

Conference Paper

Tionghoa and Environmental Conservation: Between Confucianism and Materialism

Sujadmi^{1*}, Darsono Wisadirana¹, M.Lukman Hakim¹, and Ibrahim Ibrahim²¹Universitas Brawijaya, Malang City, Indonesia²Universitas Bangka Belitung, Bangka, Indonesian**ORCID**Sujadmi: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9596-191X>Darsono Wisadirana: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1434-0466>M.Lukman Hakim: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4490-4293>Ibrahim, Ibrahim: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1717-2979>**Abstract.**

The Bangka Tionghoa are a group of Tionghoa ethnic descendants who were originally brought to Bangka Island to work as tin miners. The initial arrival of this ethnic group was devoted to increasing tin production on Bangka Island. This study aims to examine the relationship between ethnic Tionghoa and efforts to preserve the environment on Bangka Island. The research method used is a qualitative method with an intrinsic case study design. The number of informants in this study amounted to seven, with the technique of selecting informants by purposive sampling. Data analysis was carried out using the Miles Huberman technique, which included data collection, presentation, and interpretation, as well as drawing conclusions. The perspective used is the choice of rationality put forward by James S. Coleman. Coleman argued that in a social system, individuals play an important role in interventions to create social change. There are two main elements in Coleman's ideas: actors and resources. The results of the study show that the Bangka Tionghoa ethnic group's efforts to preserve the environment are based on a rational choice to protect natural resources. Resources that will continue to support their economic lives. The choice made by the Bangka Tionghoa ethnic group to preserve the environment was also influenced by the Confucian values passed down from their ancestors. The existence of supporting actors and resources has made the Bangka Tionghoa ethnic group, whose livelihood is mining, participate in efforts to preserve the environment in order to create sustainable economic resources.

Keywords: Confucian values, Tionghoa ethnicity, rational choice

1. Introduction

Bangka Belitung is one of the largest tin-producing areas in Indonesia. Tin production in Bangka Belitung is able to dominate tin production in Indonesia, reaching 90% of total production [1]. Tin mining, which has been going on for centuries, has made tin production in this region penetrate coastal areas. This also creates conflicts in addition to the benefits obtained [2]. Figure 1 provides an overview of the potential wealth of tin resources in the Bangka Belitung Islands [3]. Tin mining in this area has been

Corresponding Author: Sujadmi;
email:
amy_sujadmi@student.ub.ac.id

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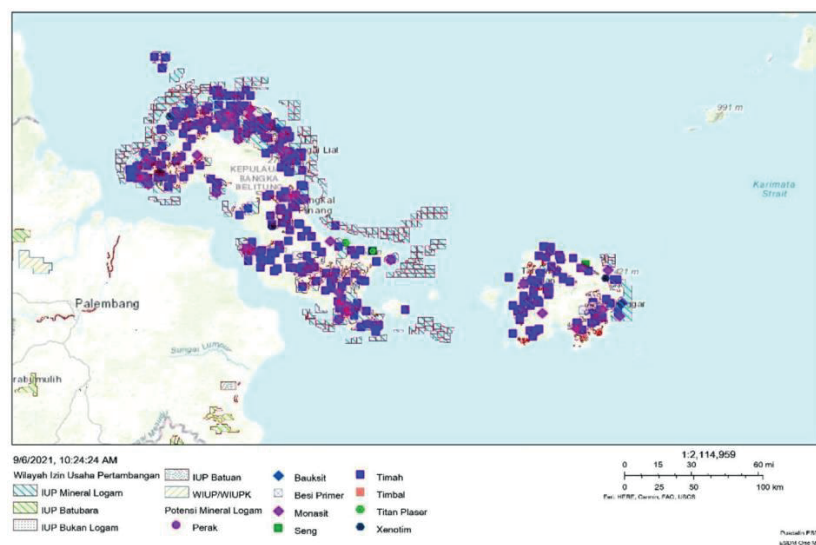
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started since the era of the Palembang sultanate, namely the time of Sultan Muhammad Mansyur in 1708 [4]. The tin miners are Tionghoa people who were brought in from several countries, such as Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Siam, and mainland China. Since the arrival of the miners who were Chinese or referred to as Tionghoa people, the development of the number of tin mining workers on the island of Bangka has been very rapid [3]. The arrival of the mining workers, who are ethnic Chinese (Tionghoa), is dominated by male workers. They are skilled workers in mining, especially in metal management [6]. They lived and settled at several points in the Bangka-Belitung Islands for a long time. Not a few of them no longer return to their country of origin for various reasons, so for generations they have settled and become Indonesian citizens.



Source: Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, <https://geoportal.esdm.go.id/minerba/>

Figure 1: Map of the Tin Mining Business Permit Area (MBPA). Source: Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, <https://geoportal.esdm.go.id/minerba/>.

The existence of ethnic Tionghoa who work in tin mining has had a considerable influence on the civilization of the people in Bangka Belitung. The process of exploration and exploitation of tin metal that has been going on for centuries has affected people's lives in various aspects both socially, economically, politically, and culturally [7] , [8], [9]. The arrival of people from outside Bangka and tin mining have formed a cultural system that has developed in Bangka Belitung. Culture becomes a fuzzy and complex construct whose preventive nature makes it difficult to define. As stated by EB Taylor in Soekanto [10], culture is a complex that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and other capabilities and habits acquired by humans as members of society. In other words, culture includes everything that humans acquire or learn as members of the society in which they live.

The long-standing social interaction between the ethnic Tionghoa community and the people in Bangka Belitung has given its own color to the development of every existing cultural element. C. Kluckhohn argued that there are seven elements of culture universally, namely the technological system, livelihood and economic system, social system, language, art, knowledge system, and religion system. Culture here is related to materialism because it provides a definition in the form of a set of principles (values) indoctrinated by an individual. In this context, materialism is also described as one of these values. In addition, materialism can be the result of temperament or psychological attributes, some of which can be strengthened or inhibited during the process of enculturation [11]. In such a complex situation, the subtle influence of these issues on each other can explain the variety of materialistic attitudes that exist within the ethnic Tionghoa community.

Mining workers who are of Tionghoa ethnicity come with cultural habits from their area of origin, which tend to be Confucian teachings. Not only in terms of livelihoods, but other cultural elements also influence civilization in Bangka Belitung. In Tionghoa society, the developing culture is known to be heavily influenced by cultural elements in the form of belief systems or beliefs, which are known as Confucian teachings or philosophy [12], [13]. For the Bangka Belitung region itself, based on the results of the 2020 Population Census (SP2020), it is stated that the percentage of residents who still identify as ethnic Tionghoa is 8% of the total population on this island. In reality, this number is relatively smaller. This is because there is a tendency for people of ethnic Tionghoa descent who were born, raised, and live in Bangka Belitung to identify themselves or claim to be ethnic Malay-Bangka. As stated by Suryanto as the Head of MAKIN for the Bangka Belitung Islands Province (Interview, March 16, 2023), at least 30% of the people of Bangka Belitung are still of ethnic Tionghoa descent. The number of ethnic Tionghoa can be seen from the beliefs held by the community. Most of these ethnic Tionghoa descendants adhere to Confucianism and Buddhism (adherents of Confucianism). Even so, not a few also adhere to religions other than Confucianism and Buddhism. Table 1 shows the distribution of the population based on religion adhered to by the people of Bangka Belitung in 2021 [3].

In general, the Confucian teachings adhered to by Tionghoa people from mainland China and several other Asian countries who migrated to Bangka Island are still firmly attached to their daily lives. Confucian teachings still exist among the Bangka Tionghoa ethnic community. This description can be seen from their activities in their belief system and livelihood system (which are part of the universal elements of culture). In the economic field, the ethnic Tionghoa who initially worked as tin miners have now penetrated

TABLE 1: Number of Religious Followers of the Bangka Belitung Islands Province in 2021.

Religion	Amount	Percentage (%)
Islam	1,31 million	89.9
Buddha	64.39 thousand	4.42
Christian	30.47 thousand	2.09
Confucians	29.29 thousand	2.01
Catholic	19.01 thousand	1.31
Hindu	1.2 thousand	0.08
Faith Stream	1.260 thousand	0.09

into other business fields. Not a few of them have turned to trade as fishermen, farmers, or fish catchers. This condition is inseparable from the factors that have opened other business fields and policies that are considered more accommodating to Tionghoa [6] [14]. Another factor that has contributed to the shift in the livelihoods of some ethnic Tionghoa in Bangka is the environmental damage caused by their mining activities. Tin mining activities have had an impact on land disturbance and led to environmental damage. The negative impacts include the quality of groundwater and surface water, physical conditions in the form of changes in land morphology and topography, and biological changes in the form of disturbances to flora, fauna, and land microorganisms [15]. The unique thing is that in every economic activity they carry out, it is illustrated that there are practices of belief in the teachings of Confucian values that are applied. The practice in question is like carrying out prayers to the gods, who are believed to be a source of good luck based on their livelihood.

On the island of Bangka, Tionghoa people believe in and often carry out religious practices in the form of worshipping gods. The god in question is depicted in the temple building on Bangka Island, where there are three gods, namely the God of Commerce, the God of Agriculture, and the God of the Sea[16]. The three gods describe how the livelihood system is carried out by the Bangka Tionghoa ethnicity, even though the initial arrival of this ethnic group was as tin miners. They believe that between humans and nature, there is a continuous relationship. Where human culture is created and expressed in harmony with the transformation of nature. Thus, there appears to be an awareness that any change in the environment around them will affect their socio-cultural lives.

Observing the phenomenon that occurred on Bangka Island, this paper intends to describe the rationality of the Tionghoa ethnic community that chose to diversify and even change their livelihoods. They originally worked as tin miners but shifted to other sectors and became active in efforts to preserve the environment. How can considering

the choice between material needs and maintaining traditional values continue to be implemented by the ethnic Tionghoa of Bangka? It is hoped that this paper can serve as an example and inspiration for mining workers to pay attention to environmental sustainability and not solely depend on the mining sector, especially tin mining. Not only do they exploit the existing natural resources, but the community also makes efforts to maintain the balance and sustainability of the environment.

The theory of rational choice (*rational choice theory*) is given by James Coleman by using the perspective of social action from Weber, who tries to explain the basis of thinking from the micro level to the macro level. This rational choice theory provides a clear understanding of Weber's assertion that value rationality and instrumental rationality are integrated in the actions of individuals or actors. Coleman agrees with Weber's opinion, which states that the individual is a subjective reality that is micro and affects the objective reality that is macro [17]. Thus, the essence of Coleman's perspective is that social theory is not only an academic exercise but must be able to influence social life through such interventions. Phenomena at the microlevel other than those that are individual in nature can be the target of analysis. Interactions between individuals are seen as the result of phenomena that surface at the system level, i.e., phenomena that were not intended or predicted by individuals. Coleman's theory of rational choice is evident in its basic idea that individual action leads to a goal, and that goal is an action that is determined by values or preferences (choices). Coleman states that it requires an exact concept of rational actors derived from economics, which sees actors choosing actions that maximize their utility or their wants and needs. There are two main elements in Coleman's theory, namely actors and resources[18].

2. Method

The research location was in Merawang District, Bangka Regency. This area is one of the areas where there are many Tionghoa ethnic groups. Among them, there are two major groups that are actively participating in the post-mining environmental preservation movement. This research uses a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design. This qualitative research method was used because this research is related to cultural studies and is interpretive in nature, which makes it possible to explore a phenomenon based on the experiences of the research subjects[19]. While the case study design is used here as an effort to explore the social phenomena of the life of the Bangka Tionghoa ethnicity related to rational choice in maintaining Confucian values and the importance of fulfilling material needs (materialism values), Case study

research is a research strategy in the social sciences that tries to explain a decision or series of decisions taken by research subjects. Why do they make decisions, how do they implement those decisions, and what are the results [20], [21], [22], [23]. Data collection was carried out through interview and observation techniques. The research subjects were ethnic Tionghoa people who worked as tin miners and were active in the movement for environmental preservation on Bangka Island. Informants were determined by a purposive sampling of seven informants. Data collection was carried out from February to May 2023. The data collected was processed and analyzed using a qualitative approach, which was carried out simultaneously and flexibly. The stages of the analysis technique include data reduction, data display, analysis, and drawing conclusions and include data triangulation techniques [22], [24], [25], [19].

3. Results and Discussion

Since the arrival of ethnic Tionghoa to Bangka Belitung, they have worked as tin miners. This tin mining activity has had a lot of impact on environmental damage. Moreover, increasingly, tin mining activities penetrate into the sea area. This causes the threat of environmental damage both on land and at sea. In an effort to overcome environmental damage, not a few of the mining workers who are ethnic Tionghoa are also actively involved in efforts to preserve the environment. This action was carried out by the Tionghoa ethnic community with the reason of upholding and implementing Confucian teachings besides material needs. Following are the results of data collected in the field that illustrate the relationship between economic activity and Confucianism among the Bangka Tionghoa ethnic community.

3.1. Confucianism and its relation to Tionghoa materialism

The ethnic Tionghoa community is known as adherents of Confucianism. Confucianism is a term attached to beliefs that originate from Confucian beliefs. This teaching is often known as the teachings of Confucianism. In Indonesia, Confucianism has become one of the legally recognized religions since the era of President Abdulrahman Wahid, also known as Gus Dur. The largest adherents of Confucianism in Indonesia are in the Province of Bangka Belitung Islands, especially in Bangka Regency, Bangka Island. Table 2 shows the distribution of population adherents to religions in Indonesia based on data from the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. The data shows that Confucianism is a minority religion. Even so, for the Bangka Belitung region, it has

a significant influence on the developing cultural civilization. In general, this Confucian teaching teaches its adherents how to determine attitudes in interactions with fellow human beings. The general public considers Confucianism more of a philosophy of life than a religion itself.

TABLE 2: Number of Religions in Indonesia's Population in 2022.

Religion	Amount (people)	Percentage (%)
Islam	241.6 million	87.02
Buddha	20.65 million	7.43
Christian	8.5 million	3.06
Confucians	4.69 million	1.69
Catholic	2.02 million	0.73
Hindu	74.89 thousand	0.03
Faith Stream	117.41 thousand	0.04

In fact, Confucianism can indeed be considered a religion, just like what happened in Indonesia. However, traditionally, this was not the case; throughout most of Tionghoa history, there were no religious institutions established to manage and teach followers of Confucianism like a religion [11], [26]. The teachings of Confucianism are known as Kongzi in Mandarin, which is the teaching of a prominent philosopher in China, namely the teachings of Confucianism. Confucianism prioritizes humanistic principles compared to belief in spirits and gods. The view in Confucianism is that it requires order in the life of a society. Confucianism teaches more about the necessity of humans being moral in order to be able to govern and manage their society and have a sensitivity to their social and economic needs [26].

Confucian teachings are still being implemented by the Tionghoa ethnic community in Indonesia. AL informant (Interview March 16, 2023), who is a Bangka cultural figure, stated that during the historical period of the arrival of the Tionghoa ethnicity, the implementation of Confucian teachings related to social and economic needs appeared around the 1930s. At that time, there was an economic depression experienced by ethnic Tionghoa in Palembang. In an effort to deal with these conditions, those in Palembang were not too affected and instead took advantage of the existing conditions. They shifted the role of European companies by relying on relations among ethnic Tionghoa in Singapore in the trade sector. The relationship between fellow ethnic Tionghoa is carried out on the basis of kinship to be able to help each other [27].

According to the narrative of an ethnic Tionghoa informant (M), they basically have commercial abilities that focus on wealth values. Informal L initially worked in the mining sector as a tin miner and then turned to becoming a crab breeder (Interview

3, April 2023). Furthermore, informant L stated that several values that were highly respected were family values, which were the first priority. By adhering to this value, young Tionghoa descendants, children, and siblings must obtain family wealth, not just individual wealth. In line with L, informant H stated that it was this spirit that motivated the ethnic Tionghoa to work hard to obtain materials so as to be able to prosper their families. They believe that by working hard to collect material, they can prosper their offspring. In an effort to find material, they also have to think about the continuity of the source of material income or the available natural resources. The KY informant, a Bangka Tionghoa descendant who switched professions to become a trader from a tin miner, revealed that they must not only think about obtaining material but also be able to maintain existing material sources. Those who initially worked in the mining sector acknowledged that tin mining is capable of providing great material benefits. But on the other hand, they see a negative impact from the activities they do. They feel the direct impact of tin mining on environmental damage. This happened because the location of the tin mining was not far from the residential area they lived in. Departing from these conditions, they realized that what they were doing did not reflect the values of the beliefs they professed, namely the teachings of Confucianism. KY stated that since childhood, he has been educated by his family to apply the values of his ancestors from generation to generation. Such a reality has made some Bangka Tionghoa ethnic groups diversify or even switch to other employment sectors. Even so, there are still many of them who remain tin miners. They are looking for other material sources without destroying the environment, which will certainly have an impact on their siblings, families, and descendants in the future. This materialism seems to come next, along with the pursuit of wealth, entrepreneurial ability, intelligence, courage, and persistence in working continuously. Figure 2. shows the values in Confucian teachings. These values have a significant influence on the ethnic Tionghoa community in daily life [11], [26], [28], [29].

An informant (JI), who is a Confucian religious leader in Bangka Regency (Interview 6 April 2023), stated that they, as Tionghoa descendants, are known to have skills in the business world, even though they started as miners. This is due to a high and painstaking work ethic as well as ingenuity in the business world, which is supported by a family spirit as well as the values in the teachings that he believes in. Based on what was stated above, it shows that people of ethnic Tionghoa descent have a work ethic, seriousness, intelligence, and perseverance, all of which illustrate support for materialism's values. These values make the Tionghoa ethnic group able to reduce their vulnerability to economic problems.

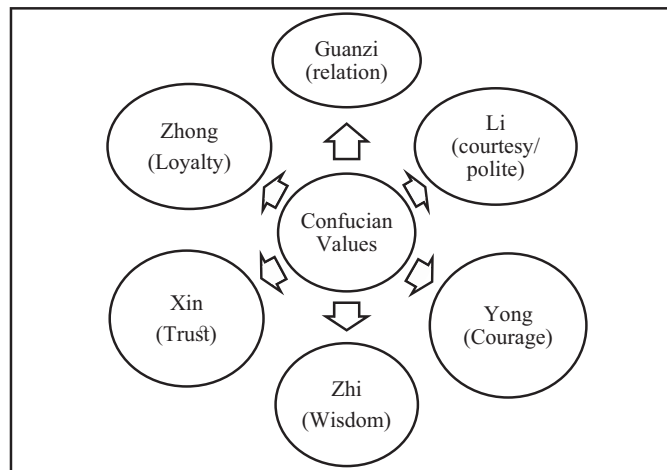


Figure 2: Confucian Values.

3.2. Rationality in environmental conservation

People of Tionghoa ethnic descent who live on Bangka Island tend to still have a strong belief in the teachings of their ancestors, namely Confucianism. In everyday life, Confucian values are still implemented. There are many resources for understanding Tionghoa culture's deep view of nature and the role of humans in the Confucian tradition. In the book *Yi Jing (Book of Change)*, the early classics reveal the dynamic interaction of nature with humans. A KH informant revealed that people who adhere to Confucian teachings tend to be more actively involved in working with nature. This has become one of the factors that made some of them switch from the mining sector to the agricultural sector in addition to the trade sector. Another factor is the availability of resources that allow the Tionghoa community to shift their livelihoods outside the tin mining sector. On Bangka Island, which is an archipelago, the availability of abundant marine resources and efforts to convert former mining land into ponds for fish and crab farming have become a source of economic capital for the surrounding community. Some people who feel the direct impact of environmental damage due to mining are slowly but surely making efforts to preserve the surrounding environment.

Informant M (Interview 7 April 2023), a crab pond farmer, stated that he and several of his friends used to work in a tin mine, but now they have switched to become crab pond farmers. They used the former tin mining land to make a pond. M. and several of his colleagues are of the view that by making use of ex-mining land to become aquaculture areas, this is one way to help prevent the spread of environmental damage. As a descendant of ethnic Tionghoa who adheres to the Confucian religion, M believes in the teachings he received that cultivating nature is a valuable thing. Anything that destroys nature will become a source of problems, especially for growing agricultural

or aquaculture communities. He further stated that nature is the basis for them to live a stable life, and care must be taken to maintain balance. To realize this, M and his group also participated in mangrove planting activities in coastal areas along with local government and environmental organizations. They believe that when they treat nature well, nature will provide the best for them and their children and grandchildren. This is in line with the ancestral teachings that they believe in and continue to implement. M and his ethnic Tionghoa colleagues realized that in order to pursue a lot of economic material, they must maintain the existing economic resources and not destroy them.

Based on data from informants in the field, it shows that there were rational actions taken by the Tionghoa ethnic group in Bangka. This action is reflected in the choices of values made in making the decision to make a change. Without putting aside the goals between Confucian values and material economic values, they try to implement one value to achieve another. In an effort to gain material or economic value, they adhere to the Confucian philosophy they believe in. Citing Coleman’s perspective, the choice of action taken by a group of ethnic Tionghoa on Bangka Island can be categorized as a form of rational choice. Coleman further said that to form a social system, the minimum basis is the involvement of two or more actors who have valuable resources for one another [18], [28]. Figure 3 shows the relationship between the choice of rationality and the rational action proposed by Weber.

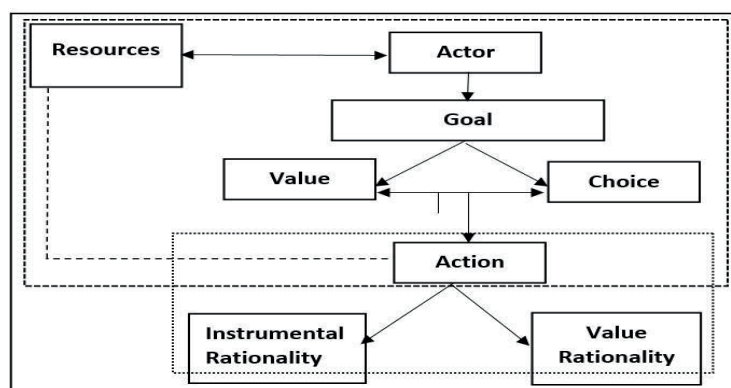


Figure 3: The Relationship between Weber’s Rational Actions and Coleman’s Rational Choices.

The rational choice taken by an actor is a rational action of the individual or the actor himself to carry out an action based on a specific goal, and that goal is determined by value or preference (choice). Coleman’s rational choice has a basic idea that becomes his major orientation, namely “people deliberately act towards a goal, with that goal being shaped by values or choices” [28] [29], [30]. However, Coleman also stated that to fulfill the theoretical concept, a more precise concept of rational actors is needed from economics, which sees actors choosing actions that maximize utility or satisfy

their activities and needs. In this context, it is clear that the Tionghoa ethnic group who choose to shift their livelihoods, apart from the reason of avoiding widespread environmental damage and becoming an affected group of people, can also earn material income, which is quite promising in the field of fishermen and crab ponds.

Rational choice theory in this context focuses on individuals and ethnic Tionghoa groups as actors. Actors are seen as human beings who have a purpose. This means that actors have goals and their actions are directed at efforts to achieve those goals, both culturally, namely Confucian values and materialist values, which in this case are economic values. Actors are also seen as having choices or values; the important requirement is that actions are carried out to achieve goals that are in accordance with the level of choice. Weber stated that rational action is related to conscious consideration and the choice that that action manifests. That it starts with a choice that is considered by the human ratio and then followed up with real action. Social action by Weber is distinguished by its rationality, such as instrumental rationality (Zwerk Rational). This is a social action carried out by someone based on conscious considerations and choices related to the purpose of the action and the availability of the tools used to achieve it. These considerations include the pursuit of rational interests, the use of technological sophistication to achieve goals, and the existence of strategies to achieve goals. Then the act of valuing rationality This is a rational action carried out by an individual based on values for reasons and purposes related to the values that are believed [31] [18]. In this action, the actor has control over overcoming each final goal and the values that are the goals to be achieved.

From this, it can be seen that every individual action, namely the Tionghoa ethnic group that makes changes in livelihoods and environmental preservation, is judged to always lead to goals oriented to both material and cultural values. In order to achieve material goals, this Tionghoa ethnic group has instruments or resources that can be used to gain economic benefits. Meanwhile, in achieving cultural values, they have embraced and held on to the values of their ancestral teachings, namely Confucianism. Basically, the purpose of the choice of action is to avoid environmental damage and still be able to use natural resources on an ongoing basis to meet economic or material needs. Thus, they can implement their ancestral values, namely, to provide the best for their offspring. In this context, it can be seen that Confucian teachings have provided an understanding to the ethnic Tionghoa community that every action taken will have an impact.

4. Conclusion

The views and choices of the ethnic Tionghoa community in their livelihoods and beliefs are rational social actions. This choice is in accordance with the level of knowledge and understanding possessed by individuals related to the benefits of the risks that are obtained when choosing an action both economically and socio-culturally. This level of knowledge and understanding is an important factor for individuals to understand every choice made and made by ethnic Tionghoa.

The Tionghoa ethnic group in Bangka Regency is considered quite creative in making rational choices in the context of diversification and changes in livelihoods outside the tin mining sector which have an impact on environmental damage. A group of Bangka ethnic Tiongho as incorporated in the Forest Farmers Group (KTH) in Bangka Regency provide rational and realistic reasons for the choice of livelihood sector they have chosen for now. Even though the potential for tin mining is still high, they see and feel the negative impacts of mining and also hold on to ancestral values related to Confucianism which made them decide to switch to crab fishing and trading. The change in their livelihood is none other than to continue to achieve the objectives of the principle of materialism without abandoning the values of the Confucian teachings they adhere to. The Chinese believe that by applying Confucian values in finding materials, they will get the best.

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