Traveling Nation-Makers: Transnational Flows and Movements in the Making of Modern Southeast Asia

Caroline S. Hau and Kasian Tejapira, eds.
Singapore: National University of Singapore Press in association with Kyoto University Press, 2011, 318 p.

Studies of modern Southeast Asian history and politics have gone through many shifts and developments, resulting in many new and critical works since the call by John Smail in the early 1960s for the possibility of an "autonomous Southeast Asian history" (1961). Since then many novel and challenging methodologies and analytical frameworks especially by Southeast Asian scholars have been added to the new historiography of Southeast Asia. Examples include the works of Reynaldo C. Ileto on *Payson and Revolution* (1979), Thongchai Winichakul on *Siam Mapped* (1994), and Michael Aung-thwin on "The 'Classical' in Southeast Asia: The Present in the Past" (1995), to name just a few outstanding works.

Even with the revisionist studies of the region, the dominant perspective and approach is still national history focused on state-centric narratives. This is particularly unavoidable when dealing with the period of anti-colonialism and national liberation from Western colonial masters. Thus, the nations, we are told and many concurred, were created by national leaders and elites who had courageously fought the Western colonial powers. Their heroic struggles against colonialism paved the way for subsequent independence in Southeast Asian countries. These historical and political facts are impossible to refute or reinterpret. We cannot deny these great nationalist leaders' historical roles and contributions to the birth of the new nations. As a matter of fact, we have always been taught to revere and respect, and been reminded in every national holiday to be grateful to, those sacred figures. We, however, are rarely or never told of the many facets of their real life-histories and practices. What were the other aspects and factors that also contributed to the success of the liberation, the path that led to the development or failure of the new nations? Recent studies shed more light on the history and politics of the nationalist movements in the region. More importantly, the new realism of Post-modern history manages to open up new approaches to, and interpretations of, the people and movements, of ideas and practices, across class and gender and ethnicity categories of the new nations. The post-Cold War era saw some of the other less prominent activists and fighters, whose struggles and political ideologies which formerly did not correspond with existing regimes, are now able to speak up. Stories and memories of those unfortunate fighters and their families which used to be expunged from a national past because of their radical political ideologies began to be reinstated within the nation's history.

Given this new conjuncture, Caroline S. Hau and Kasian Tejapira's edited volume, *Traveling Nation-Makers: Transnational Flows and Movements in the Making of Modern Southeast Asia*, adds another strong contender to the new Southeast Asian Studies. It offers alternative approaches and

studies of the past, focusing on three political movements and ideologies, namely nationalism, Communism and Islam. Unlike previous studies, it focuses on the Number Two activists and intellectuals, not the top tier well-known Number One elites and political leaders of the movements. Why so and what is the merit of doing that kind of study? Reading the 10 chapters of the book, one can derive the answer to the question. The book presents political and intellectual histories through the prism of biographical discourse. Their life-stories were treated by the authors as those of the common-man, not the exemplary heroes or heroines. Generally, their actions and movements went along with the assigned tasks and duties of the organizations but, as with real life situations, there were times when each individual had to make his/her own decisions and judgments. As a result, sometimes they made the right decisions but other times, they did not. So they were human, human-all-too-human.

The book utilizes the concept of travel as its central organizing concept, with impressive results. It deals with cross-border circulations of people and ideas. In effect, it is a critique of the limitations of the nation-states as a collective agent and a unit of analysis and study. The book has successfully presented a well-researched analysis of 10 life stories of peripatetic and eclectic Southeast Asian national fighters and activists based upon the concept of "travel."

Originally the 10 papers came from the workshop on "Flows and Movements in East Asia," which focused on "traveling" activists from the Philippines, Vietnam, Siam, Malaysia and Indonesia, with one exceptional figure of an Ukrainian from the Soviet Unions. Although the 10 individuals had their own separate lives and activities in different places and times, reading all of them in one book provides better comparative insight and understanding of the bigger picture of the anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism movements in Asia. Intellectually, their ideas traveled in and out of the region to serve the needs of the quest for a new vision of an imagined community. They shared the similar vision of a new nation and a people freed from oppressed government or ruling classes. They showed the distinct characteristic of the first generation of nationalist fighters who were ready to sacrifice their whole lives for the cause without hesitation or qualms about the risk. Their life-histories offer glimpses of the role of "traveling" proto-nationalists and radical nationalists in the making of modern Southeast Asian nations.

The book comprises 10 chapters written by prominent and well-known scholars of Southeast Asian studies. One thread that comes out distinctly is their commitment to internationalism instead of narrow and shallow racist nationalism that became predominant state ideology in the period after World War II. Resil B. Mojares brilliantly chronicles "The Itineraries of Mariano Ponce," whom he dubs as the last Propagandist of the "Propaganda Movement" which spearheaded the modern Enlightenment-inspired reformist ideas of Filipino nationalism in the late nineteenth century. Characteristic of this generation of nationalist activists, Ponce traveled to metropolitan Europe, Hong Kong and Japan, including a final trip to Indochina before coming home to Manila after 20 years of absence. His revolutionary activities in Hong Kong, where the Hong Kong Junta was

active, and Japan gave him opportunities to meet key leaders of the nationalist movements including Kang You-wei, the Chinese leader of the "Hundred Days of Reform" in 1895 and Sun Yat-sen of the Kuomintang.

Similar life experiences of activists and intellectuals whose loyalty had transcended the territorialized nation-state are well presented in Caroline S. Hau's "Du Ai, Lin Bin, and Revolutionary Flows," and Khoo Boo Teik's "Flows and Fallacies: James J. Puthucheary on Race, Class, and State." Hau calls this "dual nationalism" of a nationalist activist whose loyalty and devotion belong to both countries of his/her birth and residence as "revolutionary cosmopolitanism." She weaves together stories of the author, Du Ai and his wife, Lin Bin, the guerrilla Wha Chi organization, and his novel, *Fengyu Taipingyang* (Storm over the Pacific) to demonstrate the complex historical flows of Chinese guerrillas in the Philippines during the World War II. To those Chinese, their political loyalty was with the Chinese state but their national struggle was carried out in a different nation-state with strong "engagement, attachment, identification and activism which contributed to the development of indigenous nationalism and, later, Communism and Socialism in Southeast Asia." In Malaysia, Khoo excellently grasps and crafts the new figure of Puthucheary as an "ethnic Indian left-wing inter-nationalist, democratic socialist" whose intellectual lives spanned colonial India, Singapore, and postcolonial Malaysia.

Despite their humble and ordinary family and social backgrounds, many of these early nationalist activists were truly amazing characters in their political struggles. The intricacies of secret and underground activities of the anti-colonialism and Communist movements, including the latest resurgence of Islam in post-Cold War political developments, are clearly shown in Onimaru Takeshi's "Living 'Underground' in Shanghai: Noulens and the Shanghai Comintern Network," Lorraine M. Paterson's "A Vietnamese Icon in Canton: Biographical Borders and Revolutionary Romance in 1920s Vietnam" and Kasian Tejapira's "'Party as Mother': Ruam Wongphan and the Making of a Revolutionary Metaphor," and Shiraishi Takashi's "The Making of Jihadist: Itinerary and Language in Imam Samudra's Aku Melawan Teroris!" Kasian Tejapira beautifully decoded the famous emotional metaphor of "Party as Mother" which was initially composed as a farewell letter to his mother by Ruam Wongphan, a Communist Party member who was executed by the US-backed Sarit regime in 1962. Interestingly, at that time, the working concepts of nationalism and patriotism had been exhausted by all political groups and movements to justify their claims on respective ideologies. Sarit designated himself as the "father" of the country while the people were his children. Ruam, a member of the Communist Party of Thailand, imagined the Party as "mother" to fight back against the patriarchal despotic ruler. As espoused by Benedict Anderson, underlying these metaphors, all groups agreed that the nation is naturally right and good (1998).

Every day Noulens, a key liaison officer of the Comintern (the Third International of the Communist Party) went to his office at Szechuen Road at the fixed times of 9 a.m., 11 a.m., and 3 p.m., met his Chinese counterpart almost every day at about 11 a.m. He also held another private

office at Nanking Road where he went at 9:30 a.m. Self-control and self-discipline were the hallmarks of the Communist cadre especially during the waging of the revolutionary war against the class enemy. In 1930, Shanghai was an international metropolitan city whose populations consisted of multiple races and nationalities. According to the Shanghai census in 1930, there were 387 Filipinos in the city, the only group of Southeast Asian people residing there. Why were so many Filipinos there? In 1899, Ponce participated in meetings of the "Oriental Young Men's Society," which was established in Tokyo by students from different Asian countries, including Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, Indians, Siamese, and Filipinos. Colonial Philippines, compared to the rest of Southeast Asian states at that time, was producing educated middle class in the image of the West more than any other Southeast Asian countries. It is possible that many Filipinos were able to work, for example, as musicians in the Western-style bars and hotels and conducted various social activities in Shanghai.

The flows of political and cultural ideas figured differently depending on the historical contexts and interplay of forces at the time. In Vietnam, the influence of colonial modernity was reflected in patterns and processes of borrowing French ideas, such as Realism, Naturalism and Romanticism, which resulted in the practice of what Peter Zinoman calls "provincial cosmopolitanism." In "Provincial Cosmopolitanism: Vu Trong Phung's Foreign Literary Engagements," Zinoman critically assesses the realism of Vu Trong Phung's literary works as a guidepost to future studies in cultural politics, arguing in favor of the importance of the coexistence of "putatively opposite impulses within the thinking of intellectuals and the orientations of collective movements." Comparative studies of this practice among native writers and intellectuals should yield insights into the origin and development of Southeast Asian ideas and knowledge.

In short, the book superbly knits together various life-stories of the relatively unknown figures in the politics and history of the making of modern Southeast Asian nations from the era of colonialism to the globalized era when Islam gave rise to another vision of the future in Southeast Asia and the world.

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The Language Difference: Language and Development in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region

Paulin G. Djité
Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2011, 264 p.

English as a Lingua Franca in ASEAN: A Multilingual Model

Andy Kirkpatrick
Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010, 236 p.

Dealing with Diversity: Language Policy in Southeast Asia

Two recent books on language in Southeast Asia provide a much-needed reminder of the importance of language as an object of study within Area Studies. Both books highlight the importance of conceptualizing language in a region as not only situated in different national and local contexts, but also operating across different embedded scales of social resolution. The policy and practice of language are interwoven from the regional to the national and local, coloring the social fabric of communication, symbolism and identity. While approaches to language policy have differed significantly across the region, there is a universal struggle between a stated respect for diversity and a more practical desire to impose national languages as a tool for maintaining national unity.

In *The Language Difference: Language and Development in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region*, Paulin G. Djité offers a view on socio-economic development that is sorely missing from recent scholarship on the region. Choice of national language was a central question in the political struggles that took place as the nation states of the region were created. It can be argued that analyzing the historical processes of legitimizing, standardizing and institutionalizing national languages has produced some of the most important insights into the region's journey into modernization. However, Djité raises the call for a look at language in contemporary society, particularly with regards to how language policy and use affect the wellbeing of normal people in their daily lives—in essence a look at the outcomes of these post-colonial state building projects from a sociolinguistic point of view. The focus on the Greater Mekong Sub region (GMS), which itself includes a wild range of socio-economic development trajectories, holds high hopes for fresh insights into a complex set of socio-political language dynamics.

English as a Lingua Franca in ASEAN: A Multilingual Model, by Andy Kirkpatrick approaches language in Southeast Asia in the context of institutionalized and formalized regionalism. The book