is consistent with the notion that collective benefits motivated the founding president to initiate the KCA. Two out of these three indicators were also present for the founding members and subsequent active members. They were convinced that their contribution mattered to achieve KCA goals; and they believed that the KCA would be successful if many farmers participate. For this reason, they chose to join Singh-Lim by contributing actively in the KCA.

Unlike the farmers who formed the KCA and the subsequent active members, non-active members who joined post-2005 typically were motivated by selective incentives. They were passive, as they remained uncertain whether the KCA could succeed. Such farmers were often consumed by individual, higher-priority business activities. Although this type of member hoped the organisation would succeed, the KCA was merely something nice-to-have. Although willing to remain members and contribute the relatively modest annual dues, they saw little point in expending effort towards active pursuit of the organisation's goals. Thus, selective incentives made the most difference. While they did see their importance for "making up the numbers," in interviews, non-active members did not speak of KCA's norms; joining was a business decision as KCA members receive discounts on stall rentals during the KCA-sponsored farmers' market, and also could participate in the KCA's collective marketing activities. For these members, the material benefits of joining were greater than the costs.

Non-members fall into two categories. First, the most common are those who do not join because they anticipate little benefit. Typical among their sentiments, one farmer argued that, "not much changed [for the farming industry] even after the KCA was established." The non-joiners typically had no interest or ability to participate in agri-tainment and had already established marketing channels for their products. Thus, they perceived no added value from the KCA. They further did not believe that adding their numbers to KCA would enhance the organisation's effectiveness in negotiating with the

state. In addition, they doubted that sufficient people would participate. A second group of non-members declined to join because they disagreed with KCA goals. Some concluded that the KCA was challenging the traditional notion of farms as food production sites and believed that the KCA was incapable of improving the productivity and competitiveness of their farms. A smaller number within the second group of non-members contended that traditional farming should be abandoned in favour of modern food production techniques. Such farmers wanted to maintain Kranji as a base of food production, but with more mechanised and higher-technology production increasing farm productivity. In this way, Kranji would resemble other areas of Singapore zoned as light industry, and no longer be preserved as a "countryside" suitable for attracting tourists. Irrespective of their reasons for not joining, these farmers refrained of their own volition – they were aware of the procedures for joining and were invited to do so. These non-member farmers perceived the KCA as offering neither enticing selective incentives nor attractive collective benefits and did not trust in the KCA's ability to secure these. That such farmers refused to join the KCA would not surprise scholars from either the rational choice or the social psychological camp.

Collective identity

Viewed as an alternative to material incentives, the social psychological camp argues that collective identity would create collective claims (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 285). Individuals intertwined with the group through friendships and informal support networks have a stake in the group's fate and are likely to contribute to collective action (Fireman and Gamson 1979, 23–24). Interviews with farmers suggest that a collective identity did not exist prior to the KCA's formation; instead, the KCA worked to establish it. This facilitated the KCA's expansion post-2005 but did not play a role during the KCA's establishment. Prior to the KCA's initiation, there were few substantial interactions among farmers. While generally friendly with each other, producing Kranji farmers, both then and now, perceive themselves as business entities with business interests to be protected against competitors.

The few forms of co-operation that existed prior to KCA did little to promote a sense of broader community. Co-operation among individuals was small-scale and narrowly focused on commercial challenges, not on the larger issues facing farmers. For instance, some farmers co-operated individually with other farmers when their business interests were closely aligned, as in the case of an alliance formed in 2002 between two vegetable farms to jointly market their produce under a single brand. A second form of larger-scale co-operation was exemplified by organisations like the Singapore Livestock Farmers' Association and the Singapore Aquarium Fish Exporters Association. Membership in these kinds of associations would typically contribute to a sense of collective identity among members – but not in these cases. While some members found these organisations useful for joint marketing and distribution, other members dismissed them as "useless" (interviews). More importantly, these organisations included not just producers but distributors and others, and did not address the core issues that farmers perceived as existential threats. Substantial co-operation spanning these sub-industries was almost unheard of prior to the KCA. In other businesses, such as the quail industry, fierce competition among farmers made forming friendships difficult, much less establishing meaningful networks. Thus, based on the experiences of the KCA, pre-existing collective identities were not a necessary condition for participation in collective action. Instead, collective identity developed gradually. The evidence is thus inconsistent with SP1.2; and cannot explain how ten farmers from diverse sub-industries first came together in 2005 to initiate the KCA. Instead, KCA farmer activists gradually developed a new collective identity to frame the farmers' collective struggles and mobilise participation.

Explaining Phase I

Examining hypotheses RC1, SP1.1, SP1.2 against the initiation and initial growth of the KCA yields a narrative less consistent with the expectations of rational choice theory and more consistent with one

strain of the social-psychological literature (see Table 1). The KCA's strong leader articulated collective benefits to the farming community and succeeded in garnering the participation of others who became founding members. Founding and active members motivated by collective benefits shared certain characteristics. They tended to adopt long-term time horizons (many were relatively young or had succession plans for their farms) and were deeply concerned about the future of the farming industry. In contrast to these founding members, the motivations of less active members fell into two categories: those motivated by reward in the form of selective incentives and those persuaded by collective benefits. The former helped to fill the ranks of the KCA; the latter became more active in providing public goods to the organisation.

Phase II: Persistence of the Kranji Countryside Association

In the years since its founding, the scope of the KCA's work has included supporting individual farmers in their struggles with the authorities over land permits, engaging in collective marketing, building the reputation of the KCA and of Kranji farmers more generally, strengthening the institutional base of the organisation, and most importantly, working on land security. Even as the KCA focuses on existential threats to all farmers, it also addresses individual concerns. As one founding member stressed, "if farmers don't benefit, [we will] close down the KCA." To this end, during their bi-weekly meetings, active members help farmers within the association – for instance, writing to the government on behalf of members. Some farmers who cannot speak or write in English also depend on the KCA to translate or interpret letters from the government. In addition, the KCA engages in collective marketing, planning several initiatives to raise awareness of Kranji farms and facilitate tourist visits. During their first year, the KCA launched the Kranji Countryside Express. While public buses do serve parts of the Kranji area, the Express is the only bus service that brings visitors from the Kranji train station to six tourist-type farms in Kranji. Although the bus operates at a loss, it remains vital because it provides valuable access to farms for the public and farm employees, cementing the Kranji Countryside as a recreational destination. In 2013, the KCA launched its inaugural "Kranji Countryside Run," an eight kilometre fun run. Then-Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Law, K. Shanmugam served as the race's starter, underscoring the KCA's success in engaging prominent government officials. In June 2014, the KCA introduced quarterly farmers' markets. KCA members pay a nominal fee of about 10–15% of their profits from the event. Non-members approved by the KCA can also participate at a significantly higher fee of around S$100 per day.

These activities helped to enhance the organisation's reputation, reflected in increased media coverage. Despite its sometimes-prickly relationship with the government, the KCA garnered significant positive coverage in the local state-linked media. Regular articles highlighted Kranji both as a place for tourism and a source for locally produced food (for example, *Straits Times*, March 8, 2016; April 6, 2016; February 24, 2017). More importantly, the media portrayed the KCA positively (for example, *Straits Times*, December 28, 2016). The media focus attracted additional visitors to Kranji and the now burgeoning farmers' markets; more than this, they also raised awareness of the farmers' concerns and positioned the KCA as an effective organisation. Average Singaporeans became increasingly aware of Kranji as a countryside destination and a potentially valuable part of Singapore.

In addition, the KCA has also sought to raise its profile internationally. In 2016, it hosted the 27th Commonwealth Agriculture Conference – the first time the conference was held in Asia – to discuss the future of farming. Lawrence Wong, at the time, the Minister for National Development, the Ministry that oversees the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA), delivered the opening address. The state's symbolic support for the conference provided the KCA with an opportunity to promote its vision. The platform provided by the conference allowed it to present ideas for a research and development centre, with the current farms providing a test-bed for agricultural technology and serving as model agri-tainment sites.

KCA also became a more institutionalised organisation. In 2014, it underwent its first leadership transition. KCA President Singh-Lim stepped down after ten years of service in favour of then-Vice President, Kenny Eng. Though interviewees held both in high regard, they were quick to underscore the two leaders' strikingly different styles: the brash, frank and confrontational Singh-Lim compared to the pragmatic and conciliatory Eng. Most members suggest that the differing personalities were appropriate for the organisation at each leader's particular stage: Singh-Lim's more forceful approach helped to establish the organisation's track record of success while Eng's helps the KCA build a working relationship with government officials. To focus on its sustainability and groom the next generation of leaders, the KCA established an affiliated organisation, the Singapore Young Farmers. Finally, the KCA has also drafted a ten-year plan for Singapore's agricultural industry. Positioning itself as a thought-leader for the farming industry, the KCA presented itself as a constructive voice that provides the state with alternatives to the plan to urbanise the area.

While each of these agenda items was important, their urgency was dwarfed by land security. The perception that access to quality farmland is under threat is not without precedent. Farmers throughout Singapore's post-1965 history have seen waves of land seizures. Agriculture was a key component of colonial development from the nineteenth century (see Ang 1972). In 1921, agriculture (excluding those involved in processing of agricultural products) engaged nearly 16% of all workers; slightly more than manufacturing. By 1957, this figure was just under 7% while manufacturing employed nearly 17% of workers. Pressures to increase employment shifted the government's focus to industrialisation and urban development (Gamer 1972, 7). Land area for farms declined from 14,500 ha in 1965 to just 700 ha in 2014, or from 25% to less than 1% of total land area (Ludher 2015). By 1990, employment in agriculture plummeted to 0.3%, while manufacturing absorbed 29% of workers (Huff 1997, 407–411). Thus the 2014 announcement that the land leases of 62 farmers, including 14 KCA members, would not be renewed upon expiring in 2017 continued the historic trend of rapidly shrinking farming. According to this announcement, the land would be handed back to the state for re-development. Thirty-six newly drawn, smaller farm sites would be available for tender on ten-year leases (*Straits Times*, May 28, 2017; interviews).

Despite the offer of new land, the farmers were gravely concerned for four reasons. First, relocation could be prohibitively expensive; farmers who are moving must re-invest in basic infrastructure and technology, since much of their existing infrastructure cannot be shifted. Second, the ten-year land lease was considered insufficient if farmers were to invest in new technology. Contrary to the prevailing view of farmers as being unwilling to accept technology, the farmers interviewed were willing, even eager, to improve their productivity. Yet they felt a short lease was insufficient for them to make significant investments. Some farmers estimated that a minimum of a 30-year lease would be required to secure a return on infrastructure investments (interviews; *Straits Times*, January 17. 2016). Third, as the new land had been used for non-farm purposes, some worried about contamination. Fourth, concerned about the divisive impact of 62 farmers bidding for 36 plots, many farmers who were facing relocation considered closing their farms rather than moving to new plots. Since relocation was unattractive and perhaps unviable, the KCA's ability to lobby the state for greater guarantees of land security forms a core part of its mission and is necessary for the organisation's continued survival.

KCA's pleas to the government to change land-related decisions have met with some success. In 2016, the AVA announced that the ten-year leases on new agricultural land would instead be 20-year leases. In addition, to allow for additional transition time, existing tenures were extended from 2017 to 2021. Although extensions did not fully resolve the farmers' land problem, they represented a victory for the KCA in fighting for farmers' welfare. Some members suspected that the offer of new plots represented an attempt to divide the farmers, as only some leaders have been offered these plots. Had these farmers accepted this offer, their motivations would have been understandable. After all, most of the 62 farms affected were not KCA members, and the new land, though smaller, could still help ensure the viability of theirfarms. However, believing that accepting these individual rewards would split the group and affect social ties among members and non-members, these farmers turned down the offer. In 2018, Minister Koh Poh Koon then the Senior Minister of State of the Ministry of

National Development (which oversees the AVA), made a series of announcements, including new funding for technology adaptation, new training programmes and efforts to increase demand for locally-produced agricultural products. The minister specifically noted his conversations with local farmers, and that he had "taken on board their feedback" (Ministry of National Development 2018). These were signs of the KCA's effectiveness in engaging the government.

The KCA's accomplishments in these areas were based on its foundation of organisational cohesion, especially amongst the KCA's core leadership and its active membership. Non-active members played an important role in growing the KCA's rank of members, and thus its strength. What can explain the KCA's persistence over the past ten years?

Explaining KCA's Persistence *a*nd Growth

Selective Incentives *and* Norms *of* Reciprocity

According to the rational choice approach, the KCA's success requires overcoming two types of free rider problems: first, members needed to continuously take on leadership roles (such as joining the Exco or becoming a committee member) despite an option to shirk responsibilities and second, encouraging farmers' long-term participation in the KCA when non-members also benefit (albeit less so) from the KCA. While the weaker version of rational choice suggests that four conditions are typically present for there to exist norms of reciprocity that could circumvent the free rider problem – external enforcement of rules, state support including sanctioning rulebreakers, small and organisationally controlled resources, and a small cohesive organisational community with common norms and interests – the evidence presented here is consistent with only two. First, rules were enforced through a degree of peer pressure. Active members were required to attend bi-weekly meetings, and had to commit to and support the KCA's activities. All ten Exco and committee members supported the first farmers' market, along with three other members, with the event's success drawing more members to subsequent markets. Second, active members possessed shared norms and similar identities and interests. The other conditions did not apply: the state played no role in sanctioning members who do not conform and the relevant resource system was not under organisational control, making monitoring irrelevant. Importantly, the two conditions that do apply are less related to material incentives and instead link to social forces, overlapping with factors outlined for the social-psychological approach.

Further, active members put in more effort than their non-active counterparts, but received scant selective benefits. Collective marketing, for instance, promotes the brands of farms belonging to all members. Active members do receive additional opportunities to network with external stakeholders, to have their brands marketed more prominently and to enjoy an elevated status within the community. Yet these benefits are not especially large, and some are non-material. Active members stress that these benefits are too slight to justify the time and resources they dedicated to the KCA. In other words, these benefits do not provide a satisfactory explanation for why some members choose to be active.

Compared to even those members who are not especially active, non-members do even less and receive similar benefits from policy changes that apply to farmers as a group. For instance, when the state extended the expiration of land leases, an act that was perceived as being partially in response to the KCA's lobbying, 48 out of the 62 affected farms were non-members. Why would farmers pay an annual membership fee of S$600 a year when it is possible to simply free ride? Here, non-members respond that they are not free riders at all – even non-members that generally support the KCA's vision of Kranji tend to dismiss the KCA's lobbying attempts as unproductive, a sentiment they often share with non-active members. Indeed, the primary factor that divides non-active members from non-members is the selective incentives that come with KCA membership. First, whereas non-members do

not find the farmers' markets relevant to their marketing efforts, for those who benefit from the farmers' markets, access to booths at discounted rates offsets the price of membership. Second, member farms can turn to the KCA for help when they face specific, non-collective problems, such as rent increases, lease expiration, or repairs in nearby public infrastructure. Some non-active members ponied up the membership fees only when they experienced such difficulties and needed KCA support.

Non-active members experience few costs outside the membership fee. Unlike active members, non-active members do not generally attend the KCA's bi-weekly meetings and have a weaker sense of obligation. They sometimes attend KCA events, such as the Kranji run and occasionally pitch in for KCA events such as the commonwealth conference. While active and non-active members share similar interests and identities, the interests of non-active members are less homogenous, as evidenced by the weaker effect collective benefits have had on them. Weak norms and reciprocity thus result in inactivity and do not sustain non-active members' participation. The rational choice approach suggests that norms of reciprocity contribute to active members' participation. By contrast, selective incentives sustain non-active members' participation. However, the question of why members would choose to be active remains largely unanswered.

Social Networks and Collective Identity

Unlike rational choice, the social-psychological approach emphasises the use of ties to cultivate trust and re-enforce members' resonance with the group identity. For active members, the lure of collective benefits and the tug of social networks outweigh the temptation to free ride. Indeed, many active members see the survival of their businesses as closely tied to the KCA's success. The initial draw of collective benefits encouraged some members to become active; the bi-weekly meetings reinforce this belief in the need for and potential of collective action and ensured continued participation. Through regular meetings, active members build mutual trust and reinforce their identification with KCA goals. Such is the case for several KCA members. Several members of the Exco and the committee were not founding members but rose to their positions as they became increasingly convinced of the need for members to take on leadership positions. The collective goals gained extra resonance with these individuals as their farms gained prominence alongside the increasing awareness of and stature for the farming industry. The evidence is thus consistent with the hypothesis that social networks, alongside collective benefits, are effective in sustaining participation among active members. Collective benefits also explain why members would choose to take on active roles rather than free ride.

Although social networks also exist between non-active members, these are not essential to sustaining participation. While the KCA does host ad hoc events that provide opportunities for members to network, which would not be accessible outside its membership, non-active members view the overall networks forged through the KCA as likely to persist even if they were no longer to be KCA members. Thus, because the social networks that they valued were largely not contingent upon the non-active members' participation in the KCA, these networks were not a factor in explaining their KCA participation. Instead, a combination of both collective benefits and collective identity retained the participation of non-active members.

Explaining Phase II

Comparing RC2 and SP2 against the evidence yields three insights (see Table 2). First, factors that pushed farmers into joining the KCA – selective incentives and collective benefits – continued to sustain participation. Second, norms of reciprocity (RC2) and social networks (SP2) jointly sustained participation among active members. When these are lacking, were not at stake or failed to take root in individual members, such members remained non-active. Norms of reciprocity use guilt and shame

whereas social networks rely on resonance with the group's goals to sustain participation. The use of both norms and appeals to collective goals evidently had complementary effects in sustaining active participation. For non-active members, norms of reciprocity and social networks were insufficient because such individuals held weak norms of reciprocity and different visions. Individuals also see the social networks as independent of membership status since these networks do not reinforce their commitment to the KCA. Social networks were thus ineffective in sustaining non-active members' participation. Third, collective benefits served as the main motivation for members to become more active over time.

Table 2. KCA's persistence and growth

	RC1: Selective incentives continue to sustain collective action	**RC2: Norms of reciprocity sustain collective action**	**Sp1.1: Collective benefits continue to sustain collective action**	**Sp1.2: Collective identity sustains collective action**	**SP2: Social networks sustain collective action**
Leadership/active members	Present, but insufficient for level of activity	Present	Present	Present	Present
Non-active members	Present	Absent	Absent	Absent	Present, but ineffective for sustaining participation
Non-members	Deemed insufficient	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent
Conclusions	Sustain non-active members' participation	Sustains active members' participation	Sustains active members' participation	Sustains active members' participation	Sustains active members' participation

Table 3. Political environment underpinning KCA's formation

	PC1: Changes to political opportunities and constraints are pre-requisites for collective action	**PC2: Government support is a pre-requisite for collective action**
Formation of KCA	Present	Present

Political Context of KCA's Establishment and Endurance

Contentious collective action occurs when individuals confront government authorities and attain power by achieving solidarity and challenging power holders (Tarrow 1998). As a form of contentious collective action, the KCA was first initiated so state authorities would respond to farmers' concerns. Over the years, the KCA positioned itself as a thought leader in providing alternative solutions and visions for Singapore's agriculture. To what extent do the hypotheses on political context help to understand the KCA's emergence as an example of contentious public action?

Changes to Political Opportunities and Constraints

The expectations regarding political context are largely consistent with the KCA's experience. Despite engaging in contentious politics, the KCA found a sympathetic audience of a handful of individual government officials. In 2005, URA changed the rules on existing farms and allowed ancillary visitor facilities to be installed in farms (Lim 2009). This allowed farmers to develop tourism in Kranji. In 2008, the URA signalled its acceptance of agri-tainment by launching the new Island-wide Leisure Plan. The plan included three new components of agri-tainment including farm-stays, spa treatments and hands-on farming activities.

These changes reflected broader trends in Singapore's state–society relationship, which waxed and waned over decades in fits and starts. The first wave of opening for civil society began in the mid-1990s. Whereas the Lee Kwan Yew administration perceived civil society as a confrontational and threatening force, groups like the KCA encountered a different attitude under Goh Chiok Tong, Singapore's second prime minister (1990–2004). From the mid-1990s to 2009, the state signalled a more nuanced approach by encouraging citizens to enhance civic life by engaging actively in community issues (Koh and Soon 2012). In the absence of a strong civil society, George Yeo (1991, 4), then-Acting Minister of Information and the Arts, cautioned, "Singaporean soul will be incomplete." Consequently, the state in 2000 established a speakers' corner, ostensibly to allow the public airing of views, albeit still with strong state oversight, and permitted the formation of additional, more independent civic groups (Rodan 1996, 106). In 2004, then-Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong declared that Singapore must "open up further" by "promoting further civic participation" (Lee 2004).

A second wave came after 2011, in the wake of a watershed election that saw the opposition Worker's Party win the highest number of parliamentary seats since independence in 1965. Subsequently, the political space for participation appeared to expand even more (see Tan and Lee 2011; Barr 2016). None of these changes implied unhindered civic participation and direct political participation, which remained carefully guarded territory. Citizens recognised implicit limits (informally known as "OB [out-of-bounds] markers") and avoided state-defined "sensitive issues," especially on race and religion, lest they threaten social cohesion (Koh and Soon 2012). While academics debate the causes and nature of these waves of opening for civil society, most agree that the role for civil society has expanded in Singapore (see, for example, Lee 2002, 2005; Chua 2005; Soon and Koh 2016).

These reforms did create the context for the KCA's emergence in 2005. Consistent with Tarrow's argument that changes in political opportunities are essential for the emergence of civil society groups that are not co-opted by the state, the KCA's latitude to operate as a CBO has depended in large part on the political space that has opened in Singapore, and on the group's willingness to limit its activities to the blurry boundaries of acceptable action. To be sure, the KCA's emergence is similar to the state's acceptance of Singapore's Nature Society and AWARE that Rodan (1993, 93; 1996, 106–108) described decades ago. As Rodan (1996, 96) argued then, "in those limited cases where implicit official tolerance of extra-parliamentary political activities has occurred, it has involved predominantly middle-class groups with moderate political objectives."

Nevertheless, the KCA's limited manoeuvring room exceeds the latitude described by many Singapore watchers. Rodan (2018, 34), for one, argues that participation in Singapore has largely been limited to state-sponsored individual and collective participation, and not the kinds of collective civil society expressions autonomous from the state in which the KCA has engaged. As these kinds of collective expression pose "the greatest threat to state political control and related elite interests," Singapore and other southeast Asian countries have suppressed these (Rodan 2018, 35–36). Although it avoids challenging the state and carefully operates within OB markers, the KCA as a CBO is exceptional. After all, the KCA is not primarily advocating for the interests of others. Instead, the organisation's membership consists solely of active farmers who have organised in the face of an existential challenge mounted by the state in order to promote their collective interests. In this way,

the KCA represents a community that has organised itself, one that has so far resisted attempts to co-opt or divide them.

Also consistent with the argument that movements create opportunities by communicating information about what they do and creating coalitions with third parties, the KCA has collaborated with others. The KCA depends on a group of highly committed non-farmer volunteers attracted to the KCA's vision. The KCA also attracted several volunteers – passionate advocates for the preservation of Singapore's farms, drawn from the public and especially from among students – who played a supportive role in organising events such as the Commonwealth Agriculture Conference. The KCA remains small and these volunteers increase its capacity, as well as its legitimacy, and demonstrate that the organisation's appeal is broadening.

The evidence suggests the KCA emerged when the political environment allowed it some space to engage the state in a framing contest about farming and its role in a modernising Singapore. These political opportunities were not a given. Additionally, KCA sought to obtain wider public support by bringing in members of the public as volunteers, by organising and participating in farmers' markets, and by engaging with the mainstream media. In doing so, new political opportunities were created as third parties aligned themselves with KCA's goals. This is consistent with PC1 which predicts that contentious collective action takes place when there is a change in political opportunities and constraints.

Extent of Government Support

The KCA has been careful to work within state-imposed limits so as to not lose the minimal government support it has. Upon formation, the KCA officially registered as a society. This constrains the KCA to work within specific rules. For instance, changes to the constitution are subject to Registry of Societies' approval, which also audits the society's accounts. Under the Societies Act, a society may also be dissolved under certain conditions – for example, when it is being used for unlawful purposes or for purposes deemed to be "prejudicial to public peace, welfare or good order in Singapore." Once dissolved, activities carried out by the group are considered unlawful. Although the Societies Act works to restrict the activities of the KCA, it also provides it with legitimacy. It is no coincidence that the KCA's formation in 2005 came on the heels of the 2004 reform of the Societies Act, which made registration easier (Soon and Koh 2016, xxii).

In addition to adhering to the requirements of the Societies Act, the KCA has also been careful to stay within "OB markers," positioning itself, in the government's eyes, as a constructive voice. Although the government has not always orchestrated the growth of civil society, its ability to control it remains formidable. As one academic put it, "the extent to which Singapore citizens can influence policy making depends on the extent to which the [government] allows it to happen" (Leong 2000, 447). Even if this statement exaggerates the power of the state to limit civil society, the KCA has shown considerable self-restraint in avoiding provocation of the government. Even under Singh-Lim's leadership, her brash attitude was muted by her and her neighbours' pragmatic recognition of their still-limited political space. The KCA's leadership passing from Singh-Lim to Eng further cemented the group's pragmatic instincts.

This pattern of confrontation and conformity is consistent with PC2 that stresses minimal government support for collective action to occur. While registration as a society is one way the government can control a bottom-up organisation, it also accords the KCA formal recognition and legitimates certain actions. In pressing its members interests, the KCA pushes some boundaries in its relationship with the government, but also respects prevailing "OB markers." This pattern of behaviour brought much-needed legitimacy both in the eyes of the government and its own members alike. Thus, the political context under which the KCA formed is consistent with the expectations of the literature on collective

action cited above: the KCA was formed amidst changes that offered additional political opportunities and fewer constraints along with a minimal level of government support.

Yet this mutual accommodation between the government and the KCA simply allows the KCA to operate. The issues that the organisation was designed to address remain as pressing as when the KCA was formed. KCA members have not so much convinced officials that its vision is viable as they have convinced them that the organisation and its vision are not antithetical to the state's fundamental interests. Policy concessions the organisation has enjoyed have largely come from convincing the state that for the short-term, farms in Singapore remain viable. The KCA is far from converting officialdom to wholehearted support for farming or that its vision of Kranji trumps competing visions. Yet, this continuing struggle underscores the point that without the broader context – the changing relationship between state and civil society – the KCA could not have promoted its case.

Today, the KCA struggles with competing visions of the future, not just for Kranji but for Singapore itself – visions that threaten the farmers' place in society. The KCA's vision is but one of several that exist for Kranji, each with powerful supporters. First, the various iterations of Singapore's Concepts Map – intended for planning of land and development – express different ideas for Kranji's future. The 1971 Concept Plan zones the Kranji area into two areas: one for "open space" and the other for "industry and harbours." The 1991 Concept Plan zones a large section of Kranji for residential high-density housing (De Koninck, Drolet, and Girard 2008, 80–81; Centre for Liveable Cities 2016, 28–29). By 2001, the map classifies most of Kranji as a "reserve site" for specific uses "not [yet] determined," with smaller places for agriculture, infrastructure, and "open space/recreation" (Urban Redevelopment Authority 2018a, 2018b). These maps suggest that Kranji's land is leased to farmers until it is brought into service to meet future demand for land.

Second, Singapore's AVA (recently reorganised as Singapore Food Agency), as well as some Kranji farmers, envision a more modern, high-rise, high-tech form of food production that prioritises land-efficient agricultural productivity. Indeed, Kranji already seems to be headed in this high-tech direction. In October 2017 a competing ten-member agriculture federation –Singapore Agro-Food Enterprises – was formed to promote this vision. The group was apparently formed with overt government participation – state minister Koh Poh Koon, was named honorary advisor to the federation. While the group's leader rejects the image of a "big boys' club," current KCA leaders were not invited to join (*Straits Times*, October 26, 2017, interviews).

Third, others see a future for food production, but not in Kranji. One such sentiment – backed by an informal collection of citizens concerned about sustainable development – favours urban farming, involving extensive gardening and even farming activities integrated with Singapore's cityscape. Another informal group proposes replacing the reliance on traditional land-based food production by producing food in a modern laboratory environment. These visions are not antithetical to that of the KCA – indeed the KCA actively supports urban farming. But these alternatives threaten to undermine the need for the Kranji countryside as a source of domestic food production.

While the AVA and government officials continue to work with the KVA, the state's vision of the future of agriculture seems to be settling on the more modern approaches, with then Minister of State for National Development Koh Poh Koon, saying in parliament:

Realistically … Singapore is too small to develop vast tracts of land for farming. We will never have enough land to ever grow all the food that we need … Just as we ask our SMEs in various other sectors to transform, automate, be more productive …, so we need our agricultural players to transform into one that is more productive as well. We need to adopt modern practices and embrace technology as a multiplier to do more with less (Ministry of National Development 2017).

This more modern approach to agriculture was underscored by the AVA as it highlighted several specific high-tech approaches to growing food (Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore 2017). Thus, despite the many signs that it is willing to work with the KCA, the

government continues to focus on modern, high-technology, high-density food production – a form of production that is distinctly different from that in which Kranji farmers are engaged. While these two visions could be compatible, many Kranji farmers and others believe the government's pursuit of modern food production underscores its limited support for maintaining a rural zone in Kranji.

How the KCA contends with these competing visions is vital for the organisation's future. To be sure, the group continues to emphasise the cultural, social and even economic value of maintaining a countryside in Singapore (see Eng 2017a). At the same time, the group, concerned with being identified with tradition and nostalgia, stresses the compatibility of maintaining a farm-based countryside with some of these other visions for Kranji. KCA farmers maintain that they do not reject the adoption of production-enhancing technology, but that the short-term leases preclude the investments required to adopt higher technology (*Straits Times*, June 26, 2016; interviews). Moreover, the group emphasises that while some farmers have successfully adopted productivity-enhancing technology, the light-industry style of farming remains unproven in Singapore (Eng 2017b; personal interviews). In addition to the issue of short leases, KCA farmers are hesitant to adopt technology that would change the character of the Kranji countryside.

Conclusions

Social observers from Tocqueville until today have long debated what factors motivate individuals to overcome substantial costs to undertake collective action, the fruits of which may never come to pass, and are often enjoyed in equal measure by the ardent and the apathetic, by the activist and the indifferent. Rational choice and social-psychological theorists make assumptions about human behaviour – homo economics versus identity. These often ontologically incompatible assumptions tend to preclude attempts to fuse the two traditions. Efforts to do so also face charges of creating a tautology. More often, the two theories are considered mutually exclusive. Yet, intuitively, human behaviour is swayed by appeals to the rational as well as the emotional, to entreaties to self-interest as well as identity.

Inconsistent with the assumptions of the stronger versions of rational choice, the KCA was not created by individuals working together in order to maximise their individual self-interest. Instead, the factors that helped the farmers overcome collective action problems were based more on the leaders' commitment to collective benefits and group identity. However, to survive, the organisation had to grow in size and strength, meaning that the organisation had to attract members from among the diverse farmers. Other members joined and collective benefits and group identity helped to motivate some members to become active, even as those who continued to be motivated primarily by selective material incentives remained less active. While active members remain the lifeblood of the KCA, the organisation would not survive without the non-active members filling out its roster.

Thus, the rational choice perspective's emphasis on selective incentives can explain the behaviour of one of the three groups involved – the non-active members. As important as these members are, more puzzling are the members and central leaders who bore the material and non-material costs of establishing and maintaining the organisation, despite the prospects of non-excludable collective benefits. Yet, it was to fight for the collective benefits that explained these key members' willingness to participate and bear individually these collective costs, an outcome that can be understood through the social-psychological lens, but is less consistent with rational choice. Moreover, in terms of organisational persistence, the active members were sustained and increased in number due to the organisation's demonstrated ability to deliver collective benefits. Norms of reciprocity were helpful, but they could not explain the motivations among active members and KCA leaders alike. Collective identity, almost completely absent when the organisation was established, subsequently grew and played a part in motivating these groups, contributing to the organisation's persistence.

Thus, even in an authoritarian environment, where one would expect only collective action with a high probability of achieving benefits that could not be gained via non-participation, it was the more social and psychological factors that proved vital for attracting the leaders and core of the organisation. To be sure, the government did play a role by providing a political opportunity and structuring the interaction between itself and the organisation. By registering as a society and working within "OB markers," the KCA accepted boundaries of behaviour that simultaneously reassured the state while allowing the KCA space to act on behalf of the organisation and its vision of a vibrant countryside within the city state. Whether the KCA's experience heralds an increasing role for CBOs remains to be seen. What is clear is that such collective action has given Kranji's farmers a fighting chance. Success in retaining their land over the long run is far from guaranteed. Yet, thus far, the KCA has refused to be divided or co-opted during their ongoing struggle for land and for the state's tacit acceptance of a role for farmers within the modernising city-state.

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Note

1. One other example of a CBO is described in Naqvi (2017). In seeking to understand the role of scale and autonomy of civil society, Naqvi analyses the role of an unnamed community group that represents the interests of the residents in an area with low-income housing. Like the KCA, the membership of this group consists exclusively of the people for which it advocates. Unlike the KCA, the community group has no paid staff members and is not registered under the Society's Act.

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