

SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

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SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

Vol. 7, No. 1

April 2018

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Rereading Leftist Writings from Southeast Asia

Introduction

Jafar Suryomenggolo*

Southeast Asia has a long and rich history of leftist movements that opposed colonialism, contributed to building new nations, and brought about changes in the political configuration of the region. A number of leading figures in these movements dedicated their works and lives toward those aims, such as Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam, Tan Malaka of Indonesia, and Crisanto Evangelista of the Philippines. While some worked within their own cell or group, many were connected through underground political networks, experiences of travel, or regional and international organizations such as the Comintern (see Hau and Kasian 2011). Although a number of important studies have described the socio-political contributions of leftist activists (see, for example, Cheah 2002; Richardson 2011), little has been done to examine their writings, particularly as literary products. Discussion tends to focus on the nature of their work and activism, treating their writings as supplements to their life stories.

Interestingly, some of these texts have recently reemerged in the public sphere. While the global trend of commercializing “leftist nostalgia” as a cultural product may have provided the impetus for this comeback, a number of young researchers in the region have a genuine scholarly interest in looking deeper into the contents of these texts as a reflection of their present. Since historical research of the Left inevitably intersects with questions of national identity and socio-political change, examination of leftist texts can be a means of investigating the origins of contemporary problems and analyzing the concept of nation that is often taken for granted as “natural.”

This special issue therefore presents a number of texts by figures once active in leftist movements in the region as a way of rethinking political progress and national identity beyond the official histories of nations. Often neglected or banned in the course of writing of a nation’s official history, these texts offer interesting insights into the complexities of state-society interactions. The authors—socialists, Communists, student

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activists, and political dissidents—represent a wide range of political stances. The texts were written during periods of the authors' active political engagement (ranging from the late 1940s to the mid-1970s) and were shaped by the authors' personal experience.

The articles in this issue not only examine the contents of Southeast Asian leftist texts but focus on elucidating the social and political contexts within which they were written and published. Understanding such historical contexts can help to clarify the messages the authors wished to convey and to interpret their relevance to our present time.

Between Historical Lacunae and Cultural Recognition

Why do we need to read these leftist writings, and why now? To answer these questions, we need to consider three socio-political conditions that shaped modern Southeast Asian leftist texts. First, it is important to recognize the demise of the Left within the context of the Cold War. The Left—both Socialist and Communist Parties—was a significant force that exerted deep influences on societies and national identities in Southeast Asia, especially during the early period of the Cold War. However, with the exception of Vietnam and Laos, the Left never became dominant in any country in the region. On the contrary, it lost the battle for political authority in both parliaments and guerrilla warfare (see Hewison and Rodan 1994). The Partai Komunis Indonesia (Communist Party of Indonesia), once the third largest Communist party in the world after those of the USSR and China, was crushed after the 1965–66 purge that followed a military coup. Left-wing organizations were banned and quickly diminished in Singapore after the city-state separated from the Federation of Malaya in 1965. The Communist Party of Thailand grew in membership during the early 1960s, but in 1965 it launched a guerrilla war against the ruling government. Although it managed to survive for more than a decade, many of its members had become disillusioned and abandoned the movement by the early 1980s. In the relatively short period of the early 1920s to late 1970s, leftists vigorously produced texts. Subsequent policies of economic development pursued by anti-Communist governments, however, halted and erased (most often, by force) this important period in the life of several regional nations—a period when notions of national identity, development paths, and artistic sensibilities were articulated, actively debated, and experimented with. Leftist texts (or those labeled as such) were forced underground, excluded, rejected, and banned, eventually disappearing from official history and the public. This created historical lacunae vis-à-vis the various ideas and achievements that the Left had contributed.

Second, the various forms of leftist texts in Southeast Asia—from newspaper arti-

cles, reference books, and textbooks to short stories and novels—reflect a desire to cement popular support. Contentwise, the texts discuss issues considered important to the public at the time they were published. Interestingly, many leftist figures in the region did not produce any theoretical writings. Ho Chi Minh, for example, wrote many letters, essays, and speeches but never a complete book of his own original thinking (see Quinn-Judge 2002). Tan Malaka wrote *Madilog* (Materialism, dialectics, logic) (1943), a primer on ways of thoughts, and was well known for his autobiography (see Mrázek 1972), but he did not propose a theory or provide philosophical analyses. This is not to say that Southeast Asian leftist figures were not interested in theoretical questions. Instead, they offered different ways of communicating socialist and Communist ideals to attract support and advance their movements. This leads us to contemplate how leftist ideas are transmitted, translated, and distributed for people in the region.¹⁾

Third, the Left in Southeast Asia has left different yet enduring traces of activism. Fleeing suppression, some leftists—many involuntarily—left the countries where they were born and once worked. Living overseas, many continued their activism and produced different kinds of texts. The works of the “exiled and diaspora Left” include diaries, memoirs, and autobiographies (see Hill 2010; Teo and Low 2012), with the dominant theme of experiences of “injustice” (see Watson 2006). Their narratives provide a window not only to past events in their home countries but also to their activism in exile, illuminating the socio-political conditions that attracted them to and kept them working for leftist causes. As personal testaments, these texts fill the gaps in official records and other published writings. They also constitute part of the experience of “commodifying Marxism” (see Kasian 2001).

These three socio-political conditions highlight the importance of rereading leftist writings in order to recognize their cultural contributions to defining a society that was open to debate, proposing egalitarian social ideals, and developing the basis of national identity. They also point to the timeliness of addressing some of the legacies of the Cold

1) In Thailand, Kasian Tejapira (2003, 257) notes an interesting reflection: “Historically speaking, the Thai radicals and communists were at a disadvantage as far as the politics of translating Marxist-Communist words were concerned. From the 1920s to the mid-1940s, while the ruling elite, state ideologues, and intelligence officials were busy translating and coining these new words for the purpose of surveillance and repression of political subversives as well as economic policy debates, the first-generation *jek* communists were still largely speaking Chinese. . . . It was only after the Second World War that a new generation of radicals and communists, consisting of both Thai-literate *jeks* and native Thais, saw the necessity of, as well as having the interest and language proficiency to begin, their own independent translation and coinage of Marxist-Communist words in earnest. But by then, the strategic commanding heights in the discursive field had already been occupied by the anti-communists.”

War that created political tensions during the latter half of the twentieth century and social confusions that still linger up to the present. It is important to note that being, or being accused of being, “leftist,” “Communist,” or “red” is still dangerous in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines. Contemporary rereading of leftist texts therefore holds an important key to disclosing the dark episodes of national histories in order to heal past wounds and formulate steps for ensuring justice toward reconciliation. Free from the political baggage of the past, young scholars from the region now have the social opportunity (and academic facilities) to appreciate these leftist texts and contribute a better understanding of them in contemporary national debates.

New Insights

As noted above, the experiences of the Cold War not only shaped the texts but also left their mark on social and political events in the countries where the authors resided, wrote, and distributed their texts. The articles in this special issue look at texts from five countries: the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand. History records the presence and the influences of leftist movements in these countries, but they were not strong enough to dominate the political scene or become ruling governments. Under the Cold War the Left in these countries was defeated, and these texts were branded as leftist writings. Although ruling governments rejected and banned the texts, they have nonetheless impacted the historical trajectory and social formation of the nation. Rereading these texts in our present time allows us to identify the points of divergence between what happened in the past and official history, situate “hidden transcripts” (Scott 1990) in the nation’s history, and reinterpret their meanings beyond the conventional formulation of the nation.

In “Blood-Brothers: The Communist Party of the Philippines and the Partai Komunis Indonesia,” Ramon Guillermo traces the early works of Jose Maria Sison as a young leading Filipino Marxist radical in the 1960s. Sison traveled to Indonesia on three occasions, and upon his first return in 1962 he published a translation of three of Chairil Anwar’s poems.²⁾ Guillermo’s reading of Sison’s earlier works is particularly important in light of the current controversy over Sison’s alleged plagiarism in the late 1960s–early 1970s (especially in his *Philippine Society and Revolution*). By comparing Sison’s translation of Anwar’s poems against the original Indonesian text, Guillermo shows how Sison

2) Anwar (1922–49) was a leading Indonesian poet during the revolutionary period (1945–50). For a discussion on Anwar’s literary works, see Teeuw (1967).

injected his literary skills in translation. Textual analysis of Sison's writings shows that the author was very well versed in the "revolutionary *lingua franca*" of the day as part of his activism as founder and chairperson of the Communist Party of the Philippines. Guillermo suggests that the plagiarism controversy worked to "shame" Sison as an author and to discredit him intellectually in order to undermine his leadership in the Party. Guillermo also points out how other political actors, especially his political opponents, who had poor creative literary skills and lacked historical comparisons in their political rhetoric remain free from controversy. Guillermo's paper illustrates how leftist writings are often judged out of context and seen as copied versions of a certain original despite the author's creativity and literary skills. Furthermore, the Sison case demonstrates the political weight of leftist texts, regardless of whether the author is a political leader or merely a young writer concerned about social injustices. It is precisely this political weight that induces the exclusion, rejection, and banning of leftist writings.

Loh Kah Seng reads articles from the *Singapore Technocrat*, the English-language organ of the Singapore Polytechnic Students' Union (SPSU), to examine the limits and possibilities of student activism in 1970s Singapore. In the mid-1960s, the SPSU was one of the main forces in student activism and the *Singapore Technocrat* was instrumental in airing students' perspectives on social and political problems in the country. But throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the SPSU continually faced state charges of Communist subversion. In 1976 the SPSU's president, Foo Chin Yen, was arrested by the government on the allegation that the SPSU editorial board was under the control of the Malayan New Democratic Youth League, an affiliation of the Communist Party of Malaya. In reading the *Singapore Technocrat*, Loh notes how the SPSU shared similarities with earlier left-wing socialist groups, such as the University of Malaya (later Singapore) Socialist Club.³⁾ Their activism was inspired by radical egalitarian and socialist ideas, despite efforts by the ruling People's Action Party to restructure and depoliticize the student community, including the SPSU, in order to socialize them to support the official state policy of economic development. The students were not ignorant of this policy; indeed, contrary to the common assertion of their political apathy, they were critical about it as well as other social issues. In addition to their interventions in national issues, the *Singapore Technocrat*'s articles also constituted a transnational endeavor to speak to historic developments and to like-minded students in other countries. Going beyond the written narratives, Loh supplements his readings of *Technocrat* articles with interviews with a number of former students to better understand the contours of their activism as part of their lived experiences. Loh's paper elucidates the mental and discursive spaces

3) For discussion on the University Socialist Club, see Loh *et al.* (2012).

of the students' social and political activism in producing their writings under the Singapore state's robust political surveillance and instrumentalist view of the students.

Teo Lee Ken discusses the notion of liberational justice in the works of Ahmad Boestamam (1920–83). Although known as a Malaysian freedom fighter, Boestamam was also a key person in the leftist network during the late 1930s to early 1940s, before the Japanese occupation of Malaya in 1942. In 1946, he founded the Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (API, Awakened Youth Movement) and published the *Testament Politik API* (Political testament of the API) as its political manifesto. It was in this organization that Boestamam began his political campaign to demand independence, and as a result he was detained by the British, without trial, for seven years (1948–54). In reading Boestamam's *Testament Politik API*, Teo finds the political narrative of Malaya (Malaysia) as a nation free from the subjugation of British colonial capitalism and Malay feudalism. *Testament* contains Boestamam's socialist ideals for revolutionary struggle to achieve freedom. "Radical youth" are seen as the main force to achieve political and social change for the nation. In this context, it is important to note that after Malaysia gained its independence, Boestamam founded the Socialist Front, a left-wing coalition of socialist parties, and became its first chairperson (until 1961). In 1963, he was arrested on an allegation of collaborating with the Partai Komunis Indonesia and the Socialist Front was dissolved. Teo also read Boestamam's novel *Rumah Kacha Digegar Gempa* (Glass house shaken by tremors) (1969) to discuss how Boestamam saw the political and social landscapes of postcolonial Malaysia in relation to his revolutionary ideals. As such, Teo's paper highlights the importance of rereading texts by a leftist figure to honor his intellectual contributions and activism as an opposition force beyond the official history that reduces his work as simply anticolonial.

In "Independent Woman in Postcolonial Indonesia: Rereading the Works of Rukiah," Yerry Wirawan discusses the literary works of Siti Rukiah (1927–96), a pioneering female writer from Indonesia who published a number of important works in the 1950s and early 1960s. Her first novel, *Kedjatuhan dan Hati* (The fall and the heart), was published by Balai Pustaka in 1950.⁴⁾ Two years later she published her second book, a collection of poems and short stories, *Tandus* (Desert), and the following year it won the prestigious national literary prize. Her literary achievement brought her close to national politics, and she was elected as a member of the Central Committee of the Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakjat (LEKRA, Institute of People's Culture) in its first national congress in January 1959. Formed in 1950, LEKRA was an organization of progressive artists that had links

4) For an English translation, see Rukiah, *The Fall and the Heart* (translated by John H. McGlynn) (Jakarta: Lontar, 2010).

to the Partai Komunis Indonesia.⁵⁾ Due to her involvement in LEKRA, Rukiah was detained as a political prisoner by the New Order authoritarian regime. Her career was abruptly halted, and she never raised the pen again. Wirawan rereads *Kedjatuhan dan Hati* and *Tandus* to locate Rukiah's position in modern Indonesia's literary world, and he identifies how the crafting of her literary skill represents a progressive leftist female writer of the time. Wirawan's paper highlights the need to consider the path of women's liberation beyond the politics of identity, as Rukiah herself suggested in her works, and, as such, the pressing importance to resume her liberation project in literature as an inspiration for women's political empowerment in Indonesia.

Lastly, Piyada Chonlaworn reads the work of Jit Phumisak (1930–66), one of the most radical and influential thinkers in Thai modern history. As a young man, Jit wrote essays; and in 1957 he published an important critique of the contemporary Thai political system, *Chom Na Sakdina Thai* (โฉมหน้าศักดินาไทย, The real face of Thai feudalism). Branded a Communist by the anti-Communist military junta of Sarit Thanarat, he was arrested and spent six years in jail. Upon his release in 1965, he joined the Communist Party of Thailand in the jungles of Phu Phan. In 1966, he was arrested again and killed by a local rightist in northeastern Thailand. Chonlaworn rereads Jit's classic work to shed light on the impact it had on his changing image through the 1970s to the present. She shows how his image was and is constructed (and popularized) by different political actors to suit their respective interests. Chonlaworn's paper illustrates how Jit, whether a true leftist or just an idealistic young man, represents, as a man of literature, a forgotten past and a hope for the future of Thailand. Remembering him is therefore key for the nation to heal from its social and political wounds in order to face the future. Interestingly, despite the lack of discussions on how relevant his literary works are to the present, the anniversary of the death of Jit Phumisak (allegedly on May 5) is always commemorated and reported in Thai media.

Challenges Ahead

As Walden Bello notes in his reading of Ho Chi Minh's texts, to reread leftist writings is "to experience how a committed revolutionary with an agile mind sought to translate the concepts and ideas he was coming across as an international activist in Marxist-Leninist circles into the strategy, tactics, and organization that would successfully liberate a colonized country" (Bello 2007, xi). The texts discussed in this special issue also demonstrate

5) On LEKRA, see Foulcher (1987).

the commitment of the authors and the relevance of their ideas today. They come to us not simply as testaments of their work and activism, but also as reminders of how the current state of affairs in Southeast Asia's nations is partly shaped by their writings. Although acts of banning, suppressing, and moderating these texts have created some historical gaps, the texts have not been completely forgotten. On the contrary, they remain to remind us of the diversity of thoughts, ideas, and artistic expressions that were once debated and experimented with in the shaping of Southeast Asian nations.

This special issue shows us that leftist writings are more than "alternative histories." They were written with a purpose to engage with the contemporary issues of their time and to offer critical reflections of those issues as a means of seeking solutions. The authors were not merely exercising their rights of expression but were aware of the social responsibility of their writing to debate and address contemporary problems. The writings were widely read and discussed by the public when they were first published and worked as catalysts for public discussion. As such, these works cannot be read in isolation from the social-political concerns these authors raised and their engagement in becoming part of the movement. With these writings we can see how the history of the nations in Southeast Asia was shaped, constructed, and imagined by the people who offered progressive thoughts for social change and political liberation in the region. These are the insights that young scholars in the region can draw lessons from for their works in today's society.

Accepted: December 11, 2017

Acknowledgments

This special issue originated in a panel on "Leftist Writings in Southeast Asia" at the SEASIA 2015 Conference in Kyoto, where papers by Ramon Guillermo, Loh Kah Seng, Yerry Wirawan, and Piyada Chonlaworn were presented. I gratefully acknowledge the support from the CSEAS Southeast Asian Studies for Sustainable Humanosphere research program for supporting the panel and the GRIPS Emerging State Project under the Grant-in-Aid research projects No. 25101004 for supporting this special issue. I thank Caroline Hau and Jackie Imamura for their comments and suggestions, as well as Nathan Badenoch and Shitara Narumi for their editorial support.

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Blood-Brothers: The Communist Party of the Philippines and the Partai Komunis Indonesia

Ramon Guillermo*

This paper discusses the significant role of the Indonesian Communist movement in the formation of Jose Maria Sison as a leading Filipino Marxist radical and its possible influence on the founding of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) in 1968. After a study fellowship in Indonesia in 1962, Sison published pioneering translations of Chairil Anwar's poetry and popularized matters pertaining to Indonesia during the Sukarno era through the journal *Progressive Review*. He also had a memorable and intellectually fruitful friendship with the Indonesian nationalist guerrilla and University of the Philippines graduate student Bakri Ilyas. A small but persistent controversy on the alleged plagiarization by Sison of Indonesian radical sources in the late 1960s and early 1970s will then be addressed through systematic textual analysis. The paper will propose some general theses on authorship, modularity, adaptation, and dissemination of texts and ideas in twentieth-century radical movements. Finally, the article will assess the impact of the 1965–66 massacre in Indonesia on the revolutionary ideas and practice of the CPP.

Keywords: Communist Party of the Philippines, Partai Komunis Indonesia, Jose Maria Sison, Dipa Nusantara Aidit, *Philippine Society and Revolution*, Maphilindo

“The thirty-five years history of the CPI is not a tranquil and peaceful one; it is a history which has gone through many turmoils and many dangers, many mistakes, and many sacrifices. But it is also a heroic history, a joyful history, a history with many lessons, a successful history.”

— D. N. Aidit (1955)

Any complete history of radicalism in Southeast Asia must include the episodic but vital interactions between generations of Philippine and Indonesian Communists. It is a well-known fact that Tan Malaka (1897–1949), former chairman of the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, Communist Party of Indonesia, founded in 1920) and agent of the Eastern Bureau of the Comintern, spent some time in the 1920s in the Philippines, where he

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acquainted himself with Philippine history and society and reportedly developed warm friendships with political progressives such as Crisanto Evangelista (1888–1943), who founded the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP, Communist Party of the Philippines) in 1930. Tan Malaka’s autobiography *Dari Penjara ke Penjara* (From jail to jail) (1948) and chief theoretical work *Madilog: Materialisme, Dialektika dan Logika* (Materialism, dialectics, and logic) (1943) contain richly detailed sections dealing specifically with the Philippines (see Guillermo 2017). In the early 1960s, not long after Tan Malaka’s death, Jose Maria Sison (1939–), a Filipino activist and student of literature, initiated a new phase in Indonesian-Philippine Communist interactions which continued until the destruction of the PKI in the massacre of 1965 and the foundation of the Maoist-oriented Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) in 1968. It was around this time also that Sison shared a deep and comradely friendship with Bakri Ilyas (?–2003), a highly decorated PKI-affiliated former army officer who was a student at the University of the Philippines. This study seeks to shed light on this second episode.

In 1961 Sison’s graduate scholarship and teaching fellowship at the Department of English, University of the Philippines, were abruptly terminated because of his increasingly militant political involvement. Later that year, at the age of 22, Sison decided to take up a scholarship in Indonesian language and literature in Jakarta through the *Jajasan Siswa Lokantara*.¹⁾ At the time, Indonesia under President Sukarno was a veritable mecca for Southeast Asian radical and nationalist intellectuals and was also the home of the PKI, the third largest Communist party in the world (Sison 2004, 13).

However, things did not go as smoothly as expected: Sison experienced problems obtaining a passport since he had been blacklisted as a “subversive” by the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency. His uncle Sixto Brillantes, who was at the time the chairman of the Commission on Elections, had to personally request President Carlos Garcia to facilitate the issuance of his passport until it was eventually released late in 1961. In a portent of things to come, prior to his departure for Indonesia Sison was contacted by the pro-Soviet PKP. Jesus Lava, the Party’s secretary-general, had apparently taken an interest in the young Sison’s activities and early anti-imperialist writings and had sent his nephew Vicente Lava, Jr., to propose a meeting. However, it was only upon his return to the Philippines in late 1962 that Sison was finally able to meet with the Lavas (Sison 1989, 44; 2004, 13).

Six years later, he would found the breakaway Maoist CPP. Sison’s stay in Indonesia was a formative period in his development as a Marxist:

1) No further information can be found on *Jajasan Siswa Lokantara*. It was probably discontinued after 1965.

In four months, I learned the Indonesian language well enough to be able to speak it fluently and translate the poems of the Indonesian national poet Chairil Anwar into English. I had time to read an enormous amount of Marxist-Leninist classics and current literature, which could then be easily and openly obtained in Indonesia. I also developed good relations with Indonesian comrades in the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) and in the mass movement. At the time the PKI was the biggest communist party outside the socialist countries. (Sison 1989, 15–16)

Upon his return to the Philippines in 1962, his new connection with Indonesia became an occasion for red-baiting:

. . . the most rabid anticommunist columnists in the *Philippine Herald* called me an agent of the Communist Party of Indonesia because I was the secretary general of the Philippine-Indonesian Friendship and Cultural Association.

After Sukarno came to Manila for the Maphilindo conference in 1963, the yellow tabloid started to call me an agent of Sukarno and even accused me of fronting for him as a buyer of a Forbes Park mansion for an alleged Filipino girl friend of his, the prominent socialite Amelia de la Rama, whom I did not know from Eve. The only time I was in the company of Sukarno and a pretty woman was when I sat between him and the movie actress Josephine Estrada at a brunch tendered for him in 1963 by then Speaker Jose Laurel at his Shaw Boulevard residence.

Coming back from a short trip in Indonesia in 1963, I was accosted at the Manila airport by intelligence agents who confiscated from me a luggage full of books. I was subsequently attacked in the media for attempting to bring communist books into the country. (Sison 2004, 44)

According to Sison, he traveled to Indonesia on three occasions:

Una ang pag-aaral ko ng Bahasa Indonesia at pagsubaybay sa kilusang masa mula Enero hangang Hunyo, 1962. Ikalawa noong 1963 para dalhin ko sa PKI ang liham ng PKP na kumumpirma sa praternal na relasyon ng PKP at PKI batay sa naunang pag-uusap ng mga kinatawan sa Manila (ang mga kinatawan ng PKI ay mga kagawad ng KS na kasama sa delegasyon ni Sukarno). Ikatlo noong 1964 nang inayos ko ang paglahok ng mga delegasyon ng KM sa international youth conference sa 1964 at delegasyon ng Pilipinas sa international conference against US military bases noong 1965. (Sison, email to the author, December 6, 2015)

The first time was when I went there to study Bahasa Indonesia and observe the mass movement from January to June 1962. The second time was in 1963 when I delivered the letter from the PKP to the PKI confirming fraternal relations between the two parties based on the initial discussion with the representatives in Manila (the representatives of the PKI were members of the Central Committee who came with Sukarno's delegation). The third time was in 1964 when I arranged the participation of the Kabataang Makabayan (Nationalist Youth) in the international youth conference of 1964 and the delegation of the Philippines to the international conference against US military bases in 1965.

One important, and deep, intellectual friendship that Sison developed in the early 1960s was with a young Indonesian Communist who had encouraged him to go to Indonesia and

worked with him to found the Philippine-Indonesian Friendship and Cultural Association (Sison and De Lima 2003):

My most frequent intellectual sparring partner was, of course, my wife. We had for a close friend an Indonesian Communist, a graduate student, with whom we had frequent discussions and who lent us Marxist reading materials. (Sison 1989, 19)

It was this same person who helped him acquire difficult to obtain Marxist-Leninist materials:

We were able to get a few Marxist-Leninist books and pamphlets hidden by senior communists and also those provided by an Indonesian comrade. Eventually, we were able to arrange the flow of Marxist-Leninist literature from Indonesia, Hongkong, the US and England. (Sison 2004, 107)

In a recent interview, Sison identified his Indonesian friend as one Ilyas Bakri (or Bakri Ilyas in Indonesia):

Pangalan ng kasamang Indones na kaibigan namin ni Julie ay Ilyas Bakri. Kumuha ng Masters in Business Administration sa UP bilang iskolar ng gobyernong Indones. May ranggong kapitan sa hukbong Indones at galing sa isang pamilyang Komunista sa Sumatra. Alam kong myembro siya ng PKI at kaugnay ng Komite Sentral ng PKI. (Sison, email to the author, December 6, 2015)

The name of the Indonesian comrade who was a friend to me and Julie was Ilyas Bakri. He had taken up a master's in business administration in UP as a scholar of the Indonesian government. He had the rank of captain in the Indonesian army and came from a Communist family in Sumatra. I know that he was a member of the PKI and was connected to the Central Committee of the PKI.

Bakri Ilyas (see Fig. 1)²⁾ survived the 1965–66 massacre but spent the next 10 years of his life in jail. When the massacre occurred in 1965, he was already in Indonesia and in contact with his former comrades in the Indonesian army who were pro-Sukarno and pro-PKI (*ibid.*). He came under suspicion from the Suharto group, was arrested twice, and was jailed 10 years without trial during the Suharto period. Upon his release in 1976, his status as an “ex-Tapol” (former political prisoner) made it difficult for him to find employment. He led the organization Paguyuban Korban Orde Baru (Pakorba, Association of the Victims of the New Order) in fighting for justice and social rehabilitation for former prisoners and victims of the Suharto era (Bakri 1998). During the early 1990s, he resumed communications with Sison but was no longer able to travel. In 2003, Bakri was possibly the first and the only ex-Tapol who was buried with military rites at the

2) According to Sison, “Tuluy-tuloy ang ugnayan ng CPP at PKI dahil sa may kinatawan ang mga ito sa Beijing” (The communication between the CPP and the PKI continued [even after 1965] because they had representatives in Beijing) (Jalandoni 2013).



Fig. 1 Bakri Ilyas in *The Philippinensian* (1965)

Kalibata Heroes Cemetery. The probable reason for this is that his “illustrious military career overshadowed his status as a 1965 former political prisoner” (Adam 2005, 268). He had been decorated with three medals by the Republic of Indonesia for his exemplary military service: the Bintang Gerilya (Guerilla Star), Satyalancana PK I, and the Satyalancana PK II (*ibid.*). According to Asvi Warman Adam:

While in the Philippines, he befriended progressive Filipino [*sic*] students. These friendships formed the grounds for his detention without trial from 1966 to 1976. According to one source, he had been a member of the Indonesian Scholars Association which was affiliated to the PKI. (*ibid.*)

In his tribute to Bakri, Sison wrote:

There is not enough space here for me to state everything that I know about Bakri as an outstanding Indonesian patriot, revolutionary and internationalist. But I pledge to make sure that his writings within my access and his deeds within the range of my knowledge will go into historical record. (Sison and De Lima 2003)

Translations of Chairil Anwar and the *Philippine Progressive Review*

Indonesia also left a mark on Sison in the area of literature. Sison’s translations of three of Anwar’s poems may count as possibly some of the first translations into English of this famous Indonesian poet.³⁾ The translated poems were “Aku” (I), Orang Berdua”/“Dengan

3) Burton Raffels’ translations (Chairil Anwar 1970) came out in 1962, the very year Sison was in Indonesia.

Mirat” (Two people/With Mirat) and “Sia-sia” (Trifling/In vain). Sison’s own poetry from his first collection, *Brothers and Other Poems* (1961), reflects a spontaneous affinity with Anwar’s style. In his translations, one could say that he made Anwar’s poems his own:⁴⁾

Hindi ko alam kung may naunang nagsalin sa mga tula niya sa Ingles. Bago ko inaral at isinalin ang mga tula niya noong 1962, nalathala na ang *Brothers and Other Poems* noong pang 1961. Maaring sabihin na pareho kaming impluwensiyado ng mga Kanluranin at modernong manunulat na sina Rilke, Auden at Hemingway, laluna sa paggamit ng tuwirang wika, mga metapor at mga imahe.

I did not know if there were any previous translations of his poems into English. Before I studied and translated his poems in 1962, *Brothers and Other Poems* had already been published in 1961. It could be said that we were both influenced by Western and modern writers such as Rilke, Auden, and Hemingway, especially in the use of direct language, metaphor, and images.

Some parts of Sison’s translations may be remarked upon (Table 1). For example, below are the famous concluding lines of Anwar’s poem “Aku” (I):

Biar peluru menembus kulitku
 Aku tetap meradang menerjang
 Luka dan bisa kubawa berlari
 Berlari
 Hingga hilang pedih peri
 Dan aku akan lebih tidak peduli
 Aku mau hidup seribu tahun lagi

Sison translates this as:

Let a pellet break my skin
 I firmly rage and charge
 The wound I bear and the poison runs
 Runs
 Until enmeshed in its own smart and tangle
 And I will be more mindless
 I want to live a thousand years more

There are indeed quite a number of ways of rendering this in English, but “hingga hilang

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- 4) Caroline Hau observes, “I was struck by how ‘freely’ Sison translated Chairil Anwar. If Sison were as fluent in Bahasa as he claims to have been (and there is no reason to doubt this claim), then it might also be possible to view Sison’s poems as simultaneously translations of Chairil and Sison’s ‘own’ poems in their own right—the intentional appropriation that blurs the boundaries between translator and translated and is capable of producing ‘literary’ effects (which we can see in Ezra Pound, except Pound didn’t even have Chinese) but that, in a certain sense, the term ‘plagiarism’ (in the way it is often used nowadays and by people with their own agenda) wants to disambiguate. By current definition, Shakespeare is the plagiarist par excellence” (Hau, email to the author, December 10, 2015).

Table 1 Jose Maria Sison's Translations of Three Poems by Chairil Anwar

| Translations by Jose Maria Sison | Original Poems by Chairil Anwar |
|--|---|
| <p>I</p> <p>When comes my turn I wish none will weep Not even you</p> <p>There is no room for sobbing</p> <p>I am a wild beast Lost from the herd</p> <p>Let a pellet break my skin I firmly rage and charge</p> <p>The wound I bear and the poison runs Runs Until enmeshed in its own smart and tangle</p> <p>And I will be more mindless</p> <p>I want to live a thousand years more</p> | <p>Aku</p> <p>Kalau sampai waktuku 'Ku mau tak seorang 'kan merayu Tidak juga kau</p> <p>Tak perlu sedu-sedan itu</p> <p>Aku ini binatang jalang Dari kumpulannya terbuang</p> <p>Biar peluru menembus kulitku Aku tetap meradang menerjang</p> <p>Luka dan bisa kubawa berlari Berlari Hingga hilang pedih peri</p> <p>Dan aku akan lebih tidak peduli</p> <p>Aku mau hidup seribu tahun lagi (1943)</p> |
| <p>Two People/With Mirat</p> <p>This room is the ultimate web Where the limits of the night are lost</p> <p>I and she only reach For the black raft</p> <p>Will we drift ashore Or be engulfed By a spiteful vortex?</p> <p>Your violet eyes are stone-hard</p> <p>Are we still to embrace Or follow that shadow</p> | <p>Orang Berdua/Dengan Mirat</p> <p>Kamar ini jadi sarang penghabisan di malam yang hilang batas</p> <p>Aku dan dia hanya menjengkau rakit hitam</p> <p>'Kan terdamparkah atau terserah Pada putaran pitam?</p> <p>Matamu ungu membatu</p> <p>Masih berdekapankah kamu atau mengikut juga bayangan itu? (1946)</p> |
| <p>Trifling/In Vain</p> <p>The last time you came It was to bring a bouquet Of red rose and white jasmine: Your blood and pureness You scattered them at my feet With a look of assurance: For you.</p> <p>After that we were both perplexed We asked each other: What is this? Love? The two of us failed to comprehend.</p> <p>That whole day we were together We did not dare to come to each other.</p> <p>Ahh! My heart which refused to give The ruins their peace.</p> | <p>Sia-sia</p> <p>Penghabisan kali itu kau datang membawa karangan kembang Mawar merah dan melati putih darah dan suci Kau tebarkan depanku Serta pandang yang memastikan: Untukmu.</p> <p>Sudah itu kita sama termangu Saling bertanya: Apakah ini? Cinta? Keduanya tak mengerti.</p> <p>Sehari itu kita bersama. Tak Hampir-menghampiri</p> <p>Ah! Hatiku yang tak mau memberi Mampus kau dikoyak-koyak sepi. (1943)</p> |

pedih peri,” which Sison translates as “until enmeshed in its own smart and tangle,” could be more accurately translated as “until the pain vanishes” (or “until I turn numb”). The line immediately following, “dan aku akan lebih tidak peduli,” can likewise be more literally rendered as “and I will care even less.”

The following two lines from the popular poem “Sia-sia” (Trifling/In vain) are quite difficult to translate for anyone who attempts it because of Anwar’s polyvalent ambiguous style:

Ah! Hatiku yang tak mau memberi
Mampus kau dikoyak-koyak sepi.

Sison very freely translates this as:

Ahh! My heart which refused to give
The ruins their peace

However, “mampus” (damn!/die) apparently does not have any literal connection with “ruins.” An Indonesian scholar, Jafar Suryomenggolo, offers a possible translation as:

Ah! my heart that refuses to yield
Damn, you will be devastated by loneliness⁵⁾

Sison’s effort in translating Chairil’s poetry, especially in light of his selection of some of the latter’s more personal rather than political poems, might seem incidental to his politics. However, this work of translation cannot be limited to a mere expression of admiration by a young revolutionary Filipino poet for the work of one of the greatest Indonesian poets; it may also constitute a kind of gesture toward a larger commitment to a continuing dialogue with Indonesian comrades, a commitment that is also necessarily linguistic in nature. The *Progressive Review* (PR), the journal where these translations of Anwar were published, was edited by Sison himself along with Francisco Nemenzo, Jr., and Luis V. Teodoro, Jr. It was “A Bi-Monthly of Ideas and Opinions” with a significant circulation. The special issue (July–August 1963), which included these translations, was completely devoted to Indonesia. It had full-page pictures of Indonesian President Sukarno and Foreign Minister Soebandrio and contained several reprints of official

5) Jafar Suryomenggolo (email August 31, 2015): “I think for modern readers (like myself), the most difficult part is ‘memberi’. Because it refers to ‘love’, so it is not only about giving, but also surrendering oneself to it. In this part, I think the issue is not about to give/offer love (the narrator seems capable to offer love), but he is not ready/capable to surrender himself to love (or, doesn’t want to let himself experience love). Second, the phrase ‘mampus kau’ sounds so harsh for modern readers, like a curse. Thus, it doesn’t mean that he will really die (‘mampus’), but more like a warning. So, there is a causality between the 1st line and the 2nd line. The pattern more like: if X, so it will Y.”

government statements and speeches from Indonesia. The table of contents listed the following articles:

- Philippines and Indonesia: Editorial
- Rediscovery of Our Revolution: Soekarno
- Belgrade Speech on Non-Alignment: Soekarno
- Our Good Neighbourly Relations: Soebandrio
- Philippine-Indonesian Joint Communiqué
- Tokyo Joint Communiqué
- MAPILINDO Report
- Economic Declaration: Soekarno
- On Loans or Credit on the Basis of Production-Sharing
- Philippine-Indonesian Trade Agreement
- Chairil Anwar's Poems: Translations by Jose Ma. Sison
- Philippine-Indonesian Cultural Agreement

The editorial, presumably written by Sison himself and titled “The Philippines and Indonesia,” explains the motives for putting out an issue dedicated entirely to Indonesia and its relationship with the Philippines:

In the Philippines today, there is a rising and vibrant wave of interest in Indonesia—its people, its leadership, its policies and principles, its potential, its current problems, its efforts, its achievements and its future.

In response to this interest, we have decided to put out this special issue on Indonesia which includes the most basic and most comprehensive policy declarations by President Soekarno, such as the Political Manifesto, the Economic Declaration and the Belgrade Speech on the policy of non-alignment . . .

The study and appreciation of the Indonesian Revolution may lead not only to a better understanding of our domestic problems, by way of parallelism or by way of a wider and more realistic Asian perspective, but may also lead to an active and more effective Philippine-Indonesian cooperation that may still accelerate the retreat of imperialism from this part of the world. (Sison 1963b, 1–2)

The “Mapilindo Report” listed in the table of contents is the result of the conference of ministers held in Manila on June 7–11, 1963. The conference was attended by Tun Abdul Razak, deputy prime minister of the Federation of Malaya; Dr. Soebandrio, deputy first minister/minister for foreign affairs of the Republic of Indonesia; and Emmanuel Pelaez, vice president of the Philippines and concurrently secretary of foreign affairs. “Mapilindo” (or “Maphilindo”) stood for Malaya, Philippines, and Indonesia and was part of a dream of a postcolonial Pan-Malayan confederation in Southeast Asia having its origins at least

as far back as Jose Rizal (Salazar 1998a). Some Indonesian Communists, such as Tan Malaka, seriously pondered the question of pan-Malayan or pan-Indonesian unity (Tan Malaka 2008, 447–462; Guillermo 2017). However, Filipino Communists for their part apparently did not find such conceptions congenial to their understanding of Marxism. The first issue of PR (May–June 1963) included a commentary written by Sison on “Filipino-Indonesian Brotherly Relations” that contained one of the rare instances where this trope appeared for a fleeting moment:

The Filipino and Indonesian peoples are mutually realizing with profoundest sentiments that they are blood-brothers, close neighbours, proud sharers of an early pre-colonial culture and, that it is only natural that they pool their potential and embark on joint action and cooperation in the face of the old established forces of colonialism and neocolonialism that continue to threaten and hamper their security and development.

That both Indonesia and the Philippines should, at this moment, choose to strengthen their brotherly relations in various fields and break the considerable number of barriers that Western colonialism has built between them can easily be explained by the fact that both are determinedly opposed to the proposed Federation of Malaysia, cooked up by the British and supported by the U.S., and that both need to cooperate and consolidate their efforts in the face of formidable adversity. (Sison 1963a, 12–13)

The same issue of PR included an article by Salipada R. Pendatun titled “Betrayal in Southeast Asia”; an essay by Dr. Juan M. Arreglado on “Our Relationship with Indonesia”; and a piece by Abdul Rahim bin Karim, a Malaysian student leader, titled “Kalimantan Utara Revolt: War Against Imperialism.” Iljas (or Ilyas) Bakri, Sison’s Indonesian friend, was listed as a contributing editor in the third issue of the journal. This issue had an article by the prominent Filipino intellectual who would later on become president of the University of the Philippines, Salvador P. Lopez, titled “Malaysia and Maphilindo.” Sison and other Filipino progressives asserted their solidarity with Indonesia by taking a stand against the formation of Malaysia as an imperialist ploy (Sison 1989, 27–28). Probably the final article on Indonesia in the pages of this journal was in the ninth issue, when it was under the sole editorship of Nemenzo. The article was written by the journalist Eric Norden and titled “The Rightist Coup in Indonesia.” And after that, silence.

Philippine Society and Revolution: Indonesian Influence or Plain Plagiarism?

Alex Magno, a political scientist who formerly taught at the University of the Philippines, wrote the following in his regular column for the broadsheet *Philippine Star* on September 11, 2007:

In the early sixties, [Sison] plagiarized the work of an Indonesian Maoist who, in turn, simplistically applied Mao's elementary analysis of Chinese society to explain Indonesian society. By simply changing names and places, he put out *Philippine Society and Revolution* under the penname "Amado Guerrero" (Beloved Warrior). (Magno 2007b)

Magno was very briefly associated with the Philippine Left during the early part of his career, before his political position took a decisive turn to the right. He eventually served as an adviser to the former controversial Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who was jailed for plunder. One can unpack the assertions Magno made in the quote above as follows:

- 1) In the early 1960s Sison plagiarized the work of an (unnamed) Indonesian Maoist;
- 2) This Indonesian Maoist had "simplistically" applied Mao's "elementary analysis" of Chinese society to explain Indonesian society;
- 3) Sison then simply changed the "names and places" in the Indonesian work and called the book *Philippine Society and Revolution* (PSR).

Which Indonesian Maoist was Magno referring to? If it was Dipa Nusantara Aidit, as Ken Fuller (2011, 75) surmises, then which work of Aidit did Sison allegedly plagiarize? There is no mention here of Sison's Indonesian friend Bakri Ilyas, who did not apparently leave any writings to plagiarize. If it was another Indonesian Maoist and not Aidit, then what is his name and which work of his is being referred to? If Sison did indeed plagiarize a specific work by a particular "Indonesian Maoist," is it true that he actually just changed the names and places? Magno makes no effort to prove this assertion. Furthermore, in what way has Magno demonstrated that the "Indonesian Maoist" in question had just "simplistically" applied Mao's "elementary analysis" from China to Indonesia? It must be noted that the enormous condescension of posterity that Magno allows himself by throwing about words like "simplistic" and "elementary" to describe the ideas and motivations of historical actors just cannot work in any serious approach to intellectual history.

In another column, published a mere four months later in December 2007, Magno writes:

The biggest communist party aligned with China was the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). In the early sixties, the Indonesian president Sukarno, who was friendly with the PKI, was overthrown by a military coup led by Suharto. Tens of thousands of cadres of the PKI were massacred in the aftermath, permanently eradicating that communist party as a political force in Indonesian society. . . . One leading Indonesian communist fled to the Philippines and established contact with Sison's group. Sison's "analysis" of Philippine society is largely lifted from the PKI's version of revolutionary conditions in Indonesian society. (Magno 2007a)

In the September 2007 column, Magno asserted that Sison had “plagiarized” an “Indonesian Maoist” in the early 1960s. However, in the second version above, he surmised that a “leading Indonesian communist” who had fled from the 1965 massacre was able to establish contact with Sison’s group. This alleged meeting explains why Sison’s “analysis” was “largely lifted” from that of the PKI. Could Magno have been referring to Bakri? However, according to Sison, Bakri was already in Indonesia by 1965, just before the massacre.

The unthinking repetition of Magno’s unsubstantiated allegations by writers like Fuller seems to reinforce their veracity without actually proving anything.

One approach to this unresolved problem might be to consider a possible scenario. What if the writer Magno was referring to was Aidit (1923–65), secretary-general of the PKI, and the work being alluded to was Aidit’s *Masyarakat Indonesia dan Revolusi Indonesia* (MIRI, Indonesian Society and Indonesian Revolution) (1957)? Indeed, many years before Magno, Joel Rocamora noted that the early CPP framework was frequently criticized for being “largely copied from Chinese models and from adaptations made by the Indonesian communist party” (1994, 20), and further added in a footnote that, “Some analysts have noted similarities in the framework of analysis used by Amado Guerrero in *Philippine Society and Revolution* and that used by the PKI leader, Dipa Nusantara Aidit in *Indonesian Society and Revolution*.” (Rocamora, who is actually capable of undertaking this investigation himself, does not cite any of these “analysts” he mentions.) Assuming that such were the case, a comparison might be undertaken between Aidit’s work and the similarly titled *Philippine Society and Revolution* (1971), which was said to have been penned primarily by Sison but which was released under the pseudonym Amado Guerrero (De Villa 2002, 2–6). Aidit, who was 16 years Sison’s senior, was executed in 1965 during the US-supported anti-Communist bloodbath. (A pioneering comparative analysis of both works to which this essay owes a debt can be seen in Gealogo [2005].)

Both works were meant to serve as “textbooks” (*buku peladjaran*) or “primers” for mass activists. As the original 1957 introduction to the MIRI states:

Buku peladjaran ini disusun oleh Kawan D.N. Aidit dimaksudkan sebagai buku peladjaran untuk Sekolah2 Partai dipusat dan di-provinsi2. . . Kita menerbitkan tulisan ini dengan kejakinan bahwa tulisan ini akan besar sekali artinja, bukan hanya bagi kader2 revolusioner, tetapi bahkan bagi perkembangan gerakan revolusioner itu sendiri. (Aidit 1962, 3)

This textbook, which was put together by Comrade D.N. Aidit, is meant as a textbook for Party Schools in the center and the provinces. . . We published this book with the conviction that this work will be of great value, not only for revolutionary cadres but also for the growth of the revolutionary movement itself.

The “author’s introduction” in PSR states a similar purpose:

Philippine Society and Revolution can be used as a primer and can be studied in three consecutive or separate days by those interested in knowing the truth about the Philippines and in fighting for the genuine national and democratic interests of the entire Filipino people. The author offers this book as a starting point for every patriot in the land to make further class analysis and social investigation as the basis for concrete and sustained revolutionary action. (Guerrero 1979, xvii)

MIRI was translated into English and Russian in 1958 (Aidit 1958a; 1958b) and into German in 1959 (Aidit 1959a). Its final Indonesian edition was a seventh printing in 1965 (Aidit 1965). PSR was published simultaneously in English and Filipino in 1971 (Guerrero 1971a; 1971b) and translated into German in 1973 (Guerrero 1973). Its fifth edition was printed in 2006 (Sison 2006). A comparison of the table of contents of both works reveals a relatively close correspondence (Table 2). The topic of chapter 2 of MIRI (“The Indonesian Revolution”) overlaps with the latter part of the first historical chapter of PSR (“The Reestablishment of the CPP”) and contains the corresponding topics of both chapters 2 (“Basic Problems of the Philippine Revolution”) and 3 (“The People’s Democratic Revolution”) of PSR. Justus van der Kroef commented that PSR was similar “in organization, terminology and substance . . . [to] the analysis of Indonesian society and revolution written by the late chairman of the Indonesian Communist Party, Dipa Nusantara Aidit” (Van der Kroef 1973; Weekley 2001, 21). However, with respect to the actual content of both works, some rather striking differences come to the fore.

One major difference is the account of the peopling of the Philippine and Indonesian archipelagos in the historical section from both works. Sison used Otley Beyer’s “Wave Migration Theory,” which at the time was the dominant narrative of the peopling of the Philippines (Fig. 2).⁶ The more speculative aspects of this theory have since been widely criticized by writers such as W.H. Scott (1992, 8–11), and it is therefore no longer accepted by the scientific community. Sison avers that the other alternative available account at the time by Felipe Landa Jocano was even less credible than Beyer’s. The more widely accepted account that has gained a broad scientific consensus is the theory connected with Austronesian migration (Salazar 1998b). Aidit, for his part, had already employed a version of the theory of Austronesian migration to describe the peopling of Indonesia in his earlier work (Fig. 3). The fact that he writes of the Mon-Khmer (in Cambodia) as the original Austronesians points to his ultimate source. The term “Austronesian” was proposed as a replacement for the earlier concept “Malayo-Polynesian” by P. Schmidt (1906), who also proposed a deeper kinship between Mon-

6) Filomeno Aguilar (2005) offers a comprehensive history of such theories of migration in waves.

Table 2 Comparison of the Table of Contents of *Philippine Society and Revolution* (PSR) and *Masjarakat Indonesia dan Revolusi Indonesia* (MIRI)

| PSR | MIRI | Translation of MIRI |
|--|---|--|
| Author's Introduction | Introduksi Introduksi pada Tjetakan ke-V | |
| Chapter 1: Review of Philippine History | Bab I Indonesia dan Masjarakatnja | Chapter 1: Indonesia and Its Society |
| I.A.) The Philippines and the People | I.A.) Kedudukan geografis Indonesia I.B.) Bangsa Indonesia | Indonesia's Geographical Position The Indonesian Nation |
| I.B.) The People upon the Coming of the Spanish Colonialists | I.C.) Masjarakat feodal | Feudal Society |
| I.C.) Spanish Colonialism and Feudalism I.D.) The Philippine Revolution of 1896 | I.D.) Masjarakat kolonial | Colonial Society |
| I.E.) The Filipino-American War I.F.) The Colonial Rule of US Imperialism I.G.) The People's Struggle against Japanese Imperialism I.H.) The Present Puppet Republic of the Philippines | | |
| | I.E.) Masjarakat Indonesia sekarang adalah setengah-djadjahan dan setengah-feodal | Indonesian Society Today Is Semifeudal and Semicolonial |
| | Bab II Revolusi Indonesia | Chapter 2: The Indonesian Revolution |
| I.J.) The Reestablishment of the Communist Party of the Philippines | II.A.) Gerakan revolusioner di Indonesia dalam abad ke-20 | The Revolutionary Movement in Indonesia in the Twentieth Century |
| Chapter 2: Basic Problems of the Philippine Revolution | II.B.) Soal2 pokok revolusi Indonesia | Basic Problems of the Indonesian Revolution |
| II.A.) A Semicolonial and Semi-feudal Society II.B.) US Imperialism II.C.) Feudalism II.D.) Bureaucrat Capitalism | II.A.) Tentang Sasaran2 pokok atau musuh2 pokok revolusi Indonesia pada tingkat sekarang dinjatakan dalam program PKI adalah imperialisme dan feodalisme. | In the program of the PKI, the main targets or enemies of the Indonesian Revolution at the present stage are declared to be imperialism and feudalism. |
| Chapter 3: The People's Democratic Revolution | | |
| III.D.) Basic Tasks of the People's Democratic Revolution | II.B.) Tentang Tugas2 Revolusi Indonesia | On the Tasks of the Indonesian Revolution |
| III.B.) Classes in Philippine Society III.C.) Class Basis of Strategy and Tactics | II.C.) Tentang Tenaga2 Penggerak atau Kekuatan2 Pendorong Revolusi Indonesia | On the Motive Forces or the Force Pushing forward the Indonesian Revolution |
| III.A.) Basic Character of the Philippine Revolution | II.C.) Tentang Watak Revolusi Indonesia | On the Character of the Indonesian Revolution |
| III.E.) Perspective of the Philippine Revolution | II.D.) Tentang Perspektif Revolusi Indonesia | On the Perspective of the Indonesian Revolution |

| | | | Main Filipino "Racial Stock" | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|---|------------------------------|--|--|
| Aetas / Negritos | First Indonesian Wave | Second Indonesian Wave | First Malay Wave | Second Malay Wave | Third Malay Wave |
| 25,000 to 30,000 years ago | 5,000 to 6,000 years ago | 1500 BC from Indochina and South China | 300-200BC | 1 st – 13 th century AD | Latter half of the 14 th century and 15 th century |
| Pleistocene era | Stone age culture | Late Neolithic or bronze-copper culture | Indian cultural influences | Ancestors of the Tagalogs, Ilocanos, Pampangos, Visayans and Bicolanos Writing systems and historical records | Arab influence and Islam |

Fig. 2 Beyer's Wave Migration Theory in *Philippine Society and Revolution*

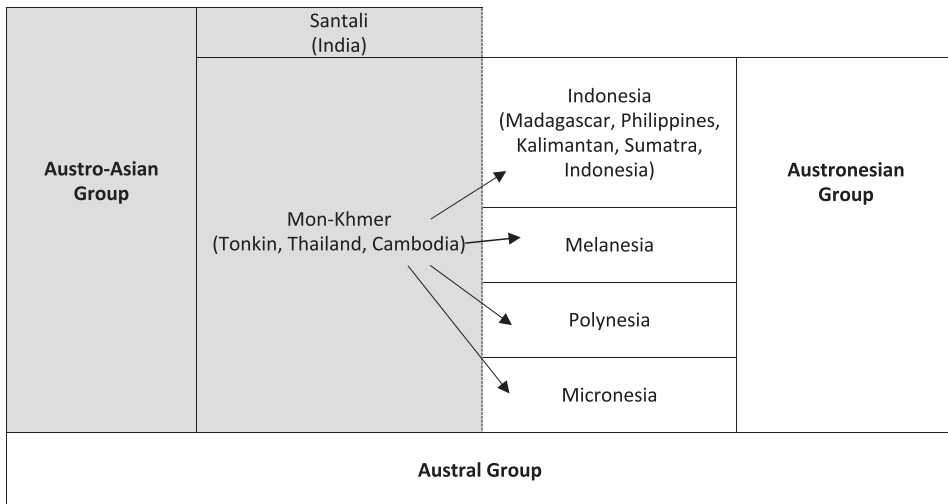


Fig. 3 The Origins of the Indonesians in *Masyarakat Indonesia dan Revolusi Indonesia* (MIRI)

Khmer and Austronesian languages. This latter proposition is not widely accepted today (Fig. 4). In a preface to the fifth edition of PSR, Sison wrote, "References to Philippine pre-history based on the 1969 level of knowledge and hypothesizing are properly explained in footnotes in the early pages of the book. They do not detract from the main strands of Philippine history, as presented in the book" (2006, i). However, the clarificatory footnotes Sison mentions seem to have been inadvertently left out in the printed

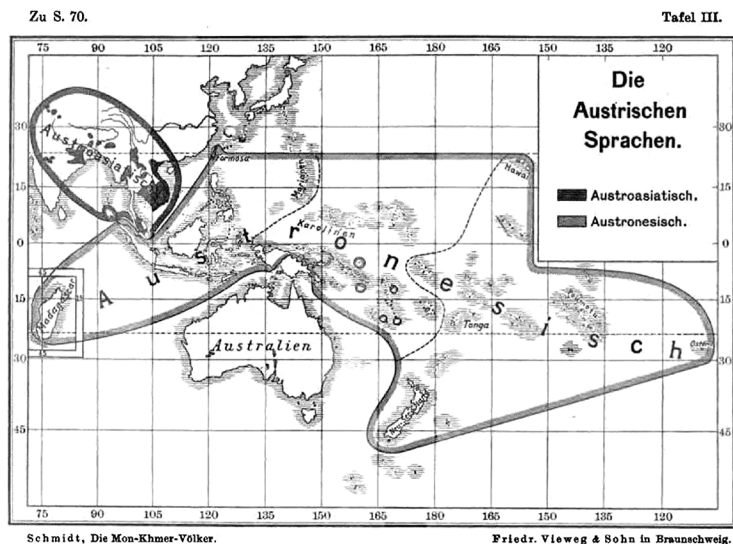


Fig. 4 P. Schmidt's Theory on the Kinship between the Mon-Khmer Language and Austronesian Languages
Source: Schmidt (1906, 79)

version of the latest edition.⁷⁾ The account in PSR emphasizes the notion of the main “racial stock” of the Philippine population as being “Malay,” while the discussion in MIRI looks deeper for the ultimate origin of the Austronesians (among them, Malays, Indonesians, and Filipinos) in mainland Southeast Asia among the Mon-Khmer. The two accounts nevertheless share a sense of the “common origin” and “shared history” between Filipinos and Indonesians. (For a contemporary perspective from the field of genetics, see Delfin [2015].) Further differences in the historical accounts of PSR and MIRI are observed by Francis Gealogo (2005), who remarks that compared to PSR, MIRI

7) Jose Maria Sison (email to the author, December 6, 2015): “One can make fun of Beyer’s wave theory by countering it with a trickles or percolation theory or justifying the wave theory with the stars being far apart from each other but cohering from a distance as a constellation. Certainly, there were no waves like large fleets of boats migrating to the Philippines. At any rate, what is more satisfying about Beyer’s theory than Jocano’s theory is that the former gives us a sense of the Austronesian migrations from 5000 B.C. down to 1500 B.C. (covering the two so-called Indonesian waves) and the coming from the south of Malays with an iron age culture (first wave of Malays from circa 200–300 B.C.) and the differentiation of major ethnolinguistic communities (from first to 13th century AD, so-called second wave of Malays) and the subsequent foundation of Islam (third wave of Malays or more accurately trickles of Arab traders and religious traders laying the Islamic foundation among the Malays of Sulu). . . . In 1973 or 1974, we had a new mimeographed copy of PSR with footnotes and updates for a possible new edition which did not come out. One of the footnotes was a caveat on both the Jocano and Beyer theories. And in prison, I drafted an article to update Philippine prehistory in PSR on the basis of the articles of Robert Fox and the like. This article is still entombed in a box, which I left in the Philippines.”

“has a more manifest orientation in terms of applying Marxist historical materialist notions of social development.”

Another major difference between the two works is that the central category of “bureaucrat capitalism” in PSR (Sison 2006, 112–125) is conspicuously missing in MIRI. This is despite the fact that the corresponding Indonesian term “*kabir*” (*kapitalis birokrat*) was in fact quite current during the Sukarno era. An explanation might be found in the totally different attitudes the PKI and the CPP had toward the state and its leaders at the time of their writing. While the MIRI was written under the conditions of a strong degree of cooperation between the PKI and Sukarno, PSR was written in a spirit of uncompromising opposition to the Philippine State. Sison explains:

Wala o mahina ang kategoryang bureaucrat capitalism kay Aidit dahil sa sobrang kapit sa NASAKOM at kay Sukarno at pabulong-bulong lang ang PKI at Aidit tungkol sa bureaucrat capitalism o corruption ng mga “social democrats” o “socialists” at iba pa na binigyan ni Sukarno ng mga economic portfolios sa gabinete niya. Ilan din sa mga PKI cadres nasa lower and also lucrative posts. But they turned over to the PKI what they earned beyond their modest family needs. (Sison, email to the author, December 6, 2015)

There was none or almost no category of bureaucrat capitalism in Aidit because he clung too much to NASAKOM and to Sukarno and the PKI and Aidit only whispered about bureaucrat capitalism or corruption among the “social democrats” or “socialists” and others whom Sukarno had given economic portfolios in his Cabinet. A few PKI cadres were also in lower but also lucrative posts. But they turned over to the PKI what they earned beyond their modest family needs.

What, then, of the alleged similarities between MIRI and PSR? If Magno’s charge that Sison had simply changed “names and places” is taken at a literal level, then there are ways of empirically verifying or refuting this by using methods such as “n-gram” analysis. An n-gram is a sequence of *n* contiguous elements, which for the present purposes are understood as consisting of words in a particular text. A test for the similarity between two texts could be conducted quite easily by using n-gram analysis. A further simplifying assumption is that Sison used the English translation of Aidit’s work rather than the original one in Bahasa Indonesia. Common sequences of lexical items can be automatically sought out in both MIRI and PSR. In this particular case, detecting word sequences that appear just once in both texts and consist of a minimum of four words could serve as a good basis for identifying areas of possible similarity in the texts. The reason for looking for a common sequence of four or more words is that, by rule of thumb, the likelihood of finding common sequences of three words and below in both texts is much greater and therefore much less likely to indicate unique textual features. On the other hand, making the minimum sequence length too long might make certain interesting features undetectable. Moreover, by limiting the number of occurrences to one in both

texts, the likelihood is reduced (but obviously not eliminated) that the repeating sequence is a commonly repeating phrase or fixed expression. A high frequency of occurrence of these sequences in two texts would point to the possibility of plagiarism. One can observe initially that many of the sequences occurring in MIRI and PSR are fixed phrases in the English language as a whole or within the genre of late twentieth-century Marxist-Leninist revolutionary texts. Some examples from PSR and MIRI of high-frequency shared n-grams are the following: “the broad masses of people” (MIRI: 3; PSR: 28); “under the leadership of” (MIRI: 8; PSR: 6); “exploitation of the people” (MIRI: 1; PSR: 6); “the vast majority of” (MIRI: 3; PSR: 4); “of the world proletarian revolution” (MIRI: 1; PSR: 5). These fixed phrases are obviously of too general usage in the Marxist-Leninist literature to be indicative of any deeper textual connection beyond ideological affinity. The n-gram sequences occurring once each in MIRI and PSR with four or more lexemes add up to a total of around 272. There is a single n-gram with a length of 10 shared by both texts (“the rich peasants, the middle peasants and the poor peasants”). The next longest n-grams have a length of eight each (“the political economic and cultural development of [the Philippines/Indonesia]”; “the present stage of the [Philippine/Indonesian] revolution is”). The great majority of single-occurrence shared n-grams each have four elements and number 172.

Most of these 4-gram sequences, when queried, do not actually reveal areas of textual similarity (for example, “a class that is,” “a proletarian socialist revolution,” “and most reliable ally,” “basis of the colonial,” “joint dictatorship of the,” “the compradors and the,” “system of rent payment,” “the proletariat is capable of,” “the revolutionary struggle against,” “[the Philippines/Indonesia] is an archipelago”)) which could support allegations or give rise to suspicions of plagiarism or lifting. What can instead be observed is the use of a kind of common “revolutionary *lingua franca*” (Hau, email to the author, December 10, 2015).

Magno’s wholesale charge that names and places were simply changed can be refuted empirically and just cannot be sustained. The only relatively close textual correspondence in MIRI and PSR to have been discovered so far using this automated search procedure is a passage containing the very unique n-gram sequence “thieves, robbers, gangsters, beggars.” This appears in the sections in both MIRI and PSR on the question of the “lumpen proletariat” (Aidit 1962, 53–54; Sison 2006, 150) (see Table 3). Such a series of four words in exactly this particular sequence obviously points to more than random coincidence. Looking at this sequence closely, it can be observed that five sentences in PSR, some of which are non-contiguous, closely correspond to three directly contiguous sentences in MIRI. It seems to be the case that the very short discussion on lumpen proletarians in MIRI was used as a kind of flexible schema upon which an

Table 3 Comparison of the Section on the “Lumpen Proletariat” in *Philippine Society and Revolution* (PSR) and *Masyarakat Indonesia dan Revolusi Indonesia* (MIRI)

| PSR | MIRI | Translation of MIRI |
|---|--|--|
| Lumpen proletariat | Kaum gelandangan | Lumpen proletariat |
| It is composed of thieves, robbers, gangsters, beggars, pimps and prostitutes, fakirs, vagrants, and all other elements who resort to antisocial acts to make a living. (139 words) The lumpen proletarians are an extremely unstable lot. They are easily bought off by the enemy and are given to senseless destruction. But some of them can be remolded. (27 words) When they join the revolution , they become the source of roving rebel and anarchist ideology . | Menjadi pentjuri-pentjuri, perampok2, gangster2, penge-mis2, pelatjur2 dan semua tjara hidup jang tidak normal. Golongan ini gojang wataknja dan sebagian dari mereka bisa dibeli oleh kaum reaksioner, sedangkan sebagian lagi bisa memasuki revolusi. Dalam keadaan memasuki barisan revolusi mereka bisa menjadi sumber ideologi dan barisan pengatjau jang berkeliaran dan dari anarkisme didalam barisan revolusi. | becoming thieves, robbers, gangsters, beggars, prostitutes and all other such abnormal ways of living or working. This group is wavering in character and some of them can be bought up by the reactionaries, while others can be bought into the revolution. In the case that they enter the revolution they can become the ideological source of roaming destructive elements and anarchism within the ranks of the revolution. |

expanded Philippine variation could be constructed. In this regard, according to Sison (email to the author, December 4, 2015), another great influence was Mao’s “Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society” (1965). Naturally, it was Marx and Engels who had established the original template on the “lumpen proletariat” in the *Communist Manifesto*:

Das Lumpenproletariat, diese passive Verfaulung der untersten Schichten der alten Gesellschaft, wird durch eine proletarische Revolution stellenweise in die Bewegung hineingeschleudert, seiner ganzen Lebenslage nach wird es bereitwilliger sein, sich zu reaktionären Umtrieben erkaufen zu lassen. (Stammen and Classen 2009, 76)

The lumpen proletariat, this passive rotting of the lowest strata of the old society, will be partly thrown into the movement by the proletarian revolution, but it is more disposed, given its conditions of life, to let itself be bought by the reactionary intrigues.

This kind of modular appropriation and adaptation might give rise to further reflections on the modes of transmission and circulation of texts in revolutionary mass movements. From the outset, given the modularity of twentieth-century revolutionary ideas and the anonymity (or “impersonality”) of the vast majority of revolutionary treatises and texts, it is doubtful whether the academic standards and concepts of intellectual property, citation, and attribution are even directly applicable to these.⁸⁾ The clandestine nature of

8) The scholar Tom Talledo (communication to the author, October 30, 2017) writes: “If the obsession is with textual authenticity or originality—what will happen to collectively shared conditions and the collectively shared dialectical analysis of those in the battlefield? The issue of textual plagiarism reflects concerns about bourgeois claims of private ownership over texts or objects of representation. *Eh*, the rebo qua rebo has no marketability (and is even a source of fear!). And the dominant mode of transmission of revolutionary knowledge in the mountains and rural areas is oral/gestural.”

revolutionary work no doubt also plays a role. Such a study on the different styles and conventions of citation and non-citation practices in Marxist-Leninist and Maoist revolutionary texts could even be carried out empirically. Some of these features are no doubt reflected in Sison's rather impersonal political prose style (Abinales 2001, 66–67). Because of these predictable qualities, Sison anticipates the shortcomings of a mere surface analysis of textual features:

Kung paghambingin mo ang PSR, MIRI at sinulat ni Mao tungkol sa *Classes in Chinese Society* at bagong demokratikong rebolusyon, madali kang makakita ng paimbabaw na pagkakapareho ng dahil sa parehas na Marxista-Leninista teorya ang ginagamit sa pagsusuri sa kasaysayan, sirkunstansya at rebolusyonaryong hinaharap ng mga malakonyal at malapyudal na lipunan ng Tsina, Indonesia at Pilipinas. Pero sa mas malalim na pag-aaral ng mga akda may malalaking pagkakaiba... Binasa at inalar ko sa Ingles at Bahasa Indonesia ang mga akda ni Aidit pero lampas kay Aidit na nakita ko ang nangyari sa Indonesia noong 1965 at binasa at inalar ko rin ang pagpupuna sa sarili ng PKI Politburo ng 1966 na nagpapakita ng mga kamalian ni Aidit sa ideolohiya, pulitika at organisasyon. Ibig sabihin hindi basta kopya lamang ng MIRI ang PSR. . . . Mali si Rocamora sa pagsasabi na sumunod lang ang CPP kay Aidit or PKI kaysa kay Mao o CPC sa pagsusuri ng lipunang Pilipino at pagtatakda ng rebolusyon. (Sison, email to the author, December 6, 2015)

If one compares PSR, MIRI, and the writings of Mao about the classes in Chinese society and the new democratic revolution, one would immediately observe surface similarities because they all used Marxist-Leninist theory in analyzing the history, circumstances and revolutionary future of the semicolonial and semifeudal societies of China, Indonesia, and the Philippines. But a deeper study of these works will reveal big differences. . . . I read and studied in English and Bahasa Indonesia the writings of Aidit; but beyond Aidit, I saw the events in Indonesia in 1965 and read and studied the self-criticism of the PKI Politburo in 1966 which showed Aidit's errors in ideology, politics, and organization. This means that PSR is not just a copy of MIRI. . . . Rocamora is mistaken in saying that the CPP only followed Aidit of the PKI instead of Mao or the CPC in the analysis of Philippines society and in establishing the revolution.

Moreover, according to Caroline Hau:

The same insight holds when one looks at Sison's writings on literature, where one can note several passages where he "speaks" Mao without quotation marks. Mao, for that matter, often "spoke" without quotation marks, either. In East Asian literature, there is a tradition of using phrases and ideas from classical poetry and other texts without quotation marks, which in fact was the mark of erudition among literati who could be counted on to be able to identify the source of a particular phrase or line—one cannot, for example, make sense of "The Tale of Genji" without knowing the poetry and other classic texts embedded in its own prose. Originality, in other words, required drinking from the old fountain of language and ideas, rather than repudiating that fountain in favor of a new well. (Hau, email to the author, December 10, 2015)

Conclusion

What does it mean to raise questions of plagiarism with respect to a text like *Philippine Society and Revolution*? It is quite clear that the most common and necessarily political agenda behind such accusations would be to destroy the credibility of the authors of such texts by shaming and discrediting them intellectually. However, when one considers the specific conjunctures wherein such allegations have arisen, one could also frame such accusations more specifically within contexts of theoretical struggles within the Party. The insinuation of plagiarism can thus serve as a convenient device to undermine the legitimacy and validity of the theoretical positions proposed in PSR. Notions of “copying” and “mechanical application” seem to prove conclusively the crude, simplistic, and shallow nature of the theories in question.

For their part, right-wing pundits in the Philippines have long wanted to plagiarize and copy what they have variously called the “Indonesian Solution,” “Indonesian Model,” “Jakarta Solution,” and “Final Solution” as a supposed solution or “end-game” they wish to see applied to the Philippines. Such thinking became rampant during President Gloria Macapagal Arroyos’s term, which saw almost daily extrajudicial killings of activists and NGO workers (Alston 2008). A columnist, Antonio C. Abaya (2006), crowed about how the Indonesians “simply exterminated [the Communists] like so many cockroaches.” In another column titled “Defeating the Communists,” he rhapsodized about the mass murder of Indonesian Communists:

In Suharto’s Indonesia, communists and suspected communists were summarily executed by the thousands during the military’s counter-coup after the Parti Komunis Indonesia [*sic*] tried to seize power in 1965 (by machinegunning to death the entire high command, save one general, of the Indonesian armed forces). Estimates of communists and suspected communists summarily executed by the military range from 300,000 to three million. Freed of the corrosive presence of communist insurgency, propaganda and agitation, the countries of East Asia—South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Suharto’s Indonesia—were able to devote all their energies and resources to economic development, thus benefiting the broad masses of their populations . . . (Abaya 2007)

If the Philippine right wing has often bemoaned the lack of an Indonesian-style massacre in the Philippines, Filipino Communists seem to have learned from the Indonesian Communists in both a positive and negative manner. As Sison put it, “Inevitably, the revolutionary movements of pre-1965 Indonesia, Vietnam and China had a strong impact on Filipino revolutionaries because these stood for armed revolution to achieve national liberation and democracy; and were in the neighbourhood of the Philippines” (1989, 29). One possible example of a positive lesson is how Aidit opened up the question of waging

guerrilla war in an archipelagic country in his work *The History of the Communist Party of Indonesia*:

One of the basic mistakes of the Party in studying from the Chinese revolution at that time was the Party only tried to find out the similarities between the Chinese revolution and the Indonesian revolution.

According to experiences in China, for an underdeveloped country such as Indonesia, guerrilla warfare, the creation of liberated guerrilla areas and the organisation of a people's army in these areas is one of the correct forms of struggle to achieve complete national independence. But in Indonesia, this form of struggle did not have the broad possibilities available in China. This is because of the peculiar conditions of this country.

The most advantageous conditions for guerrilla warfare are extensive regions, mountainous areas and forest lands both wide in extent and far from towns and highways. The conditions in Indonesia met only some of these requirements.

Further, we know from the experiences of the Chinese Communists that it was only after they had reached the Northeast area, which borders on the Soviet Union, that they had a rear on which they could rely. With the Soviet Union as their rear, Chiang Kai-Shek could no longer encircle the Chinese revolutionary forces. Moreover, after being able to prevent the possibility of enemy encirclement, the Chinese Communists were in a position to launch planned attacks on the Chiang Kai-Shek troops.

The Indonesian revolution did not possess such conditions. Indonesia is a country composed of islands. An Indonesian people's liberation army cannot rely upon a friendly neighbouring country as its rear because it does not have one.

In putting forward the above facts, does it mean that guerrilla warfare cannot be operated in Indonesia? Not at all. But what should be done to make guerrilla warfare methods more effective under the prevailing conditions in Indonesia was to combine the method of guerrilla warfare with the revolutionary action of the workers in the towns occupied by the enemy, with economic and political strikes of a general character. (Aidit 1955, 25–26)

The CPP's groundbreaking document on the "Specific Characteristics of Our People's War" (Guerrero 1979, 179–215) is, in several key areas, much more detailed and developed and proposes several quite distinct theses from the particular conclusions drawn in Aidit's book. However, the initial general observations of the CPP's document are very similar to Aidit's. According to it:

There are three outstanding characteristics of the Philippines in being an archipelago. First, our countryside is shredded into so many islands. Second, our two biggest islands, Luzon and Mindanao, are separated by such a clutter of islands as the Visayas. Third, our small country is separated by seas from other countries. From such characteristics arise problems that are very peculiar to our people's war . . .

Waging a people's war in an archipelagic country like ours is definitely an exceedingly difficult and complex problem for us . . .

The principle of self-reliance needs to be emphasized among all revolutionary forces on a nationwide scale. This is because our small country is cut off by seas from neighbouring countries,

particularly those friendly to our revolutionary cause. The Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian peoples are more fortunate than us in one sense because they share land borders with China, which serves as their powerful rear. Self-reliance can never be overemphasized among us. (*ibid.*, 185–188)

The 1965 massacre in Indonesia and the subsequent annihilation of the powerful PKI as a political force in Indonesian society undoubtedly had a major impact on the theory and practice of revolution in the Philippines. It was probably the lesson of the almost total vulnerability of the PKI in the face of massive state violence that motivated the CPP to stress the necessity of an armed component. Gealogo (2005) was probably correct when he wrote:

The Philippine appreciation of the “lessons” of the Indonesian experience of 1965, and the Indonesian Left’s openness to parliamentary struggle prior to the debacle, somehow cemented the idea of the inevitability of armed revolution as the only solution to the contradictions facing Philippine society.

One can also surmise that Asia’s most persistent revolutionary movement was able to be just that because of a strong emphasis on self-preservation and on the slow building up of strength which characterized its concept of a protracted people’s war (perhaps like Anwar’s poetic persona, it wanted to live a thousand years more). Too little is yet known about the multigenerational interactions between the Indonesian and Philippine radical movements, and much more research needs to be done in order to obtain a fuller and more complete picture. Nevertheless, the indisputably significant early influence the PKI had on the Philippine Communist movement makes the silence of PSR on the Indonesian massacre all the more unsettling. It would therefore be fitting to end with Sison’s answer to how he and his comrades felt about this annihilatory event and the fundamental impact the self-criticism of the PKI (1968) had on them:

Nalungkot at nagalit ako at ibang kasamang Pilipino sa malawakang masaker noong 1965 at sinuri namin kung bakit nangyari ito. Ang PKI Politburo mismo ang gumawa ng komprehensibo at malalimang pagpupuna sa sarili. Ito pa ang masasabing may mas malaking impluwensiya sa CPP kaysa sa anumang sinulat ni Aidit. . . . Ang pagpupuna sa sarili ng PKI Politburo ay umaayon sa mga aral mula kay Mao. Kinukumpirmahan lamang nito ang linya ni Mao na kung walang sariling hukbong bayan ang Partido at ng bayan, wala silang anuman. Kung gayon, matatag na binuo ng CPP ang NPA sa loob lamang ng tatlong buwang kasunod ng pagtatayo ng Partido. (Sison, email to the author, December 6, 2015)

I and other Filipino comrades were saddened and angered by the widespread massacre in 1965, and we looked into the causes behind it. The PKI Politburo itself had written a comprehensive and deep self-criticism. This had the greatest influence on the CPP, more than any work by Aidit. . . . The PKI’s self-criticism agreed with the teachings of Mao. It confirmed Mao’s line that if the

Party and the people had no people's army, they had nothing. This being the case, the CPP consolidated the formation of the NPA only three months after the founding of the Party.

Accepted: December 11, 2017

Acknowledgments

This article would not have been possible without Jose Ma. Sison's generous cooperation. The author would also like to thank the following for the various ways they helped in writing and improving this article: Yerry Wirawan, Show Ying Xin, Jafar Suryomenggolo, Jeff Hadler, Jun Aguilar, Tom Talledo, and Caroline Hau.

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Polytechnicians and Technocrats: Sources, Limits, and Possibilities of Student Activism in 1970s Singapore

Loh Kah Seng*

Making a case for studying student activism outside of elite university students, this paper investigates the sources of polytechnic student activism in a tightly controlled society: 1970s Singapore. It seeks to find less obvious histories: the limits of state control, the relative openness of the city-state, and the identity and lived experiences of the polytechnicians. Through the writings and cartoons of the Singapore Polytechnic Students' Union, augmented by oral histories, the paper traces the contours of student activism as defined by everyday events as well as momentous experiences formed at the intersection between campus, national, and transnational—particularly pan-Asian—developments.

At the national level, the polytechnicians' identity responded to the state's instrumentalist view of students, which was to define the polytechnic student in a more expansive way, attacking student apathy toward social and political issues. Some student matters, such as protests against bus hikes, escalated into national issues, bringing the polytechnicians into encounters with state officials and politicians. Political surveillance caused fear and anxiety but also fostered a sense of injustice. Conversely, international contact, such as reading critical literature and participating in pan-Asian seminars, helped the polytechnicians place Singapore in an Asian context and plot themselves on a mental political spectrum. Reading was an experience: universal ideas in books enabled the students to contextualize local issues, just as everyday experiences in Singapore helped them locate the abstract. The international contact thus enabled the polytechnicians to give meaning to concepts such as "students," "education," and "Asia."

Keywords: student activism, Singapore Polytechnic, pan-Asia, Malaysian students, technocrats

Scholarship on the history of left-wing student activism in Singapore has in recent years been invigorated by new research on Chinese-stream middle school and English-stream university student activists (Huang 2006; Liao 2010; Loh *et al.* 2012). These studies have

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detached the subject from the frame of Communist subversion that dominated the earlier literature (see Lee 1996), while also questioning the long-accepted dichotomy between English- and Chinese-stream students. However, the role of student activists from polytechnics, particularly the first institution, the Singapore Polytechnic, remains to be written. Established in the late-colonial period after World War II, the Singapore Polytechnic was an instrument of British-led decolonization, aimed at shaping the city-state's postcolonial future by producing a steady stream of technicians and other blue-collar workers to supplement the administrative and professional elite being groomed at the University of Malaya (later, University of Singapore). The polytechnic's pragmatic role was subsequently enlarged by the People's Action Party (PAP) government, which came to power in 1959 and continued to seek British expertise on technical education (Loh 2015).

Polytechnic student activists—or polytechnicians, as they called themselves—comprised a unique category: unlike their university counterparts, they did not occupy a privileged position as the future leadership of an anticolonial or pro-democracy movement, or as a technocratic elite in a developmental state (Weiss *et al.* 2012). In the hierarchy of political economy in Singapore, the polytechnicians were intended to play a less prestigious middle role, as diploma-level technicians and engineers who would share more common experiences with the working class. The history of polytechnic student activism thus raises questions and approaches that differ from those of university students.

The polytechnic's pragmatic function did not prevent the emergence of bold and critical-minded student activists who looked beyond their studies to the political and social landscape of early postcolonial Singapore under an authoritarian government. In the mid-1960s, alongside fellow activists from the University of Singapore Socialist Club and Ngee Ann College Students' Union, the Singapore Polytechnic Political Society supported the Chinese-stream Nanyang University against the government's decision to reform its curriculum and medium of instruction.¹⁾ In fact, polytechnic student activism was fueled by such policies imposed from above.

Beyond the 1960s, some of the polytechnicians were connected to another dark chapter of Singapore's history. Those leaders from the Singapore Polytechnic Students' Union (SPSU) who continued their activism upon graduation were later detained without trial for their involvement in a state-alleged "Marxist conspiracy" in 1987. The reasons behind this crackdown remain unclear, though Michael Barr (2010) has done good work to trace the international roots of the Catholic activists who were detained. Nevertheless,

1) Ngee Ann College Students' Union, University Socialist Club, and Singapore Polytechnic Political Society, Memorandum on the Present Nanyang University Crisis (1965).

the voices of the detained polytechnicians remain mostly unheard. This rather mirrors the roles they played as student and social activists. As former polytechnicians recalled, they were “manpower activists” who, together with activist lawyers and Catholic Church workers, volunteered at the Geylang Catholic Center to help exploited migrant workers (mostly Malaysians). The ex-polytechnicians also supported the Workers’ Party in the 1981 elections, printing pamphlets and writing articles in the party’s organ, *The Hammer*; they comprised the publication’s “de facto editorial board.”²⁾ As Low Yit Leng remarked, they were so heavily involved in social activism, both as polytechnic students and thereafter, that when she was arrested she did not know the exact reason for her detention.³⁾

Inter-Nation-Local Singapore and Its Activist Spaces

The polytechnicians provide a glimpse into the underside of Singapore’s social and political history in the 1970s. Unlike the radical university students who formed the vanguard for Thailand’s democratization in the early 1970s (Prajak 2012), their Singapore Polytechnic counterparts had far less political impact in the city-state. The SPSU did not lead or contribute to a nationwide movement for democracy in Singapore: the PAP’s hold remained strong, and the polytechnicians’ activism was largely constrained to the campus, to writings and to conversations with international students. The members of the SPSU’s student councils were never more than a tiny elite of active students who tried but generally failed to mobilize their peers; most of his classmates, by polytechnician Tan Tee Seng’s admission, were not moved by his efforts.⁴⁾

Instead, the attempt here is to investigate the nature and sources of student activism in a tightly controlled society, so that we may better see the less obvious histories: namely, the possibilities offered by the activism as well as the limits of state control and openness of Singapore. What follows endeavors to mark out the shape of left-wing polytechnic activism as defined by a combination of international, national, and campus developments in the 1960s and 1970s.

Following recent research, the focus here is on the identity, lived experiences, and worldviews of the polytechnicians—in short, a social history. Rather than taking the terms “Left,” “student activist,” and “student” as givens, such research has demonstrated that they were constructed historically from a range of possible interpretations, and thus contested. I have used a similar approach in my co-authored work on the Uni-

2) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng, January 20, 2015.

3) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

4) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

versity of Malaya Socialist Club, with various student groups according competing meanings to key concepts in the postwar years, such as “student,” “socialism,” “university,” and “politics.” The university socialists made a broad and activist interpretation of the role of students, by which they themselves became an intellectual force bridging the university, the Malayan nationalist movement, and the urban and rural society of Singapore and Malaya (Loh *et al.* 2012). In the case of Malaysia, Meredith Weiss has also argued that university activists there mobilized as students rather than as Malaysians, youths, or Muslims; they were thus a unique group that advocated the interests of others rather than their own (Weiss 2011). Similarly, Indonesian students also mobilized as a moral force, untainted by politics and based on their privileged position as the modernizing elite of the nation (Aspinall 2012). By contrast, radical students in the Philippines had to subsume their student identity to become Communist cadres, whereupon they lost their identity and influence over time (Abinales 2012).

The identity of students was shaped historically by what Fabio Lanza (2010) in his study of Beijing student activists in the May-Fourth-era China calls “lived experience.” Lanza points out that it was everyday interactions with various kinds of spaces—the university, city, neighborhood, and intellectual and political spaces—that set university students “at a distance” from the state, so turning youths attending higher education into modern activist students. This approach shows that, contra previous historiography, “students” in the modern sense did not exist prior to the May Fourth and so the Beijing University students did not merely “change China.” As Lanza argues, it was through the students’ experiences and activism that they defined themselves as a distinctive group of socio-political actors, largely independent of the Chinese regime (Lanza 2010, 5). This paper seeks to build upon Lanza’s work, taking into account both spaces and temporality (events and processes), as well as to explore the international dimensions.

The paper argues that polytechnic student activism stemmed from everyday events as well as momentous experiences formed at the intersection between campus, national, and transnational—particularly pan-Asian—developments. The 1970s was a difficult time for activism of any form in Singapore, and the power of the PAP government and its intolerance of autonomous activism bred a claustrophobic atmosphere of fear—the fear of state surveillance and repression. Yet even in such a context, events at various levels—be the repeated clashes with the polytechnic bureaucracy, intimidation and arrests of fellow students in Singapore, or crackdowns against progressive movements in another part of the world—encouraged a small number of independent-minded students.

The sources used here are largely written, drawn, and orated by the protagonists themselves. Using memoirs, Khairudin Aljunied has likewise traced an ethnographic history of Malay radicals as a productive force and avant garde, sprung forth from big

historical moments and everyday experiences that defined them (including those in prison) (Aljunied 2015). This paper similarly looks to utilize the students' writings to map their worldview and responses to the social and political issues that confronted them, and the historical context in which they moved. It does so by drawing upon the numbers of the English-language organ of the SPSU, the *Singapore Technocrat*, supplemented by a small number of interviews with former polytechnicians.

There is another reason for the lack of sources. The period in question, the 1970s, renders British and other foreign sources relatively less useful, while the Singapore archives on national security issues are still closed to researchers (Loh and Liew 2010). The archives hold records from the Ministry of Education (but not, it seems, the key policy papers), but they remain under restricted access and their use for research requires the work to be vetted and approved by the ministry. Thus this paper, for positive and negative reasons, draws heavily from the vivid reports, commentaries, letters, and political cartoons found in the *Technocrat*. These are useful in unraveling the lived experiences of students and the various issues that galvanized them.

To explore the spaces for social activism in 1970s Singapore is to map out the local and international factors, in addition to the PAP's political control and policies. Admittedly the polytechnicians could not, as Beijing University students did during the May Fourth movement, stand at a distance from the state (Lanza 2010). The main political opposition to the PAP, the left-wing Barisan Sosialis—which once possessed a mass base of workers, squatters, and Chinese-stream students—had been decimated by a series of crackdowns in the early 1960s; by 1968 the PAP held all the seats in Parliament. The combination of political repression and great fires in squatter areas also destroyed the strength of left-wing rural organizations. Urban squatters and slum dwellers were thus unable to resist being moved to public housing estates, nor were the lightermen who historically toiled and lived along the Singapore River: these communities were progressively atomized and socialized into homeownership citizen-workers in order to pay for their housing (Dobbs 2003; Loh 2013). The mid- to late 1960s also witnessed Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia and the closure of British military bases on the island, with alarming economic and security implications for its survival. Although the imagined repercussions did not materialize (Loh 2011), they created a state of crisis that allowed the PAP to push through restrictive laws that weakened the power of trade unions vis-à-vis employers, namely, the public agencies and foreign multinationals.

These PAP policies mobilized Singaporeans en masse to support the state industrialization program (Rodan 1989). The program was successful at the national level and benefited many Singaporeans materially, but it was driven forward at such a pace without oversight from opposition or civil society groups that it could not fail to have deleterious

effects at the local level. The changes produced considerable social and economic dislocations for various groups of people who lived and worked in Singapore. The move to high-rise housing was a difficult experience for the elderly and low-income families that struggled to pay their rent (Chen and Tai 1977; Hassan 1977); just as crucially, the agency and dynamism of semi-autonomous squatter communities was quickly replaced by a submission to the norms of the imposed social and economic system when they were rehoused in public housing (Loh 2013). With a “tripartite” labor system in place and trade unions no longer independent of the state and capital, low-wage workers also had no power to contest unreasonable employers and poor working conditions. This was the case for migrant workers who arrived in Singapore in the 1970s, largely Malaysians. Both new and older research on the decade also points to widening social and income gaps within the Chinese population—between graduates of English- and Chinese-stream education and between employees in economic sectors differentially linked to Singapore’s industrialization (Salaff 1988; Koh 2010).

University student activism was likewise drastically curtailed by the end of the 1960s. In 1963–66 student groups across different academic institutions led a nationwide struggle for university autonomy and student rights, but this eventually failed (Loh *et al.* 2012). Between 1964 and 1978, students seeking entry into institutions of higher education, including the polytechnic, had to produce state-endorsed “suitability certificates” to support their application, which barred expressly leftist students. In 1971 the Socialist Club at the University of Singapore, which had been a leading intellectual voice for left-wing socialism since 1953, was deregistered following years of declining membership and activity. These setbacks did not spell the end of university student activism: in 1974 architecture students at the University of Singapore captured the Students’ Union (USSU) and attempted to organize exploited workers in Jurong Industrial Estate—the centerpiece of the government’s ambitious industrialization program. This effort was also criminalized and suppressed by the state, but it nevertheless had a galvanizing influence on the SPSU’s student leaders.

The international dimensions of Singapore’s political economy in the 1970s are just as significant. As Garry Rodan demonstrates, international capital investment, largely American but also Japanese and European, provided the material impetus for the PAP’s export-led industrialization program. Singapore succeeded because it joined the newly formed international division of labor, functioning as the destination for Western companies going offshore to find cheaper factory sites and workers. Indeed, Singapore began to face a labor shortage and had to import Malaysian workers (Rodan 1989).

Yet, the ties between national control and international capital also encountered countervailing international forces. The genesis of the New Left in Europe and a grow-

ing belief in the power of communities opposed the top-down planning and technical expertise that was previously dominant. In Singapore, similarly, community organization efforts emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, led by Catholic social activists and influenced in part by liberation theology practiced in Latin American and other Asian countries (Barr 2010). The activists worked briefly in housing and industrial estates in Jurong, Toa Payoh, and Bukit Ho Swee, utilizing group-oriented techniques to help residents and migrant workers organize themselves to deal with housing and employment problems. Such activism was politically non-threatening, but its attempt at independent collective action stirred the state enough to quickly stamp it out (Loh 2013). Despite this, the Catholic activists, joined later by lawyers and former polytechnic student leaders, continued their work until they were detained in 1987.

The student activism at the Singapore Polytechnic formed another flank of this “inter-nation-local” triangle of mutual influence in the 1970s. It was precisely the intersection of such varied scales and trajectories of events that defined the activism. This qualifies the categorization of university student activism according to world-historical or pan-Asian trends in the recent edited volume by Meredith Weiss, Edward Aspinall, and Mark Thompson (2012). The editors distinguish between two overlapping periods: first, a “leftist” wave between the late 1950s and early 1970s that was partly influenced by the European New Left. This was followed by a “developmentalist” movement in the 1960s and 1970s that addressed the economic programs of the state and their social effects (Weiss *et al.* 2012). Such a clear-cut demarcation is, however, problematic. In Singapore (not included in the edited volume), polytechnic student activists straddled both waves: the time frame is the 1970s, with some New Left influences, but the polytechnicians were also critical of the social ramifications of the PAP’s industrialization program.

“Blur Blocks” Becoming Polytechnicians

In terms of identity, were the polytechnicians Communists or students? The charge of Communist subversion has long dominated scholarship on Singapore’s history (Lee 1996). However, recent research into the declassified British archives has traced the purges of the Left in the early 1960s to the desire of Singaporean and Malayan leaders to remove their political rivals rather than to deal with a real threat of subversion (Wade 2013). Another way to move beyond the subversion framework is to fully contextualize left-wing activism rather than to make a simplistic link between the activism and international or Malayan Communism. My earlier work has explored various aspects of the

history of the Left in postwar Singapore, such as trade unions and rural associations. The left-wing movements were undoubtedly attracted to the Marxist ideology, had Communists in their leadership, and were inspired by such events as the Communists coming to power in China in 1949. Yet, these movements are better understood as local and largely autonomous responses to socioeconomic issues and colonial policy in Singapore and Malaya within the frames of anticolonialism and socialism (Fernandez and Loh 2008; Loh 2013).

The polytechnicians may be likened to the University Socialist Club, which, while inspired by radical socialist and egalitarian ideas, was not a front for the Communist Party of Malaya. The club acted primarily as a student group, working on the basic premise that university students had a role to play in the political and social life of Malaya. This role entailed, on the one hand, upholding the interests of marginalized groups, such as workers, peasants, and other oppressed students, and on the other, articulating the intellectual framework of Malayan socialism that would transform the country into a nation-state (Loh *et al.* 2012). In a similar vein, albeit in a postcolonial context, the SPSU was concerned over what polytechnic students could do about social and political issues in Singapore in the 1970s.

There was still a spectrum of activism on the social role of students in the period, although the left wing was quickly diminishing. As Low Yit Leng recalled, when she was a freshman some of her seniors were very militant and ambitious, desiring to control all the student clubs in the polytechnic and opposing religion- or welfare-based societies.⁵⁾ According to Tan Tee Seng, the 15th and 16th Student Councils were extremely politicized, comprising largely mature-age and Malaysian students. By contrast, his cohort was apathetic, literally “blur blocks”: freshly graduated from secondary schools and ignorant of social and political issues. As he explained, he became a student leader—the vice-president of the 17th Council in 1976—by default when the Internal Security Department (ISD) arrested the leaders of the previous council.⁶⁾ It was common knowledge among the polytechnicians that there were polytechnic students with ties to the Communists, particularly in the Chinese Language Society. This was a cultural society that carried out clandestine activities, such as reading banned literature, and some of its members either joined the Communist underground or were detained by the ISD.⁷⁾

The polytechnicians’ identity was shaped also by their reading. They devoured what they could lay their hands on, both Communist and non-Communist progressive literature. The students obtained some of the literature from independent bookstores at Bras

5) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

6) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

7) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

Basah—a source of leftist and progressive literature. Other literature came through networks of book fairs organized periodically by the polytechnicians, who also reviewed the books and brought them to the knowledge of the general student population in the polytechnic.⁸⁾ In focusing on the everyday spaces and lived experiences of students, Lanza argues that reading in itself does not politicize them (Lanza 2010). While this is a useful primer for examining other factors, reading certainly had an impact. It was not whether reading or experiences mattered more, but the way both factors intersected and influenced each other. In other words, reading was an experience: the external ideas and situations narrated in the books enabled students to contextualize local issues, just as everyday experiences and events in Singapore helped them to locate the abstract. Polytechnician Tan Tee Seng found some of the works relatively easy to relate to, such as the *Communist Manifesto*, Soviet material on workers, the revolution against the Tsar, and Maoist texts on China's development and the Cultural Revolution. The students did not read with much self-reflexivity; they were surprised to learn later about the horrors perpetuated by the Gang of Four. However, they did not passively absorb the propaganda, finding the more stridently ideological material difficult to stomach. What moved the students were the emotional stories in the literature as much as ideological imperatives, and universal themes such as heroism, patriotism, and repression resonated strongly.⁹⁾ Pak Geok Choo of the 18th Students' Council recounted that, besides leftist material such as George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, she enjoyed reading the work of Pearl Buck and other progressive American books from the popular publisher Penguin.¹⁰⁾

The polytechnicians' identity as students was based on their response to the instrumentalist notion defined by the state: polytechnic students were seen as technicians in training who comprised the blue-collar workforce for the industrial development of Singapore. The polytechnicians, however, sought to define the polytechnic student in a more expansive and activist way, just as the critical articles in the *Technocrat* gave the term "technocrat" a wider meaning than merely someone who applies technological knowledge to practical problems. Students, an article in the *Technocrat* urged, were not "mechanical robots or digits"; neither should the "primary and even the secondary focus [of polytechnic education] are (*sic*) on science and technology."¹¹⁾ Disagreeing with a former principal of the polytechnic, the article argued that liberal studies, which was removed from the curriculum by the PAP government in 1959 (Loh 2015), was crucial for treating a person as an individual human being. The article concluded that memoriz-

8) Author's interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

9) Author's interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

10) Author's interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

11) "The Polytechnic and the Union," *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(2) (May 1974): 4, 10.

ing engineering formulae did not prepare students for confronting or resolving social issues in the outside world:

True, we enroll in the Polytechnic primarily to study on how to make a living, but can we ignore the injustices and problems in our society, pretending that they do not exist and study conscientiously?¹²⁾

The SPSU responded to the PAP's functional view of polytechnic students by attacking what it viewed as their apathy toward social and political issues. The union called student apathy "a dark chapter" in the institution's history, "not only unrestrained, but . . . at its peak."¹³⁾ This critique of widespread disinterest was an attempt to define the identity and role of students by way of accusation. The critique made certain modes of thinking and behavior in an authoritarian state that were rational at an individual level—students accepting the national development imperative and focusing on their studies and future career—harmful for society and the nation. The charge of apathy thus constitutes a modernist discourse, where it was deemed that through activism an existing and problematic state of affairs could be improved upon (Loh *et al.* 2012). The modernism highlighted how the polytechnicians viewed students as having a bigger role in the social and political life of the nation. This was precisely what the state wanted to discourage.

Significantly, the polytechnicians' self-identity was defined not only in opposition to the state's prescription but also in relation to how they viewed non-polytechnic students, namely, secondary, pre-university, and university students. As "Polytechnician" wrote in the *Technocrat* in 1974, the polytechnic offered a new start for secondary and pre-university students who had spent years studying and then "vomiting out" facts and formulae in the examinations, and who risked becoming "educated" people "standing on a lonely pedestal" and unconcerned about social issues in the country.¹⁴⁾ Polytechnician also criticized the lesser status of polytechnic students, noting that "polytechnicians would end up producing the wealth while our counterparts in the universities would be the ruling class of the nation!" Citing the British economic historian Malcolm Caldwell and school principal (and former politician) Francis Thomas, Polytechnician asked his/her peers to be more critical minded and ready to disagree with the government, before concluding:

Instead, while in our pursuit of engineering knowledge, let us keep our faculty of critical reasoning and judgment alive. Let us be alert to the needs of society especially the poorer ones and attempt

12) "The Polytechnic and the Union": 4, 10.

13) "Union Awareness," *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(2) (May 1974): 2.

14) "Our Education System: Pausing to Examine It," *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(1) (April 1974): 1.

a constructive approach to the issues facing society.¹⁵⁾

The relationship between the SPSU and USSU was an interestingly ambivalent one. While unhappy about their subordinate position to undergraduates in the political economy of Singapore's national development, the polytechnicians clearly looked up to their university counterparts. As Tan Tee Seng explained, the USSU's efforts—under its charismatic President Tan Wah Piow—to mobilize workers in Jurong Industrial Estate in 1974 inspired the polytechnicians. By contrast, Tan Tee Seng spoke of himself and his fellow students as playing ancillary roles, such as providing manpower in flood relief efforts, or assisting in Tan Wah Piow's Retrenchment Research Center for workers in Jurong. Tellingly, Tan Tee Seng said little about polytechnicians providing the intellectual leadership in student activism.

What were the reasons for the polytechnicians' seeming sense of inferiority? While not understating the role of manpower support, their weak self-identity reflects the stigmatizing effect of PAP policy toward polytechnic education. In 1968 the government gave the University of Singapore the sole right to award degrees in engineering, accounting, and commerce. These were subjects taught at diploma level in the Singapore Polytechnic, which hitherto also had ambitions to expand into a technical university. In fact, for several years in the mid-1960s, the university and polytechnic had attempted an unwieldy arrangement to jointly offer degree courses (Loh 2015). Thereafter, however, with the degree courses hived off to the university, the polytechnic became a less prestigious and economically attractive cousin, an institution for producing mid-level technicians. The polytechnicians' weaker self-identity suggests that they had internalized the secondary role of the polytechnic.

Mastery of language was also a factor. The polytechnicians wrote and spoke in the same medium as the undergraduates: English. However, they appeared acutely aware of their less effective and eloquent command of English, although it was adequate for its purpose. In this sense, the culture of polytechnic student activism was again constrained by state policy. The Ministry of Education required secondary students enrolling in the polytechnic to obtain a pass in English; the British colonial government had required a merit grade, but this was deemed too difficult for students from vernacular secondary schools (*ibid.*). Thus, as Tan Tee Seng readily admitted, although English was the main medium of writing and communication in the polytechnic, the standard was purely functional and lower than what would be written in, say, the *Singapore Undergrad*, the organ of the USSU.¹⁶⁾

15) "Our Education System: Pausing to Examine It": 1.

16) Author's interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

At times, though, the nature of polytechnic education gave the students' activist discourse a distinctive character. They could use the language of engineering and applied science to address social and political issues. A standout article in the *Technocrat* argued that the polytechnic's principal, teachers, and students all had a part to play in decision making on educational issues. The article made a vivid analogy of the authoritarian state as a malfunctioning system:

The infra-structure of our society provides, in all her organizations, the rulers at the top and the "ruled" at the bottom. From a theoretical point of view, work can be carried out smoothly. The directives flow through the so-called proper channels, from top to bottom, while there's the hope that feed-back informations would flow at the same time in the reverse. It is ideal and it should be the ultimate goal to have a proper dialogue in this respect. However, where decisions and directives, come out from one man and the feedback goes to him or is censured by him as well, its [*sic*] time some thought be given to the system.¹⁷⁾

Thus, the author could point out the flaws in Singapore's political system without recourse to ideological vocabulary such as "democracy" or "human rights" (though the polytechnicians used it on other occasions). Far from being rigid and oppressive, the applied science language was flexible enough to accommodate a logic that could assess and reinterpret political ideas. Such a language may be more persuasive to technical-stream students, but more crucially it also highlights the strong self-identity, in positive terms, of the polytechnicians.

Campus Risings

The 7,000-odd students who attended Singapore Polytechnic in the 1970s were not a unified physical community but divided in several ways. For one, they were dispersed among three campuses: at Ayer Rajah (commonly called ARC, attended by the engineering first-years); Prince Edward (PEC, the original campus built in 1958 and which the seniors attended); and the newest campus at Dover, completed in 1978. In addition, the students were divided by their courses: "the Common, ITC, and the Aero boys" (the common engineering course for first-years, industrial technician certificate course, and aeronautical engineering course), as an article in the *Technocrat* stated. There was also a linguistic and communication divide between students from English- and Chinese-stream secondary schools.¹⁸⁾ However, despite these divisions, there were formative

17) "Freshmen Orientation Convention 1974/1975," *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(3) (June 1974): 5.

18) "Ayer Rajah Campus: No Pride Only Prejudice," *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(2) (May 1974): 5.

campus experiences that gave rise to a shared identity among the polytechnicians.

A considerable number of SPSU members in the early 1970s were older students from Malaysia who had some prior working experience before joining the polytechnic. Being “foreign” itself was an advantage in fostering activism: the students spent more time on campus and were more keenly concerned about and involved in campus issues and activities.¹⁹⁾ Through Malaysian students in the SPSU and USSU, the polytechnicians became aware of social issues in Malaysia—by then a separate nation-state—such as the hunger strike by peasants in Baling, Kedah, and the eviction of squatters in Tasek Utara, Johor Bahru, in 1974.²⁰⁾

For the polytechnicians, campus study (or non-study, as was frequently the case for student activists) and life was important in germinating a shared sense of mission. They spent much of their time in discussions and planning activities at the Union House, particularly in its conference room, which sometimes served as a study room during the examination period. In 1974, the 13th Students’ Council was dragged into controversy for an allegedly excessive use of union funds to renovate the conference room.²¹⁾ This showed how important the Union House was to SPSU students.

That campus matters superseded ideology was expressed cogently in the polytechnicians’ call for student autonomy and an independent student government. The SPSU leadership viewed itself as a form of student government with its authority and powers, analogous to a national government and deserving of respect and cooperation by the polytechnic administration. As Tan Tee Seng pointed out, the SPSU’s constitution—as a formal document for student governance—was invigorating for student activism and a contrast to the secondary school experience, where student leaders were appointed by the administration.

The polytechnicians believed that their authority was not respected by the polytechnic’s administrators in many ways. A sore point between the 17th Students’ Council and the polytechnic’s board of governors was the latter’s attempt to withhold funds the union needed to organize campus activities.²²⁾ Such obstruction prompted the council to cite the constitution to obtain the funds, for instance to organize buses that would service the three campuses.²³⁾ Pak also distinguished between the successful work camp organized by the union, which had freshmen volunteering in the farms of Singapore as a way of reflecting on their social role, and the industrial orientation program organized by the

19) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

20) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

21) “A Lesson to Learn,” *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(1) (April 1974).

22) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

23) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

administration, which she deemed a failure.²⁴⁾ Low Yit Leng of the 17th Council also recalled an instance of student militancy: a banner hung outside the Union House condemning the polytechnic administration.²⁵⁾

The pages of the *Technocrat* were unsurprisingly filled with “curses” about inept, unconcerned, and high-handed campus officials.²⁶⁾ During the 1974 freshmen orientation, about 40 seniors, including several SPSU exco members, were accused of ragging freshmen. The assistant registrar responded by refusing to allow the students to enter the Ayer Rajah campus. This prompted a sit-in protest outside his office, since the denial of entry prevented the student leaders from carrying out the orientation program. The official refused to leave his office to meet the students, and the stalemate was resolved only when the principal drove down from Prince Edward to speak with the students. Judging the assistant registrar as lacking “initiative and foresight,” the SPSU applied another cutting engineering metaphor to the incident:

As if [*sic*] in a highly mechanized system, only a loose screw or nut is enough to send the whole system, be it a computer or compressor unit, running into shambles which only the programmer or operator can put right.²⁷⁾

The yearly orientation for freshmen was a regular event by which the polytechnicians sought to attack the issue of student apathy. The SPSU’s Freshmen Orientation Committee, which organized the program, approached it as a formative event in socializing secondary school students into a full range of polytechnic student life in addition to the academic aspects. The SPSU portrayed itself as the “missing link” between the student population and Singapore society.²⁸⁾ The union was keen to raise awareness of its work among the “freshies”; the theme for the 1974 orientation program was “Union Awareness through Active Participation.”²⁹⁾

Orientation was, however, a contested experience that meant different things to different people. There was a dark side to it: the ragging of freshmen. Despite their efforts, the polytechnicians could not eradicate the problem (or rumors of ragging), and it was uncertain where orientation ended and ragging began. In principle, ragging was no longer tolerated. In the immediate post-World War II years, progressive students at the University of Malaya, including the leaders of the USSU and Socialist Club, had

24) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

25) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

26) “Diplomatic Alienation,” *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(3) (June 1974): 4.

27) “Diplomatic Alienation”: 4.

28) “The Polytechnic and the Union”: 10.

29) “Union Awareness”: 2.

decried ragging as a humiliating experience for freshmen that had no place in a country that was attempting to resolve far greater issues such as colonial rule and exploitation of the masses (Loh *et al.* 2012). The polytechnicians were aware of the implications of ragging: a lead article in the *Technocrat* in 1974 declared it a thing of the past, while the Freshmen Orientation Committee, made up of SPSU members, purportedly conducted the program on a “very large and responsible scale.”³⁰⁾ Tan Tee Seng also joined the union partly because he wanted the Freshmen Orientation Committee to stop ragging new students.³¹⁾ At an abstract level, the polytechnicians were able to distinguish between orientation and ragging: the former was to push the freshman out from the ivory tower to involvement in the wider community, while the latter merely dehumanized the individual.

Yet, contributors to the *Technocrat* regularly observed that ragging remained a common experience for freshmen; at times even SPSU leaders themselves were accused of doing it. At the 1974 orientation there was an alleged incident committed by senior students, where a freshman was forced to remove his shirt, shoes, and socks and gallop around the basketball court.³²⁾ Other students felt that the union’s zeal to socialize freshmen was not very different from ragging practices. A cartoon in the same year showed a reluctant, bewildered freshman in the grasp of two students, one representing the Freshmen Orientation Committee and the other a senior student, both seeking robustly to introduce him to polytechnic life (insert).³³⁾ Another writer felt that the activities organized by the Freshmen Orientation Committee were not interesting and ineffective in the long term, so it was important for the seniors to assist and communicate with the freshmen throughout their stay at the polytechnic.³⁴⁾

Seemingly trivial events at the polytechnic were also formative experiences for student activism, for they encouraged subversive interpretations. Canteen fare and prices was one such factor. The ARC canteen, opened in 1972 and run by the polytechnic administration, was a frequent target of student criticism. A survey two years later found the canteen food to be unhygienic, poor in quality, and overpriced—ostensibly 25 cents for an egg and 10 cents for bread.³⁵⁾ While the quality of food subsequently improved, the canteen remained a focal point for student criticism in another way: during lunch, polytechnic staff were seen to “steal away from the school compound in their automobiles

30) “Orientation and the Single Freshman,” *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(3) (June 1974): 1.

31) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

32) Letter by S. A. Tan, *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(3) (June 1974).

33) “Freshmen Orientation Convention 1974/1975”: 5.

34) “Orientation and the Single Freshman.”

35) “Unhygienic Practices at PEC Canteen,” *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(1) (April 1974); Letter by Simon Lim to the Editor, *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(2) (May 1974): 8.

towards much greater culinary skill”—there being no food stalls within walking distance of the campus.³⁶⁾ A letter in the *Technocrat* alleged other grievances: the yong tau foo stall owner beating up three army boys, and the canteen assistants gambling in the open. The author emphasized that s/he brought both incidents to the registrar’s attention, but he did nothing.³⁷⁾ Everyday events and places such as lunch break and the canteen fostered a social divide between students on the one hand and canteen operators, teachers, and administrators on the other. Such experiences affected the general student population, but it was the polytechnicians who linked them to themes about inequality and student activism.

The 1974 survey also found that students at the ARC were unhappy with early starting times for lectures (8 am). Many first-years were displeased about being taught by students from the University of Singapore, which meant that the lessons had to accommodate the undergraduates’ schedules at the university (or that the undergraduates sometimes came late for class).³⁸⁾ Furthermore, social and recreational facilities at the polytechnic were lacking. The male toilet was considered too small and poorly ventilated. There were also inadequate sports and recreational facilities, which were limited to table tennis and board games such as carrom; the lack of a billiards table was frequently grumbled about.³⁹⁾ The *Technocrat* joked about students being able to play table tennis if they could find the long-missing ball, or checkers if they used the bottle caps from soft drinks.⁴⁰⁾

Speaking Truth to Power

Some campus and student matters transcended the physical boundaries of the polytechnic and could escalate into national issues. One example was the hike in bus fares in 1974. The SPSU supported a nationwide student protest against a proposed hike of 10 cents by the Singapore Bus Services (SBS), the monopoly service provider in Singapore, an increase that was supported by the PAP government. The protest ultimately failed, with the SPSU accusing the authorities of ignoring their requests for information.⁴¹⁾ Despite the failure, the protest revealed that the polytechnicians did not merely advocate for other groups (in this case, bus riders), but from their own interests and experiences

36) “Ayer Rajah Campus: No Pride Only Prejudice”: 5.

37) Letter by Simon Lim to the Editor: 8.

38) “Life at Ayer Rajah Campus,” *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(1) (April 1974).

39) “Life at Ayer Rajah Campus.”

40) “Ayer Rajah Campus: No Pride Only Prejudice.”

41) “Student Suppression,” *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(3) (June 1974).

as students using public transport. The polytechnic students commonly endured long, exhausting trips on crowded buses or were simply unable to board them. The polytechnic administration chartered two buses for students, but this token gesture was seen to be inadequate.⁴²⁾ Weiss *et al.* (2012) have framed students as being unique in acting on behalf of others, but in this case the polytechnicians were combining their own needs with those of other groups.

The protest against the bus hike was an inter-student union affair. Working closely with other student groups, the SPSU espoused the importance of student unity. The *Technocrat* carried an article on the hike by the Students' Christian Movement in Singapore. Sympathetic toward the daily toil of bus drivers and conductors, the article highlighted the crux of the issue: the government's abandoning its role in providing public transport for the lower-income group and endorsing the profit-seeking behavior of the bus company. This policy stance of the PAP, the article emphasized, stemmed from the government's pursuit of foreign capital investment for the development of Singapore, which now penetrated the public services. The article concluded that the solution lay in recovering state control of public transport to ensure affordable and adequate bus services for the general population. The article was accompanied by a cartoon (insert) of an SBS bus driving off a cliff students' unions from the four institutions of higher learning—the University of Singapore, Nanyang University, Ngee Ann Technical College, and Singapore Polytechnic—that had organized a petition against the bus hike.⁴³⁾

Bus hikes were vital learning experiences that brought polytechnicians into encounters with state officials and PAP leaders. In a protest against a subsequent bus hike, Tan Tee Seng recounted that the minister for transport refused to meet him and other student leaders who had collected signatures for a petition against the hike. The students also argued the issue with the polytechnic's registrar; Low Guan Onn, deputy chairman of the polytechnic board of governors; and Ahmad Mattar, parliamentary secretary for education. In Tan Tee Seng's view, the polytechnicians were remarkably bold and "militant," carrying wooden sticks around the campus to prevent the security guards from removing their posters against the hike (although no violence was actually used).⁴⁴⁾

More worryingly, bus hikes also made the students aware of surveillance and harassment by state security forces, which caused much fear and anxiety. Pak remembered with some amusement her consternation when she and fellow polytechnicians were taken away by the police for handing out cyclostyled pamphlets in Jurong against a bus hike. Worried about her parents finding out about her activism, she did not inform them but

42) "Ayer Rajah Campus: No Pride Only Prejudice."

43) "Who Benefits from the Bus Hike?" *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(1) (April 1974): 5.

44) Author's interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

was eventually released from police custody without being charged.⁴⁵⁾ Such fear and paranoia of the state permeated the experience of student activism in the 1970s. Pak insisted that what she called the “White Terror” was real, derived from both firsthand knowledge and stories of militant seniors being arrested.⁴⁶⁾ Tan Tee Seng and his fellow students often talked about the “professional students” who had been planted among the student population by the ISD.⁴⁷⁾ Following the arrests of the leaders of the 16th Students’ Council, Tan Tee Seng was sufficiently spooked to heed the warnings of students from the USSU and “went into hiding” to avoid arrest (no one came for him).⁴⁸⁾

But besides fear, awareness of the repressive power of the state also bred anger and a sense of injustice. Of the 1974 bus hike protest, one student angrily recounted his/her harrowing experience with ISD officials:

It is regrettable that the Government has not acknowledged students’ sincerity in the campaign. This deliberate air of arrogant indifference has sadly turned into repression as exhibited by the perverse and pervasive presence of the Internal Security Department (I.S.D.).

Students’ actions during the campaign were closely watched and several active ones were constantly harassed by the I.S.D. Four of our students have already been “invited out.” As in each “interview,” which takes place in a coffee-house, the student was reminded of his well-being and the consequences of dissentment. Even the welfare of the members of his family was brought up. He was also prompted to co-operate with the authorities and was “bribed” with mere privileges and benefits like an easy stay in the Polytechnic, into selling his conscience, by going into a state of inaction or betraying the Union by being an informant. These statements are not exaggerated! They are the truth—the threats we received are real!⁴⁹⁾

The comment reveals the making of the polytechnicians’ self-identity: they saw themselves as an important activist group, but also persecuted and vulnerable. They faced a dilemma, being concerned about the country’s issues but having their enthusiasm met with surveillance and intimidation.

The encounters with the ISD over the bus hike led one writer in the *Technocrat* to point to a larger issue: the “alienation within our society that manifested itself through lack of grass-roots contact between the governors and the governed.”⁵⁰⁾ To the students, Toh Chin Chye, the longtime chairman of the polytechnic’s board of governors (since 1959) and senior PAP leader, was a blatant symbol of political control. Toh’s unpopularity among students was at least a decade old. In 1964, to bar young subversives, the PAP

45) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

46) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

47) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

48) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

49) “Student Suppression”: 2.

50) “Diplomatic Alienation”: 4.

required applicants to institutions of higher learning, including the Singapore Polytechnic, to produce state-approved “suitability certificates.” A decade later, a lesser but still significant issue provoked the polytechnicians’ anger: Toh refusing to attend the Freshmen Orientation Convention held at the Shangri-La Hotel, organized by the SPSU.⁵¹⁾ Toh claimed that he and other polytechnic administrators had not been properly invited or consulted over the choice of venue (which was certainly an expensive one), but a student retorted in the *Technocrat* that the chairman had reached, and published, his conclusions without listening to the students’ side of the story. The writer demanded:

[H]ow much attention can we get from this man, who besides being the Chairman of the Board of Governors, is also the Chairman of the Peoples’ [sic] Action Party, Minister of Science and Technology and the Vice-Chancellor of the Singapore University?⁵²⁾

The fact that the *Straits Times*, the main English-language daily in Singapore, had duly published Toh’s remarks without editorial refrain also reveals how relations between the SPSU and the state-controlled national media were generally frosty. In 1974, a scandal broke out at the polytechnic with three students caught stealing examination papers. The SPSU acknowledged the deed (calling it a “leakage”) but attributed it to a very small number of black sheep in the student population, while pointing out the (admittedly less than convincing) mitigating factors: the lax security that had allowed the students to commit the theft, and the fixation with examinations that led them to do so. The union was also angered by reports in the *New Nation*, a small English-language newspaper, claiming the number of students involved in the theft to be 12 and that “hundreds of students” had benefited unfairly from the dishonest act.⁵³⁾ The SPSU was further incensed to discover that an upcoming episode of a television series was ostensibly “all about stealing examination papers” at the polytechnic.⁵⁴⁾

Difficulties with the PAP government arose also because many SPSU leaders were Malaysian citizens. In the 1974 ragging incident that led to a sit-in, a lecturer further angered students by asking whether they were Malaysians or Singaporeans.⁵⁵⁾ The students’ response revealed how, unlike the lecturer, they identified themselves primarily as students rather than by nationality. In another case in the same year, several Malaysian students from the USSU were interrogated by police who were checking for illegal immigrants in Queenstown New Town. The students duly produced their pass-

51) “Toh’s ‘No’ to Invitation to Attend Poly Orientation Convention,” *Straits Times*, May 19, 1974.

52) “A Vague Reputation,” *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(3) (June 1974): 2.

53) “Editorial: Examination Leakage,” *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(1) (April 1974): 3.

54) “To Condemn or Not?” *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(2) (May 1974): 9.

55) “Diplomatic Alienation”: 4.

ports to identify themselves, but the police confiscated them and instructed the students to report to the police station the following day. The *Technocrat* decried the incident as “a mass scale harassment of union officials.”⁵⁶⁾ Again, in supporting its counterparts at the University of Singapore, the SPSU highlighted its commitment to student solidarity across institutions and nationalities.

However, while the polytechnicians learned of firsthand accounts and partial rumors of repression in Singapore, there was a lack of a “genealogy” of left-wing activism. On the one hand, the students knew that surveillance and repression did not take place far away, but on the very campuses of the polytechnic. Tan Tee Seng recalled the ISD’s arrests of current and former members of the students’ council and the Chinese Language Society in September 1976. The government accused these students and polytechnic graduates, as well as other students from Ngee Ann Technical College, of working with former leftists of the 1960s to supply the Communist insurgents in Malaysia with transmitters and walkie-talkies.⁵⁷⁾ Yet, polytechnicians like Tan Tee Seng were disappointed to discover that, for some reason, the older leftists did not regard them as activists on an equal footing. Generally, though separated by only a decade, the polytechnicians lacked knowledge of the older political activism.⁵⁸⁾ As Low Yit Leng explained, they “did not have anyone to look up to” and had to find their own ways to organize.⁵⁹⁾ Thus, while polytechnic student activism forged links with other student groups, it was unable to do so with the older leftist group in Singapore.

Pan-Asian and Trans-regional Networks and Imaginings

Besides local and national developments, pan-Asian and trans-regional networks were important in shaping polytechnic student activism. The international student networks were a conduit for obtaining leftist and critical literature and thus helped raise the social awareness of students who had not read the humanities in secondary school. As Tan Tee Seng explained, it was through the SPSU’s contact with international student groups such as the Asian Students’ Association (ASA) and Federation of United Kingdom and Eire Malaysian and Singapore Students’ Organizations that the students became aware of such works.⁶⁰⁾ Low Yit Leng was so involved in these international forums that she became

56) “Diplomatic Alienation”: 4.

57) “Smashed! Red ‘Brain’ Raid,” *Straits Times*, September 7, 1976.

58) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

59) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

60) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

ASA assistant secretary-general for two years after graduating from the polytechnic.⁶¹⁾

The international contact helped the polytechnicians place Singapore in an Asian context. As Tan Tee Seng observed, ASA conferences enabled them to meet students of other countries and place themselves on the political spectrum. Students from China and Hong Kong, he surmised, were radical and “put us to shame.” On the other hand, the Japanese students from the International Students’ Association were even “more blur”—more depoliticized—than Singaporeans.⁶²⁾ For Tan Tee Seng, knowing about student activism in other countries led him to view the Lee Kuan Yew government as ruling like a “mafia,” but also to realize that repression was a sign of weakness.⁶³⁾ Conversely, as Low Yit Leng explained, the international exchange also helped students from other countries understand that social issues existed even in a prosperous city-state like Singapore, and that it was more difficult to be a student activist there than in their own countries.⁶⁴⁾

Polytechnicians also meaningfully visited or otherwise learned about the social role of other institutions of higher learning in Southeast Asia. For instance, they visited Thammasat University, a focal point for left-wing student activism and Thailand’s short-lived democratization in the early 1970s. From such contact, Pak was inspired by the knowledge that Thai student activists went to the countryside to experience the lives of peasants.⁶⁵⁾ As with the Thais, meeting students from the Philippines, then under the rule of martial law imposed by Ferdinand Marcos, enabled the polytechnicians to reflect on both inspiring efforts toward radical change and the conservative reaction from military and authoritarian forces in Southeast Asia.⁶⁶⁾

The international student seminars also brought current issues and ideas to the polytechnicians. In 1974 the Hong Kong Federation of Students organized the first Asian Students’ Seminar on Higher Education, funded by the ASA. The seminar was attended by delegates and representatives from 12 countries, including a second-year production engineering student from the Singapore Polytechnic. Covered in detail in the May 1974 issue of the *Technocrat*, the seminar raised issues of concern to the SPSU, such as academic freedom and student solidarity, the reform of higher education, and the concept of student government. On the last point, the seminar supported the formation of student governments and national unions of students in Asian countries—germane to what the

61) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

62) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

63) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

64) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

65) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

66) Author’s interview with Tan Tee Seng, Pak Geok Choo, and Low Yit Leng.

polytechnicians themselves were advocating. The seminar also backed the Singaporeans by adopting a resolution to condemn the PAP government's repression of student activism.⁶⁷⁾

Although the seminar made rather sweeping generalizations about the state of higher education in Asia, its discussions and pronouncements helped SPSU students define the meaning and boundaries of key concepts like "students," "education," and "Asia." On the reform of higher education in the region, the seminar did not confine itself to technical or administrative questions but argued that the issue ought to be considered in relation to the political, economic, and sociocultural aspects of the country. The report in the *Technocrat* adjudged education systems in Hong Kong and Singapore to be "elitist" and "colonialist," calling for the "[r]emoval of much of the western bias in curriculum irrelevant to Asian social needs and its replacement by studies of culture, language and development of Asia, Africa and Central and South America."⁶⁸⁾

The seminar had a strong focus on Asian issues but also discussed developments elsewhere in the former colonial world. The report attacked Western imperialism, citing a range of international cases, including liberation movements in Africa and the Pacific islands and US nuclear tests in the Pacific. It also demanded the immediate release of political prisoners in Asia and reinforced the activist adage of students going beyond the classroom to learn from "progressive groups" such as workers and peasants. Consistent with the emerging New Left, the seminar also condemned racism, specifically the oppression of aborigines in Australia (which sent a delegation to the seminar).⁶⁹⁾

Conclusion

Jan Myrdal (2013) called for approaching Marxism not as a "cut to measure" ideology, but historically, as shaped by contemporary perspectives and contexts and whose meanings were varied and open-ended. This paper broadly utilizes this principle to discern the sources and basis of polytechnic student activism in Singapore. Admittedly, the polytechnicians shared some notable similarities with the earlier left-wing socialist movement. One instance is the polytechnicians' attempt to contest and redefine the role of the student, just as the University Socialist Club had done earlier. The polytechnicians urged a socially relevant role for polytechnic students rather than merely graduating into technician jobs in the industrial economy. This role was socially expansive: it reached

67) "Asian Students' Seminar on Higher Education," *The Singapore Technocrat* 3(2) (May 1974): 3, 10.

68) "Asian Students' Seminar on Higher Education": 1, 3, 10.

69) "Asian Students' Seminar on Higher Education": 1, 3, 10.

out to students at other institutions of higher learning in Singapore, to Singaporean and migrant workers (such as bus users and Malaysian workers in Jurong Industrial Estate), and to international students.

Nevertheless, the activism at the polytechnic possessed a unique character, as shaped by a combination of international, national, and campus influences in the 1970s. These influences intersected with and reinforced one another. Thus, state surveillance and repression generally had a deterrent effect, but knowledge and rumors of it also encouraged the polytechnicians and imbued their worldview with a sense of vulnerability. Likewise, most polytechnic students became depoliticized under the PAP government and focused on their studies, but this state of affairs gave the polytechnicians a “crisis” (student apathy) and the weapons to attack it (orientation and petitions), while also giving them a sense of mission. Conversely, campus issues and incidents became staging points for criticizing the indifferent or repressive state: for instance, through the perceived responses of the PAP leaders and ISD to the bus hike protest, or the tension between the SPSU and the polytechnic administration over the use of union funds, orientation, and ragging. It was difficult to separate state and campus when, as polytechnicians pointed out, the chairman of the polytechnic’s board of governors was also a cabinet minister.

To add to Lanza’s research on the spaces that helped form the modern Chinese student (Lanza 2010), international spaces and events were an important part of the polytechnicians’ lived experiences in Singapore. At the international level, reading critical literature gave students the conceptual tools to comprehend politics and economics in Singapore, while also clarifying and localizing the ideas and situations expressed in the literature, most commonly themes such as heroic endeavor, radical socialism, and political repression. The conferences that allowed the polytechnicians to meet their Asian and non-Asian peers also helped them plot themselves—and Singapore’s place—on a transnational mental map of student activism. Likewise, international networks of students gave Singaporeans a larger identity and collective support beyond the boundaries of the polytechnic and the nation-state.

A case can then be made for investigating student activism outside of the “leaders” or “elite.” If, as Weiss *et al.* (2012) argue, one of the central questions is the identity or self-identity of students, then polytechnic students deserve a place in the wider scholarship on student activism, which has tended to focus on Anglophone university students or, in the case of Singapore, Chinese-stream students from middle schools and Nanyang University. The polytechnicians were not simply “manpower activists.” While generally aligned with the efforts of English- and Chinese-stream university student activists, the polytechnicians distinguished themselves from both undergraduates and school students,

sometimes positively but at other times in more self-stigmatizing ways. One striking difference was how the polytechnicians adapted the logic of applied science and engineering—which they learned in their classes—into a critique of an authoritarian regime.

What does a study of polytechnic student activism bring to Singapore historiography? Important research is being done to reinterpret the political history of the immediate postwar years beyond the frame of Communist subversion. If there is a criticism to be made of this scholarship, it is that it still focuses on big events (particularly the transition to a nation-state) and movements (portions of the Singapore and Malayan Left). The subject of polytechnic students, however, looks at smaller and less dramatic histories. It provides a glimpse into the dynamics and tensions that lay beneath the political economy of Singapore. In concrete terms, the polytechnicians' efforts were weak and largely ineffective, but they highlight how the PAP did not enjoy absolute hegemonic dominance in Singapore, as some scholars have suggested (Barr 2014; Chua 1997). The PAP's power circumscribed student activism in the 1970s but also fostered it in other ways. In some important ways, too, Singapore remained a politically open and active city-state: the spaces and events at campus and international levels that influenced the activism connected students from different institutions and other countries, provided access to critical literature, brought awareness of larger issues outside the polytechnic, and encouraged advocacy on behalf of others. The polytechnicians may thus help us to throw light on this largely unwritten history of Singapore.

Accepted: December 11, 2017

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Liberational Justice in the Political Thought of Ahmad Boestamam

Teo Lee Ken*

This article reads Ahmad Boestamam's *Testament Politik API* (1946) to understand his political thoughts, especially on the notion of justice and freedom. The text was written as an agitation against the British and the social structure of Malay and Malaya society. This article also reads Boestamam's novel, *Rumah Kacha Digegar Gempa* (1969), to discuss his idealism and views on the political landscape of post-colonial Malaysia. This article argues that Boestamam's thoughts on justice have made important contributions to the discourse of the nation.

Keywords: justice, liberation, Marhaenism, socialism, Boestamam

Introduction

David Kelly, in his discussion of the meaning of the idea of freedom and the elements that frame its expression in the context of Asia, notes:

... there is a key cluster which seems repeated to claim centre stage and to describe itself as real freedom. This is the cluster centring around ethics, politics and law. . . . But for much of the time, freedom really matters in social history when it figures as social practice, an idea, indeed even a "shared vision of social life," but more specifically as the underlying source of criteria of legal, ethical, and political practices—human rights, the rule of law, civil society, democracy and so on. (Kelly 1998, 3)

Kelly's insights are important to understand how people and society in Asia conceive of freedom and justice beyond their daily experiences, on their own terms and practices. The leaders of these communities, in particular, are central to the articulation of these elements. Building on this, this article focuses on Ahmad Boestamam's articulation of liberational justice as freedom, and how he defined freedom as "an idea, indeed even a 'shared vision of social life'" in the context of Malaysian political history.

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A socialist revolutionary and nationalist, Boestamam¹⁾ is unequalled in terms of revolutionary fervor, rhetorical expression, and radical political ideology. He engaged in journalism, politics, and literary writing.²⁾ Boestamam started his career as a journalist. During that stint, he met individuals who provided the foundation for his political ideas and influenced his activism throughout his life. He helped form the Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM, Malay Nationalist Party) and established its radical youth wing, Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (API, Awakened Youth Movement), and later the Parti Rakyat Malaya (PRM, Malaya People's Party). He held steadfast to socialist idealism throughout his life.

Boestamam wrote extensively and possessed an expansive writing range.³⁾ Written from the 1950s to the late 1960s, his novels capture vividly the Malaysian political landscape and contestation of ideas. Among his significant writings are the political treatise *Testament Politik API* (The political testament of API) and his autobiographical trilogy *Lambaian dari Puncak* (Waving from the summit) (1983), *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak* (Carving the path to the summit) (1972), and *Tujuh Tahun Malam Memanjang* (Seven years of prolonged nights) (1976).⁴⁾ As literary texts, they are invaluable for the study of Malaysian intellectual history, particularly the conception of liberational justice. However, Boestamam's articulation of liberational justice is strongest in the realm of politics. His *Testament Politik API* is a seminal political treatise on the political history and intellectual tradition of Malaysia.

This article starts with a discussion of how Boestamam articulated liberational justice as freedom. His thoughts on this matter are well recorded in the political manifesto *Testament Politik API* (1946). The article then moves to discuss the issues of society and time as articulated by Boestamam in his novel *Rumah Kacha Digegar Gempa* (Glass house shaken by tremors) (1969). This novel offers a window to his views and hopes on

1) Ahmad Boestamam (1920–83) was born Abdullah Sani bin Raja Kechil in 1920 in Tanjung Malim, Perak. He attended both Malay and English schools. The name Ahmad Boestamam is derived from Subhash Chandra Bose, a revolutionary-socialist and nationalist from India whom he read and revered.

2) Ibrahim Yaacob formed the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Young Malays Union) in 1938. Boestamam's involvement in the radical Malay political movement began when he joined the Malay paper *Warta Malaya* led by Ibrahim Yaacob.

3) He used various pen names, including Ruhi Hayat, Hayati, Jiwalara, and Kamsani Karim. Boestamam wrote numerous novels, short stories, poems, essays, commentaries, biographies, and political manifestos. He also translated many works from English to the Malay language.

4) These have been compiled and published as *Memoir Ahmad Boestamam: Merdeka dengan Darah dalam Api* (2004). In the mid-1940s, Boestamam served on editorial boards and as a writer with several newspapers, including *Pelita Malaya* (Light of Malaya), *Suluh Malaya* (Torch of Malaya), and *Suara Rakyat* (Voice of the people).

the political landscape of Malaysia. The article concludes by highlighting how the liberational justice discourse espoused by Boestamam emerged with the notions of society and time and was a pivotal discourse in the sphere of competing political discourses during the 1960s.

Liberational Justice as Freedom

A.P.I. mahu kepada satu Negara Merdeka yang berdasarkan demokrasi tulen, satu pemerintahan yang datangnya dari ra'ayat, di-jalankan oleh ra'ayat menerusi kerajaan yang di-bentuk oleh wakil2 ra'ayat, untok faedah, kebajikan dan keselamatan ra'ayat. (Boestamam 2004b, 9)

API wants an independent state founded on genuine democracy, a body politic constituted by the people, conducted by the people through a government instituted by people's representatives, for the interest, welfare, and security of the people.

Boestamam founded API in February 1946 (Boestamam 2004a, 143, 148, 253), and a few months later, in December 1946, he published the political manifesto *Testament Politik API* (*ibid.*, 193). The *Testament* is a political text that proclaims the strength of youth. It describes the global youth movement, the youth movement in Malaya, and API, including its political objectives. The *Testament* opens with the following statement:

Di-dalam-nya ada di-terangkan dengan sechara ringkas tetapi padat tentang tenaga pemuda, pergerakan pemuda di-dunia, pergerakan pemuda di-Malaya dan juga tentang pergerakan A.P.I. (Angkatan Pemuda Insaf) dan tujuan2 politik-nya.
Moga2 buku ini akan mendatangkan faedah kepada pemuda2 Melayu 'am-nya dan pemuda2 A.P.I. khas-nya.
Pemuda2 Melayu—Insaf-lah.
MERDEKA dengan DARAH. (Boestamam 2004b, Kata Pendahuluan)

In it is explained briefly but concisely the strength of youth, youth movements around the world, youth movements in Malaya, and also the movement API (Angkatan Pemuda Insaf) and its political aims. With full hope this book will bring benefit to Malay youth generally and youth of API specifically. Malay Youth—Awakened. FREEDOM through BLOOD.

As a political treatise written in 1946, it is unparalleled. To this day, no work of political ideology matches its forcefulness, clarity, and radicalism. It addresses themes similar to other anticolonial leftist works of the late 1930s to 1950s. The *Testament* is a radical denunciation of the British and the social structure of Malay and Malaya society. Its blunt agitation for the violent overthrow of the British, Malay feudalism, and colonial capitalism, however, is a distinctive feature that differentiates it from other writings during that period.

API carried on the struggles initiated by the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM, Young Malays Union) and PKMM. The KMM was established in 1938 by the teacher and journalist Ibrahim Yaacob, who had been educated at the Sultan Idris Training College (Roff 1994, 222). As the first left-wing Malay political organization in Malaya (Rustam 2008, 25, 28), the KMM espoused a “strong anti-colonial stance” (*ibid.*, 30) in terms of opposition and non-cooperation against the British, and an opposition toward the Malay feudal and elite class (*ibid.*, 48–50) where the KMM arose as a “counterpart to the rightwing, quasi-political State Malay Associations then in process of formation” (Roff 1994, 235).

Rustam Sani (2008, 37) noted that two characteristics marked KMM’s distinctiveness in the political discourse and landscape of the 1930s and early 1940s. The leadership and members of the KMM were not from the traditional Malay feudal class, which consisted of rulers and the aristocracy. Instead, they came from the Malay non-ruling class and masses that had obtained a Malay- or English-stream education (*ibid.*, 47). Additionally, the KMM advocated the struggle and idea of Melayu Raya (Greater Malaya), a “nationalist ideology or sentiment based on the idea of a grand Malay (or Indonesian) nation perceived by its believers in its cultural or ethnic terms and territorially covering the Malayan and Indonesian archipelagos” (Ibrahim 1975, 20; Cheah 1979, 85, 89–90; Rustam 2008, 53).

The idea of Melayu Raya crucially informed Boestamam’s political perspective. The struggle against colonialism and the demand for independence embodied in the idea of Melayu Raya shaped Boestamam’s nationalist ideology and practice. Further, the shared culture and history of Malaya and Indonesia moved Boestamam to explore and embrace the ideas of nation, socialism, and liberation developing in Indonesia. However, simultaneously the influence of Melayu Raya led Boestamam to conceive a different view of the nation. Rustam (2008, 62) has emphasized that the KMM concept of Melayu Raya referred to “an ‘ethnicist’ notion of the nation.”

Boestamam’s idea of the nation and society, strongly influenced by the Marhaenism⁵⁾ conception of socialism, was based on popular sovereignty and liberational justice—specifically the ideals of freedom and political equality. Boestamam expressed this outlook from the mid-1940s with the establishing of the PKMM and API in tandem with changing political conditions where Indonesia had proclaimed independence and the British had returned to Malaya after the war (Boestamam 2004a, 133–135). In its relation to the

5) Boestamam adopted the idea of Marhaenism from the Indonesian nationalist leader Sukarno’s use of the term. Marhaen was the name of a poor peasant Sukarno encountered. Subsequently, Sukarno conceived the term “Marhaenism” as the name for his political ideology and the ideology of Partai Nasional Indonesia, which sought to safeguard the welfare and change the social conditions of all oppressed classes in Indonesia.

PKMM, API saw itself as:

satu barisan yang bersedia mempertahankan kehormatan diri, kehormatan kampung dan kehormatan Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya yang menjadi barisan perjuangan ra'ayat jelata Melayu itu. (Boestamam 2004b, 21)

a front that is prepared to defend self-dignity, the dignity of the hometown, and the dignity of the Malay Nationalist Party of Malaya, which serves as the front of the Malay people's struggle.

The *Testament* as such embodied the culmination of a political struggle and idealism amassing from the KMM and PKMM, to API. Boestamam and API pursued a confrontational and militant struggle for radical social change and freedom. The dominant political-economic class, consisting of the British, feudal, and Malay elite and foreign capital owners, preserved the social-political order that exploited the masses.

Two key features arise in the nationalist and political activism of Boestamam. The most apparent was the adoption of socialist ideals and political fronts. Boestamam maintained close affiliations with the KMM, was a founding member of the PKMM, and led API, which was the youth and radical-militant wing of the PKMM. He adapted ideas enunciated by Communist and socialist-influenced nationalist movements in Indonesia (*ibid.*, 3, 15–16, 24–25, 27). Sukarno's conception of a localized version of socialism known as Marhaenism informed Boestamam (*ibid.*, 10). In 1955 Boestamam established the PRM, which was based on the political ideology of Marhaenism.

The second feature of Boestamam's activism was his focus on the youth as a force of radical social change. Only the youth could displace the ruling and dominant political-economic class:

Dunia memang tidak dapat melupakan tenaga muda. Dari semenjak dunia ada dan dalam masa dunia menempoh perubahan2 yang memang tuntutan oleh 'alam mengikut process-nya tenaga pemuda selalu terbokti. Dalam segala lapangan ada tenaga pemuda dan memang menghendaki tenaga pemuda itu. . . . Perhatikan pula barisan2 tentera, perkuliaan, pergerakan, pertanian, pertadbiran negeri dalam dunia ini, siapakah yang banyak menyumbangkan tenaga-nya di-dalam-nya baik dahulu mahu pun sekarang? Tidak lain dan tidak bukan ia-lah PEMUDA. (*ibid.*, 1)

This world does not forget the strength of youth. From the time the world existed, and during the time the world experienced changes that were certainly required by nature according to its processes, the strength of youth has always been proven. In all fields there is the strength of youth, and these areas certainly require that strength of youth. . . . Observe the military, laborers, movement, agriculture, state administration fronts in this world—who has contributed the most strength in them, whether in the past or the present? It is none other than YOUTH.

Youth are at the forefront of the pursuit of radical change as “darah pemuda2 itu panas

dan di-dalam dada pemuda2 itu-lah tersimpul-nya semangat yang berkubar2 dan chita2 yang murni dan tinggi” (the blood of youth are raging, and in the bosoms of youth are entwined fiery spirits and virtuous and lofty idealism) (*ibid.*, 2). Their pure idealism for goodness, progress, beauty, peace, and justice in the world makes “tenaga yang ada pada pemuda itu ia-lah tenaga raksaksa” (the strength possessed by youth a colossal strength) (*ibid.*, 3). Boestamam differentiated two kinds of youth—radical and moderate:

Jiwa pemuda jika hendak di-bahagi2 dengan sechara besar boleh-lah di-bahagi dua—radical dan moderate, keras dan lembut. Pemuda yang berjiwa radical mahukan perubahan dalam segala lapangan dengan serta merta dan serentak, memakai semboyan KERAS LAWAN KERAS, SENJATA LAWAN SENJATA. Tetapi pemuda yang berjiwa moderate mahukan perubahan dengan perlahan2, dengan sechara evolutive, memakai semboyan biar lambat asalkan selamat. (*ibid.*, 2)

The spirit of youth, if it is to be divided, can be broadly divided in two—radical and moderate, forceful and amenable. Youths who are radical in spirit want immediate and simultaneous changes in all spheres, adopting the slogan of FORCE AGAINST FORCE, ARMS AGAINST ARMS. However, youths who are moderate in spirit want changes slowly, in an evolutionary manner, adopting the slogan of “slow so long as safe.”

Youth and nationalist movements around the world informed Boestamam’s view of youth as radical forces for change (*ibid.*, 3–6). Boestamam himself wrote that the *Testament* focused on the radicalism and idealism of youth. He made numerous references to youth movements, particularly in Indonesia (*ibid.*, 2–3, 14–18). Indonesia was undoubtedly the biggest influence on Boestamam’s statement on the role of youth in radical political change. Political consciousness and mass mobilization had begun early in Indonesia. A revolutionary and nationalist mass youth front in the form of the Sumpah Pemuda (Youth Pledge) emerged in 1928 (Sukarno 2014, x). In the *Testament* Boestamam referred to a prominent radical youth leader, Bung Tomo, and mentioned his struggles as an inspiration to API (Boestamam 2004b, 27). In his excellent and pivotal work *Java in a Time of Revolution*, Benedict Anderson captures the central and revolutionary role of the *pemuda* or youth in the early stages of the Indonesian Revolution. Its basis was both traditional and modern, as on one hand “youth was itself an essential category of traditional Javanese society” (Anderson 1972, 2, 33). On the other hand, in the cultivation of popular nationalism during the Japanese occupation that “generated that sense of mass power, of fraternal solidarity, of immense possibilities,” the idea and mobilization of youth “were all created for an impending historical moment, the meaning of which, it became increasingly clear, was to be the destiny of the nation.” This idealism constituted the “character of youth experience itself” (*ibid.*, 30). Anderson’s pivotal work discusses how, in contrast to other modern revolutions, the Indonesian Revolution could not “satisfactorily be

explained through conventional Marxian analysis, or in terms of either an alienation of the intelligentsia or a frustration of rising expectations.” It was Indonesian youth who provided “the central thrust of revolutionary power” (*ibid.*, vii).

Youth, revolutionary change, and liberation were also directed toward the future. Anderson explains how youth and the idea of youth played a deep and profound role in the nationalist movements of Indonesia, where

one can see how much nationalism is tied to visions and hopes for the future if one looks at the names of the early organizations that joined the independence movement at the beginning of our century: Jong Java (Young Java), Indonesia Muda (Young Indonesia), Jong Islamietenbond (League of Young Muslims), Jong Minahasa (Young Minahasa) and so on. There were no organizations that called themselves Old Java, Eternal Bali, and so on. Their orientation was to the future and the social basis was youth. (Anderson 1999, 6)

To oust the ruling political-economic class, Boestamam pursued a combative and revolutionary struggle. He called for “force against force” and “arms against arms.” The nationalist movement and struggle was a process of rebellion:

Begitu pula dalam pergerakan kebangsaan. Kalau pemuda itu tidak dapat bergerak dan lambat berhasil-nya chita² dengan sech²ara sehat, maka tidak ada keberatan bagi mereka untuk memilih jalan yang keras dan radical saperti memberontak. (Boestamam 2004b, 2)

Likewise in the nationalist movement. If the youth cannot progress and in adopting peaceful means are slow to realize their ideals, they are not indisposed to adopt forceful and radical means including rebellion.

This impetus for revolution has classical social origins. Judith Shklar (1990, 84) in considering the position of injustice in political thought explains that the sense of injustice and its “political dangers were always known, to be sure, since yesterday’s outcast may well be tomorrow’s revolutionary avenger. And so, Aristotle noted that perceived injustice stimulates revolutions, but his interest in the subject was limited to its ideological expression.” In the same way, the condition of colonialism produced a sense of injustice in Boestamam that stirred him to seek a revolutionary struggle. But nationalist and political movements in neighboring Indonesia also inspired this intent.

Hence, Boestamam emulated the slogans of the youth movement in Indonesia when he wrote in support that “we confront colonialism with revolution. We are not afraid to soak this earth in blood” (Anderson 1972, 52; Boestamam 2004b, 3). In many ways Indonesian revolutionary and nationalist politics and Sukarno had a great impact on Boestamam and his *Testament*. Indonesian nationalist leaders declared the independence of Indonesia in 1945, while Boestamam published his *Testament* in 1946. Many of the

themes and rhetoric of *Testament* seem to resemble Sukarno's 1933 essay "Mentjapai Indonesia Merdeka" (Achieving an independent Indonesia) (Sukarno 2014, 354–463).

Sukarno, for instance, enunciated the call for revolutionary struggle in the form of *massa-aksi* or mass action. To Sukarno, "massa-aksi adalah pergerakan massa yang radikal" (mass action is a mass movement that is radical) (*ibid.*, 395). The formation of a mass movement was necessary as the politics of the *kaum lunak* or moderate groups were futile and the demands for justice would always be ignored (*ibid.*, 421). This demarcation of revolutionary and moderate politics was also used in Boestamam's differentiation of two kinds of youth. Thus, mass action connotes:

aksinya rakyat djelata yang sudah terluluh mendjadi dijiwa-baru, melawan sesuatu keadaan jang mereka tidak sudi pikul lagi. Memang, massa-aksi adalah selamanja radikal. Memang, massa-aksi adalah selamanja membuka dan mendjebol akar-akarnya sesuatu keadaan. Memang, massa-aksi adalah selamanja mau menanam akar-akarnya keadaan yang baru. (*ibid.*, 427)

the action of the common people who have changed to a new spirit, fighting a condition that they are no longer willing to accept. Indeed, mass action is always radical. Indeed, mass action is always the exposing and penetrating of the roots of a condition. Indeed, mass action is always intent on planting the roots of a new condition.

The essence of mass action is total change, involving the removal of the old and the construction of a new social order. It totally rejects "sikap setengah-setengahan jang tidak berdjoang tetapi hanya tawar-menawar" (the outlook of some who do not struggle but only negotiate) (*ibid.*, 424).

Boestamam adapted this urgency and radical politics. In Boestamam's mind, violence, rebellion, and blood all converged and were encapsulated in revolutionary change. Boestamam and API manifested this through the form of revolutionary movement:

A.P.I. sedar untuk mencapai hasil-nya chita2 ada dua jalan besar yang terbuka ia-itu . . . Jalan chepat, radikal dan serentak . . . Jalan yang pertama mendatangkan perubahan dalam segala lapangan dalam masa yang singkat. . . . Jalan yang pertama menuntut perjuangan. . . . Jalan yang pertama meminta pergorbanan tenaga, harta dan darah. . . . Maka di-antara dua jalan ini A.P.I. memilih jalan yang pertama. Keyakinan A.P.I. hanya ada pada jalan yang pertama itu sahaja. Sebab itu-lah A.P.I. memakai semboyan: KERAS LAWAN KERAS. LEMBUT LAWAN LEMBUT. (Boestamam 2004b, 11)

API is conscious that to achieve its ideals two approaches are open, that is . . . The swift, radical and outright approach . . . The first approach brings changes to all spheres in a short time. . . . The first approach demands struggle. . . . The first approach seeks the sacrifices of effort, property, and blood. . . . Therefore, between these two approaches API selects the first approach. The conviction of API rests only on the first approach. It is why API adopts the slogan: FORCE AGAINST FORCE. COOPERATIVE AGAINST COOPERATIVE.

The ideal of freedom spurs this radical social change, revolution, violence, rebellion, and the cry to drench “this earth in blood.” The articulation of justice stems from conditions of injustice, but it also develops from the basis of an ideal, for “any society is by definition a system of rules that distinguish right from wrong and better from worse” and “it is thus in justice itself that the sense of injustice begins” (Shklar 1990, 86–87).

For Boestamam, freedom meant, first, freedom from injustice. In the *Testament* Boestamam defines injustice as referring to the construction of a class-based society, and social justice as referring to the absence of man and socially constructed classes in society:

A.P.I. mahu kepada satu susunan masharakat yang adil atau yang di-katakan keadilan social. Keadilan social ada-lah satu sendi, suatu syarat yang utama dan penting untuk menentukan tulen atau tidak-nya demokrasi yang di-jalankan oleh satu2 negara itu. . . . Kepada A.P.I. keadilan social itu ia-lah susunan masharakat sesuatu bangsa yang di-dalam-nya tidak ada lagi pembahagian tingkatan yang di-ada-kan oleh manusia yang di-antara satu sama lain bertentangan dalam faedah, hak kepentingan dan kewajipan-nya terhadap negara. Kepada A.P.I. ada-nya orang2 bangsawan dan ada-nya ra’ayat murba, ada-nya yang mulia dan ada-nya yang hina itu ia-lah kerana masharakat tidak adil, kerana di-adakan oleh manusia yang kerana tipu muslihat-nya dapat mengadakan klas2 dalam masharakat manusia itu. (Boestamam 2004b, 10)

API wants an arrangement of society that is just or that is said to be social justice. Social justice is a principle, an essential and important requisite that determines whether the democracy implemented in a state is genuine or not. . . . For API, social justice refers to the social order in a nation in which there are no class divisions made by men who have conflicting benefits, rights of interests, and obligations toward the state. For API there exist the nobility and common people, the honorable and the abject because of an unjust society, because it is made by men who through deceit are able to establish classes in that society of men.

In British Malaya the populace was divided between the elite who possessed pure authority and wealth, and the masses and dispossessed, thus forming an unjust society marked by political and economic inequalities. On one hand, there were ruling classes who dominated political power and economic capital. On the other hand, there were the urban and rural masses that had neither political nor economic power. As such, according to Boestamam (*ibid.*, 11), social justice could be attained only if these divisions were abolished.

Hence, freedom also meant the elimination of colonialism and feudalism. The British colonialists and feudal and Malay elites with the support of foreign capital owners defended this unjust social order. Boestamam denounced the ruling political-economic class and their supporters. They were enemies even though from the Malay community. They obstructed the struggle for freedom:

Sekali pun pemuda2 itu daripada bangsa Melayu sendiri, daripada adek abang kita sendiri, mereka itu juga ia-lah musuh kita; setidak2-nya ini-lah dia disiplin A.P.I.—ini-lah dia undang2 perjuangan yang harus ada dalam satu2 badan politik yang mempunyai tujuan besar hendak merebut kemerdekaan bangsa dan tanah air. (*ibid.*, 16)

Even if those youth are from the Malay race, from among our brothers, they are also our enemies; at least this is the discipline of API—this is the precept of our struggle that has to be in a political body that aims to attain the monumental aim of seizing the freedom of the nation and motherland.

To Boestamam, the construction of a class-based society constituted injustice as it resulted in the colonizers and ruling elite depriving the masses of political power and economic wealth possessed by and conferred on the former. Colonialism denied the masses political-economic sovereignty through domination. Freedom entailed removing these hierarchies to realize justice and to uphold the people's sovereignty.

Second, freedom to Boestamam meant freedom from oppression. In the *Testament*, Boestamam identified five types of oppression. These encompassed oppression by the colonialists, oppression by Malays themselves who become the tool of the colonialists, oppression by the feudal class, oppression by traditional religious teachers, and last, oppression by capital owners among both the Malays and foreign races (*ibid.*, 20–21). Boestamam cited the political standing of the Islamic scholars who formed part of the ruling class. They were conservative and condoned oppression, hence perpetuating the existing social conditions.

Local and foreign owners of capital also came under the sharp pen of Boestamam. The *Testament* not only instigated the overthrow of the existing political order, it also demanded a total transformation of the economic forces at play. The existing economic system benefited only the ruling political-economic class. It gained from the exploitation and oppression of the masses. Boestamam called for an economic system that not only profited and privileged the ruling class but also catered to the welfare of the people. He urged for a planned economy where “segala sesuatu yang mengenai soal ekonomi haruslah dipegang oleh Negara—atau *State*” (everything that is related to the question of the economy must be governed by the state—or *State*) (*ibid.*, 9–10).

Then there is freedom of expression. To Boestamam the British colonialists and ruling government enforced rules to curtail protest and dissent in order to prevent the spread of subversive ideas and movements. These threatened the existing political order. Boestamam and API were among many groups seeking to end colonialism, oppression, and exploitation. These prohibitions safeguarded the power of the British and colonial government. In the *Testament* Boestamam called for the abolishing of these rules. On this issue, Boestamam insisted on

kemerdekaan berpidato, bersuara dalam surat2 khabar, bersidang dan lain2. Menghapuskan undang2 yang menetapkan boleh menghukum surat2 khabar kerana berani menegor pemerintahan dan kerana menyiarkan tulisan2 yang dikatakan menghasut. (*ibid.*, 23)

freedom to speak, voicing out in newspapers, to have meetings and others. Remove laws that stipulate the penalizing of newspapers that dare to criticize the government and that publish writings that are said to be seditious.

These rules repressed the nationalist movement and struggle for independence. The restrictions on expression and the perpetuation of colonialism signified injustice.

Finally, freedom referred to the unity of all youth in Malaya. To be free was to be united. It was irrelevant that youth in Malaya were of various races. Commitment to revolutionary change and devotion to the ideals of the national-political movement and struggle were paramount. Allegiance to the idealism of the struggle and movement overcame differences of race, religion, or background:

Maka demikian-lah pula kita. Kita mahu berikat dan bekerja sama dengan pemuda2 segala bangsa yang ada di-Tanah Melayu ini, tetapi kita tidak akan begitu bodoh mahu bekerja sama dan berikat dengan pemuda2 segala bangsa yang menggalang2 perjuangan kita, yang tidak suka bangsa kita mulia dan merdeka bahkan mereka itu ia-lah musuh kita. (*ibid.*, 16)

Thus, so are we. We want to fraternize and cooperate with youth of any races in Tanah Melayu, but we are not so ignorant as to want to cooperate and fraternize with youth of any races who impede our struggle, who do not want our nation to be esteemed and sovereign—indeed they are our enemies.

Boestamam strived to build a common platform embracing all communities. For him the conflict and struggle were not against other ethnic and religious communities. Rather, they were based on political values and ideals against those who caused injustice, such as the colonizers:

Kita harus mengetahui bahawa kita pemuda2 Malaya sama ada Melayu, China, India atau lain-nya tidak-lah ada perbezaan-nya—tidak ada lebih kurang-nya. Kita ada-lah sama2 pemuda anak tanah jajahan yang hidup-nya terbiar, yang pelajaran-nya tidak di-peruahkan dan sangat sedikit yang mendapat peluang melanjutkan pelajaran-nya dan memetik buah pelajaran yang tinggi2, yang hanya di-galakkan menjadi alat (perkakas) dan berkuli dan lain2, yang hanya di-tidur2 dan di-buai2kan dengan segala macham kepalsuan dan kepelesiran hidup. (*ibid.*, 17)

We must know that we the youth of Malaya—whether Malay, Chinese, Indian, or others—have no differences: nothing more and nothing less. We are all youth sons of a colonized land whose lives are abandoned, whose education is not provided, and very few get the opportunity to advance their education and pick the fruits of a good education, who are encouraged to only become tools and laborers, and are being put to sleep and lulled by all forms of life's falseness and pleasure.

Boestamam made it clear that the colonizers and ruling order had no moral concern for the various communities. The condition of injustice in this case can be said to be the deprivation of intellectual consciousness, and the coercion and indoctrination of the people to merely serve the interests of the colonial and ruling order. Boestamam continues:

. . . sebab itu kita ada mempunyai tujuan yang sama sekarang ia-itu menghapuskan angkara2 yang menghimpit kita itu, dan untuk menghapuskan angkara2 itu maka perlu-lah kita mendirikan satu benteng—benteng waja—untuk menghapuskan segala puak dan pehak, segala gulungan yang menyebabkan angkara2 itu. (*ibid.*, 17)

. . . that is why we have the same purpose, that is, to eliminate the evils that repress us, and to eliminate those evils we need to build a bastion—a staunch bastion—to eliminate all clans and sides, all groups that cause those evils.

The only solution to this, for Boestamam, was unity and struggle. In this struggle, the solidarity and idealism of youth sustained their unity. Through unity, freedom could be realized. When freedom was realized, justice could be attained:

Saudara2 pemuda A.P.I. dan pemuda2 Melayu di-seluruh Malaya! Menilek kepada kepentingan2 ini mari-lah dari sekarang kita menyusun barisan kita menyusun perpaduan bangsa Melayu, kemudian mari-lah kita menyusun barisan perpaduan pemuda2 Malaya segala bangsa yang sukakan democracy, kemudian mari-lah pula kita menyusun barisan perpaduan pemuda2 Asia dan akhir-nya perpaduan pemuda2 sa-dunia. Hanya dengan jalan ini-lah sahaja keamanan keadilan dan democracy dapat di-jamin di-dunia ini. (*ibid.*, 18)

Fellow brothers, the youth in API and Malay youth in the whole of Malaya! Considering this significance, let us together from now amass our front, amass the unity of Malays, then let us amass the youth of Malaya of all races that cherish democracy, then let us amass the united front of the youth of Asia and finally the unity of youth around the world. It is through this way only that peace, justice, and democracy will be guaranteed in this world.

The *Testament* served as the ideological basis for Boestamam and API to overthrow the status quo and establish a free and united society. The commitment to build a democratic Malaya on the principles of democracy in accordance with the spirit of popular sovereignty (*ibid.*, 8) underpinned this ideological struggle. Society obtained its basis and legitimacy from the people by popular consent and not from feudal rule. A society based on democracy, where government representation was directed toward the interest, welfare, and security of its people (*ibid.*, 9), was a free, and thereby just, society. As he wrote:

A.P.I. mahu kepada satu susunan masharakat yang adil atau yang di-katakan keadilan social. Keadilan social ada-lah satu sendi, satu syarat yang utama dan penting untuk menentukan tulen

atau tidak-nya demokrasi yang di-jalankan oleh satu2 negara itu. Selagi keadilan social tidak ada selama itu-lah demokrasi itu tidak tulen saratus peratus. (*ibid.*, 10)

API wants an arrangement of society that is just or that is said to be social justice. Social justice is a principle, an essential and important requisite that determines whether the democracy implemented in a state is genuine or not. So long as social justice is absent, there will not be one hundred percent democracy.

The *Testament* was groundbreaking in terms of its content. But equally important was its call for revolutionary change. It called for a total, violent, and militant social change. The principles of democracy, freedom, and social justice articulated in the *Testament* were radical when compared to the dominant political ideas of the period. These political ideas were merged with a rhetorical bent and praxis that was confrontational toward the ruling class and social order. Thus, the *Testament* was radical not only in terms of content but also form. It expressed a language that was fiery, forceful, direct, and vernacular in the form of the words and sentence structure that Boestamam used.

In this Boestamam was very much influenced again by Sukarno, who was known for his fiery oratory and rhetorical language. In the *Testament* radical political ideas combined with rhetorical language and a revolutionary call. For Boestamam liberational justice referred to freedom seized through revolutionary change. So influential and pathbreaking was the *Testament* that the British banned the manifesto and API. Boestamam was found guilty of sedition in his pursuit of the oneness of all peoples, of a free and just society through revolutionary change.

Society and Time: *Rumah Kacha DigeGAR Gempa* (1969)

For Boestamam liberational justice ultimately entailed the freedom of self and society. And this freedom was seized through revolutionary change. Boestamam's articulation of liberational justice as freedom accompanied the emergence of self and society. The onset of self and society in turn ensured the relevance and need for freedom of self and society. This break and continuity in history marks the significance of Boestamam and liberational justice as freedom.

With the emergence and articulation of liberational justice as freedom, and the self and society, a third concept develops: time. Within this context, movement and social change occurs. Freedom is possible only with time, specifically a future. Movement and social change is directed toward the future. Thus, in the works of Boestamam we identify the combination of freedom, self and society, and time. Boestamam's period marks

the beginning of the history concerning liberational justice. It encompasses the struggle for liberational justice, and freedom in particular, and the groups and ideologies opposed to it. His novel *Rumah Kacha Digegar Gempa* (1969) reflects this. In *Rumah Kacha*, Boestamam sketches, first, the landscape of political and social life in Malaysia, and second, the ideological currents and conflicts underlying that background.

The novel tells of three students—Rahmat, Su Sian Lock, and Ratna—in London and their return to Malaya upon graduation. Sian Lock and Ratna are good friends who read law. One day they meet Rahmat, also a law student, at a function. Sian Lock and Ratna develop feelings for Rahmat and make a deal to compete fairly for his affections. Sian Lock wins his heart in the end. The three return to Malaya upon completion of their studies. In Malaya, Sian Lock converts to Islam and marries Rahmat as Susaniah. One day Rahmat meets Ratna again. Soon after, he takes her as his second wife. Rahmat with both his wives, Sian Lock and Ratna, form a *rumah kacha tiangnya tiga*, or a “glass house with three pillars.”

At first glance the novel appears to be a simplistic and frivolous story of Rahmat’s polygamous marriage mixed with historical themes and mere sexual acts and erotic scenes. However, at a deeper level *Rumah Kacha* is a biting, unhindered, and carefree satire of the Perikatan coalition consisting of the racial-based UMNO (United Malays National Organization), MCA (Malayan Chinese Association), MIC (Malayan Indian Congress) parties. These three political parties, representing the communal interests of the Malay, Chinese, and Indian communities respectively, formed the Perikatan in 1954 and led by Tunku Abdul Rahman, the president of UMNO, negotiated with the British for Malaya’s independence that was proclaimed on August 31, 1957.

The background of the novel covers the political and socioeconomic landscape of Malaysian society. The narrative of Rahmat’s marriage to Sian Lock and Ratna represents the process of friendship and hostility, and the culmination of the union of a Malay with a Chinese and an Indian. The marriage of three different races is a sly and mocking reference to the history and formation of the Perikatan coalition (Ruhi Hayat 1969, 6, 22, 26–27, 117–118; Cheah 2002, 1–7).

Boestamam includes themes that allude to the nature, inclination, and social-political culture of those political parties, the coalition, and its leaders. In the first instance the novel highlights the privileged and affluent background of Rahmat, Sian Lock, and Ratna. Sian Lock and Ratna come from rich families. The former’s father is a business tycoon who owns vast acres of rubber plantation and several shophouses. The latter’s father is the manager of a massive rubber plantation. There is no mention of Rahmat’s financial source, but it is possible that he is from either an elite and aristocratic background or the educated class for him to be able to pursue his law studies in London. Such origins reflect

the general background and upbringing of the Perikatan leaders.

In the second instance there is a strong Western and colonial influence on the three characters. Rahmat and Sian Lock, in particular, are inclined toward Western culture in the form of songs and dancing, and indulge in drinking. Consider the scene during Rahmat and Sian Lock's meeting with two other students, Ruzihan and Senawi:

"Kalau begitu kita minum2lah dulu," Ruzihan menetapkan. "Minum bir, jadi?" Semuanya memberikan anggokan. . . . Sesudah menjamu selera mereka kini menjamu telinga pula. Ber-bagai2 lagu dibunyikan Ruzihan tetapi kebanyakannya lagu2 moden, lagu2 angkatan sekarang, lagu2 gelek dan lagu2 gila. Sebuah lagu "You Are Always in My Heart" yang dinyanyikan oleh Dean Martin paling disukai sekali oleh Rahmat sehingga dimintanya Ruzihan memainkannya semula beberapa kali. (Ruhi Hayat 1969, 53, 57)

"In that case let us drink first," Ruzihan stated. "How about beer?" All of them nodded. . . . After feeding their appetites, now they feed their ears. All kinds of songs were played by Ruzihan, but most were modern songs, contemporary songs, dancing songs, and upbeat songs. One song, "You Are Always in My Heart," sung by Dean Martin, was Rahmat's favorite, and he told Ruzihan to play it repeatedly.

It should be noted that Boestamam neither makes a moral judgment nor implies the immorality of their behavior. However, it illustrates the pervasiveness of colonial culture among the educated class—in this case students from the elite and capital-owning class who study in the colonial motherland. More concretely, it is an indictment of the colonial conformism and mindset of political leaders from the ruling Perikatan coalition. Syed Hussein Alatas would later deliver a penetrating analysis of this colonial conformism in *Intellectuals in Developing Societies* (1977) and *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (2010).

Last, the friendship and subsequent marriage of Rahmat with Sian Lock and Ratna highlights the polygamous marriage of a Malay, Chinese, and Indian. It represents the racial communal-driven compromise between UMNO, MCA, and MIC. It is a race-based partnership based on the intent and struggle to preserve each racial community's culture, power, and wealth. The partnership is founded upon and promotes racial identity. The segregation and understanding of each racial group relies on colonial constructed essentialist cultural values and traits. Consider the conversation between Rahmat and his parents-in-law regarding his legal practice and career prospects:

"Tentang itu jangan susah," orang tua Susaniah segera memberitahukannya. "Berapa saja engkau mahu saya boleh adakan. Berapa saja, katakan. Apa lain yang saya boleh tolong, sedia akan saya berikan. Bangunan untuk dijadikan pejabat? Saya ada kawan kenalan untuk mengadakannya bagi engkau dan dimana saja. Pendeknya satu pun tak ada susahnyanya. Saya tak minta engkau bayar balek. Asalkan sharikat engkau sendiri itu terdiri, saya sudah puashati." (Ruhi Hayat 1969, 69)

"About that, don't be troubled," Susaniah's parents told him. "However much you want, I can

settle it. How much, just say. Whatever else I can help with, I am prepared to do. A building for the office? I have a friend to settle that for you, and in whichever place. In short, there is no trouble. I don't ask you to repay me. As long as the company is yours, I am satisfied.

And elsewhere, in another conversation with Ratna, who offers to establish a law firm with him:

"Kau tahu, Su, dia ajak abang berkongsi dengannya dipejabatnya tu. Ratna & Rahmat namanya, katanya. Abang tak payah keluar modal apa2 sedang kira2 pendapatan dibagi dua . . ." (*ibid.*, 83)

"You know, Su, she asked me to join in a partnership with her at her office. Ratna & Rahmat would be the name, she said. I won't have to contribute any capital, while the earnings will be divided by two . . ."

The offer of capital to Rahmat by both his parents-in-law and Ratna is characteristic and represents the relation between Malay feudal political power and non-Malay economic capital. It is the political arrangement that underlies the Perikatan coalition and guides its pursuit and dominance of political power. In *Rumah Kacha*, Boestamam exemplifies this political expedience through narrative and characters.

The ideological conflict contained in *Rumah Kacha* makes it an important work. This conflict is not explicit: Boestamam does not position the ideology of the Perikatan coalition against those of the nationalist-socialist movement. That is not the intent. The work is meant as a caustic satire of the Perikatan and its leaders. If we move beyond the text and locate the work within the social and political landscape of the period, the work and the themes it highlights are at the center of an intense ideological contestation. The novel is a protest against the dominant political ideology of the Perikatan and its leaders. It encompasses Boestamam's political struggle. It is a resistance and struggle in the form of the written letter.

Boestamam opposed the values the Perikatan embodied. His opposition stemmed from a socialist perspective. Boestamam represented the poor and exploited class. He struggled for economic equality and protection for this class. For Boestamam, the causes of injustice were political domination and economic exploitation. To achieve freedom for both self and society, British rule had to be eliminated. This included changing the status quo composed of the ruling political-economic class who cooperated with the British. And further, the political ideology and mobilization of race obstructed freedom. It caused and perpetuated the existence of different political and economic classes in Malaysian society. So long as these classes remained, there could be no freedom and justice.

Boestamam opposed these social conditions on the basis of socialism and justice. He articulated liberational justice as freedom, which referred to freedom of self and

society. In *Rumah Kacha* there is a striking passage that sums up the conflicting ideologies of Boestamam and the ruling coalition, and hence justice against injustice, and freedom against unfreedom. In this passage, Ratna speaks to Sian Lock of her dislike for Veluatham Davidson:

“Hanya itu saja yang menyebabkan engkau tak suka padanya?” Sian Lock bertanya, mahu tahu se-banyak2nya. “Banyak sebab lain,” Ratna Devi menerangkan. “Dia orang politik, mabokkan politik, dan politiknya itu politik kiri pula. Sudah tentu saja faham politiknya itu, faham sosialis, bertentangan dan berchangah dengan faham politik ayah saya. Dan saya pun tak sechochok dengan faham politik itu.” (*ibid.*, 17)

“Only because of that you don’t like him?” Sian Lock asked, wanting to find out as much as possible. “There are many other reasons,” Ratna Devi explained. “He’s into politics, obsessed with politics, and also his politics is Left politics. Surely his political view is a socialist view, in opposition and conflict with the political view of my father. And I am also not compatible with that political view.”

In this narrative, Boestamam captures the ideological contestations that occurred in the 1960s. He focuses on the political discourse of the ruling government and state, revealing its values and characteristics but presenting not much of his own political idealism and discourse, which he elaborates more in other novels such as *Sorong Makan Tarik Makan* (Sliding and pulling, eating both ways) (1967) and *Malam Tak Berbintang* (Night without stars) (1968).

However, *Rumah Kacha* is crucial because, in addition to depicting the dominant political discourse, Boestamam captures the emergence and development of self and society. This is an emergence and development that is significant because within its backdrop is the articulation of liberational justice as freedom. This narrative arises from a discourse of liberational justice. Boestamam articulates liberational justice as freedom, and this discourse of justice competes against other prevailing political discourses.

Conclusion: The Political Discourse of Liberational Justice

In a revealing essay on the ideological origins of the French Revolution, Keith Michael Baker (1990) writes that several main discourses existed in France beginning from the mid-eighteenth century. Baker notes that these consisted of “three strands of discourse, each characterized by the analytical priority it gives to one or the other of these terms”:

What I shall call the judicial discourse emphasizes justice. What I shall call the political discourse emphasizes will. What I shall call the administrative discourse emphasizes reason. These three

competing vocabularies structure the language of opposition to monarchical authority, just as they define the efforts and claims of its defenders. (Baker 1990, 25)

For Baker, these three discourses “defined the political culture that emerged in France in the later part of the eighteenth century and provided the ideological framework that gave explosive meaning to the events that destroyed the old regime” (*ibid.*, 27).

In the same way, in Malaysia various political discourses emerged, developed, and contested one another. Central to this was the conflict between the racial-capitalist discourse of the ruling regime and the liberational justice discourse Boestamam represented. The former discourse owed its origins to feudal culture, British colonial ideology, and ethno-nationalism. The latter discourse attempted to integrate popular sovereignty, socialist thought, and Malay literary culture.

This article shows that Boestamam articulated liberational justice as freedom. His revolutionary political manifesto *Testament Politik API* outlines his meaning of freedom. For him freedom meant freedom from injustice, freedom from oppression, freedom of expression, and freedom as the unity of all races. This freedom was seized, for Boestamam, through means of revolution, radical social change, and even violence and blood.

In addition to that, this article shows that Boestamam’s articulation of liberational justice as freedom accompanied the emergence of self and society. With freedom and self and society emerged a third concept, time. These concepts made movement, social change, and the future conceivable. *Rumah Kacha* demonstrates the reality of these concepts and depicts their interactions in social life. This novel explicates the social and political landscape of Malaysian society and the ideological contestations that occur within it. It is essential to relate the concepts of freedom, self and society, and time, and the process of movement, social change, and the future because it enables us to derive Boestamam’s articulation of liberational justice as freedom and identify the emergence of the liberational justice discourse.

In *Russian Thinkers*, Isaiah Berlin praises Alexander Herzen and writes that “Herzen, despite his brilliance, his careless spontaneity, his notorious ‘pyrotechnics’, expresses bold and original ideas, and is a political (and consequently a moral) thinker of the first importance.” Herzen was, in Berlin’s estimation, “an original thinker, independent, honest and unexpectedly profound” (Berlin 1994, 83, 111). Another Russian thinker, Mikhail Bakunin, on the other hand,

stood for ceaseless rebellion against every form of constituted authority, for ceaseless protest in the name of the insulted and oppressed of every nation and class. His power of cogent and lucid destructive argument is extraordinary, and has not, even today, obtained proper recognition.

Berlin further adds that Bakunin is “morally careless, intellectually irresponsible, a man who, in his love for humanity in the abstract, was prepared, like Robespierre, to wade through seas of blood” (*ibid.*, 106, 113). In other words, Bakunin was the direct opposite of Herzen, in both temperament and sense of social responsibility. Although Berlin’s description of Bakunin is less than complimentary, Bakunin remains absolutely instrumental to the history of nineteenth-century Russian social thought. Boestamam was in many ways the “Mikhail Bakunin of Malaysia.”

Accepted: December 11, 2017

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Independent Woman in Postcolonial Indonesia: Rereading the Works of Rukiah

Yerry Wirawan*

This paper discusses the strategic essentialism of gender and politics in modern Indonesia by rereading literary works of Siti Rukiah (1927–96): her first novel, *Kedjatuhan dan Hati* (1950), and her collection of poems and short stories *Tandus* (1952). It locates Rukiah's position in modern Indonesian politics and the literary world to understand how she crafted her literary skills. It highlights the importance of her hometown, Purwakarta, as the locus of her literary development. It argues that as a representative female writer of the time Rukiah offered important contributions to the nation's consciousness of gender equality and liberation from the oppressive social structure.

Keywords: Rukiah, Purwakarta, female author, postcolonial literature, Indonesia

Introduction

During the early years of Indonesian independence, the young generation (Pemoeda) played an important role in the nation's literary world. Writing was a medium to express the restlessness and rebellion of the young generation (see Teeuw 1967; Soemargono 1979). Writers of the period were collectively known as the "1945 Generation," and Chairil Anwar (1922–49) was the towering figure of this generation—his poems were praised for the prose he formulated to express a sense of courage and boldness. Siti Rukiah (1927–96) was a little younger than Anwar, yet she produced exceptional works. She, too, wrote a number of poems during this period, and in 1948 she was a correspondent for *Poedjangga Baroe* (New writer), a Batavia/Jakarta-based avant-garde literary magazine. She was one of the authors of this generation who productively published literary works in postcolonial Indonesia.¹⁾

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1) See Siti Rukiah, *Kedjatuhan dan Hati* (1950); and Siti Rukiah, *Tandus* (1952). The first female author to have published a novel in postcolonial Indonesia was Arti Purbani (*Widyawati*, 1948). Arti Purbani is the pen name of Raden Ayu Partini Djajadiningrat (1902–98), the wife of Hoesein Djajadiningrat (1886–1960).

After the transfer of sovereignty in 1949, Rukiah continued her writing activity and involvement in politics throughout the 1950s and 1960s. She joined the leftist artist group Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (LEKRA, League of People's Culture) in the 1950s. Unfortunately, her bright talent and career were halted abruptly in 1965 amid the brutal purge of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI, Partai Komunis Indonesia). She was detained and sent to prison without due process, and after her release in the late 1960s she lived the rest of her life in difficulty with six children. Although her name is mentioned in contemporary Indonesian literary textbooks, only a few young Indonesians are able to access her works.²⁾

Rukiah's writings and life have attracted a number of scholars of Indonesian literature.³⁾ Annabel Teh Gallop (1985) examines her literary works by focusing on their emotional and intellectual ideas. From her analysis, she concludes that Rukiah's *Kedjatuhan dan Hati* (The fall and the heart) is, in fact, a representation of the author's love affair and psychological conflict. Julia Shackford-Bradley (2000) offers a different reading on Rukiah. Based on textual and language analyses as well as interviews with Sidik Kertapati, she sees Rukiah as constructing herself on the ambivalent choices that she faced at the time of her writing. She concludes that the revolutionary figures in Rukiah's works were Rukiah's own inventions—in other words, fictional (Shackford-Bradley 2000, 254). Alicia Marie Lawrence (2012) compares Rukiah to Eden Robinson (an indigenous female writer from Canada) and finds that Rukiah's writings were a product of the communication of her emotional experience, based on her submissiveness as an indigenous woman. She concludes that *Kedjatuhan dan Hati* represents the voice of a subaltern woman and that in current light, reading it may have some practical value for community organization and political decision making.

Although these studies have different methods, they focus on Rukiah's literary works as her personal achievement and reflection of inner conflict rather than a direct expression of the revolution that she experienced. They also analyze Rukiah in comparison to other (female) literary figures: Shackford-Bradley compares Rukiah to Kartini, Hamidah, and Soewarsih Djojopoespito; Lawrence compares her to Robinson. This

2) On November 6, 1965, *Duta Masyarakat*, the newspaper of Nahdlatul Ulama, reported that although *Tandus* was republished by Balai Pustaka, its distribution was halted (See "Stop Naskah2 Lekra di Balai Pustaka," *Duta Masyarakat*, November 6, 1965). Interestingly, her brief biography (including her involvement in LEKRA) appears in an online encyclopedia published by the Ministry of Education of Indonesia. See *Ensiklopedi Sastra Indonesia*, http://ensiklopedia.kemdikbud.go.id/sastra/artikel/S_Rukiah, accessed April 20, 2016.

3) Some of her works are translated by John McGlynn. See S. Rukiah Kertapati (1983); Siti Rukiah (2011). In 2017 Ultimus, an independent publishing house in Bandung, republished Rukiah's works: see *Kejatuhan dan Hati* (2017) and *Tandus* (2017).

comparative reading is useful to understand Rukiah's creative inspiration and distinctive qualities as compared to other female authors. Understandably, Shackford-Bradley's and Lawrence's readings emphasize the literary values of Rukiah's works rather than the historical trajectory of the socio-political conditions that allowed Rukiah to write. As such, they fail to consider Purwakarta (in West Java), her hometown, as an important locus that forms Rukiah's consciousness and in turn informs her writings.

This article intends to place Rukiah's literary works as the historical documents of a young Indonesian woman during the revolution. It emphasizes Purwakarta and its surroundings as providing the context of Rukiah's early writings: the novel *Kedjatuhan dan Hati* (1950) and her anthology of short stories *Tandus* (Desert) (1952). This article starts with a brief summary of Indonesian women writers and their movement during the colonial period. Following that, it discusses Purwakarta—where Rukiah once resided and produced a number of literary works—in the context of the Indonesian Revolution (1945–49). This is followed by a short biography of Rukiah and the historical context of her stories. In the last part, this article analyzes and (re-)interprets her texts on socio-political issues, especially on modernity. This article argues that although Rukiah's literary works can be read as her individual achievement, they are also a result of the socio-political transformation that affected her hometown and her life.

Female Authors during the Colonial Era

During the colonial period native women had to suffer multiple forms of repression due to the colonial system and patriarchal tradition, while male figures dominated the media and political organizations. Nonetheless, they used writing as an important medium to channel their concerns and views on social issues that affected their lives. There were at least two prominent Indonesian women whose literary works were published and widely read during colonial times: Raden Adjeng Kartini and Soewarsih Djojopoespito. Interestingly, they came from different family backgrounds, and thus they can be considered to represent the diversity of Indonesian female intellectual figures in the pre-independence period.

Kartini was born to a noble family on April 21, 1879 in Rembang, Central Java. Due to her aristocratic background, she was able to attend Dutch elementary school, at least until the age of 12 years. During her adolescence, following Javanese tradition for noble young girls, she had to discontinue her studies and avoid social activities in order to prepare for marriage (*pingit*). During this time of seclusion, Kartini spent most of her time reading books and corresponding with a number of Dutch pen friends. Her letters

demonstrate her critical thinking on various issues (they were written in eloquent Dutch). Her primary concern was girls' right to education and the local traditional practice of polygamy. At the age of 24 Kartini became the fourth wife of a nobleman, but unfortunately on September 17, 1904 she died at the age of 25 after giving birth to a son.

Although Harsja Bachtiar regards Kartini's seclusion as a consequence of her nobility, her life represents the dilemma of standing as a modern woman versus living in line with tradition.⁴⁾ In the beginning of the twentieth century in the Dutch Indies, education access for girls, underage marriage, and polygamy were certainly the main issues facing native women as reported in colonial surveys.⁵⁾ Given such a situation, Kartini's life (except her tragic death) represents the ideals of a native woman who was not only fluent in a European language and could express her thoughts and concerns but also an enlightened native. In order to push for social change in the colony, an edited collection of Kartini's letters was published in 1911 (the Malay version was published in 1922) and became a best seller in colonial society. Royalties from her book were donated to establish Kartini's school in 1912. These efforts to increase education for girls were eventually supported by the colonial government, which adopted the ethical policy of girls' education and attempted to modernize the colony.

In the following period, the increasing number of educated women gave rise to the presence of women activists in the first decade of the twentieth century. The first native women's organization was Putri Mardika (Free Daughter), founded in Batavia in 1912. This organization aimed to help women who wished to continue their education, to increase their self-confidence, and contribute to society. In 1913 Putri Mardika published its own newspaper, which discussed various issues including polygamy and child/underage marriage (see Vreede-de Stuers 1959).

In the 1920s, the women's movement gained popularity among native activists. There were an increasing number of social organizations with a women's section. Two months after the Second Indonesian Youth Congress, 30 women's organizations arranged the First Indonesian Women's Congress in Yogyakarta on December 22–26, 1928. This congress concluded with an agreement to form a women's federation, Perikatan Perempuan Indonesia (PPI, Indonesian Women's Union). However, the First Indonesian Women's Congress did not mention clearly its political stance on the nationalist issue in

4) See Bachtiar (1979). For comparison, see Gouda (1995).

5) Nine elite women were interviewed in the 1914 colonial survey on the status of native women: Raden Ajoe Soerio Hadikoesoemo, Raden Ajoe Ario Sosrio Soegianto, Oemi Kalsoem, Raden Adjeng Karlina, Raden Adjeng Amirati, Raden Adjeng Martini, Mrs. Djarisah, Raden Dewi Sartica, and Raden Ajoe Siti Soendari. See *Onderzoek Naar de Mindere Welvaart der Inlandsche Bevolking op Java en Madoera, Verheffing van de Inlandsche Vrouw*, IXb3 (Batavia: Papyrus, 1914). For a summary, see Vreede-de Stuers (1959, 150–151).

its communiqué. Sukarno, the most prominent nationalist leader at the time, regretted the result of this congress (see Wieringa 2010).

A different picture of the relationship between female activists and male domination in the nationalist movement is described in an autobiographical novel published in 1940, *Buiten het Gareel* (Out of harness). This novel was written in Dutch by Soewarsih Djojopoespito, who was born on April 20, 1912 in Bogor. She was educated at Kartini's school before moving to Middlebaar Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs, or Dutch lower secondary school, in Bogor. In 1931 she became a teacher at Taman Siswa in Batavia, where she met her future husband, Soegondo Djojopoespito, a key person in the youth congress in 1928 (see Shackford-Bradley 2000, 199).

Her story took place in the 1930s, when there was a great deal of anticolonial sentiment among native intellectuals. *Buiten het Gereel* recounts the story of Sulastrī, a teacher at a private school (or *sekolah partikelir*),⁶ and her husband, Sudarmo, a political activist. The novel describes the couple as "proletarian intellectuals," meaning that Sulastrī and her husband were educated figures although they were not part of the elite class. This depiction was in line with a phenomenon at the time of an increasing number of young people among the native population who chose to have an independent career in the private/nongovernmental sector rather than seeking a position in a government office. Nevertheless, working as a political activist required Sudarmo to repeatedly relocate to different cities. Sulastrī dutifully followed her husband, as was expected of an ideal wife. Despite their unsettled life, Sulastrī was able to manage their meager income.

The novel provides a contrast to the common image of Kartini as the ideal woman. Sulastrī is described as being more articulate: she could express her opinions freely and decide her own life and path, both as a female activist and as a devoted wife. Although the novel describes Sulastrī as a woman of her own thoughts, it actually uncovers an unequal relationship between male and female intellectual-activists. Sulastrī's life is still tied to Sudarmo's as she (still) consents to live under her husband's authority.

During the Japanese period, women's organizations were dissolved. In turn, the Japanese military administration established Fujinkai, which was led by the wife of a top local officer. It was obligatory for all civil servants' wives to register as its members.⁷ It also recruited a number of ordinary women to train in order to support the Japanese army at war by engaging in such activities as visiting wounded soldiers, knitting socks,

6) These schools were founded across the country by native Indonesian nationalists to fulfill education needs for all Indonesians.

7) This kind of leadership was often taken as a model during the New Order period (1965–98). In fact, one organization, Dharma Wanita, continues this practice even today.

and entertaining Japanese and Pembela Tanah Air (PETA, Defenders of the Fatherland) soldiers (Wieringa 2010, 144). Later, these practical skills came in useful in supporting the Indonesian Revolution.

Purwakarta Area during the Revolution⁸⁾

Purwakarta is located in the Karawang area, which is approximately 80 kilometers from eastern Jakarta. When the republic moved its capital to Yogyakarta in the beginning of 1946, this area soon became the frontline of the battlefield. The local population of Purwakarta undoubtedly supported the republican cause and embraced the revolutionary idea due to the misery they had to suffer during the colonial period. Under Japanese occupation, Karawang and its surroundings were forced to supply rice crops and manpower labor (*romusha*). Those who failed to fulfill the military's authority of this obligation were detained and persecuted. Consequently, there was great resentment among the common people, who joined gangsters to wreak revenge against the Japanese and Allied forces during the revolution.

After the defeat of Japan, people in the Karawang area immediately manifested their discontent and resentment against local Japanese. The PETA units in Rengasdengklok (60 km north of Karawang) seized power early in the morning of August 16, 1945. They disarmed a few Japanese and raised the Indonesian flag. The PETA's revolt in Rengasdengklok spread rapidly to Purwakarta. The alliance between the conservative nationalists, the PETA, the police, and the civil service was formed while the PETA disarmed the security and took over the town from the Japanese. Although the Japanese immediately succeeded in crushing this insurrection, the revolutionary spirit had started in the Karawang region (Cribb 1991, 49–50).

Meanwhile, political tensions were rapidly rising in Jakarta. The young generation organized under Angkatan Pemuda Indonesia (Youth Generation of Indonesia) formed a joint command organization, the Lasykar Rakyat Jakarta Raya (LRJR, People's Militia of Greater Jakarta), in Salemba (in central Jakarta) on November 22, 1945; they were headed by a former medical student (*ibid.*, 71). Their main task was to defend the town, although they had limited military arms. And this dire situation made them powerless with the coming of the Allied forces to Jakarta. On December 27, 1945 the Allied forces were instructed to restore order with repressive measures, including searching resistance

8) This part relies extensively on the study by Robert Cribb (1991), which provides details on the militias and their armed struggle around the Purwakarta area.

groups in the *kampungs* of Jakarta. Apparently, this repression was too heavy to fight against. In less than a week, it was reported that Allied forces detained 743 people and successfully controlled the town. Facing this critical situation, the LRJR had to leave Jakarta and moved their headquarters to Karawang (*ibid.*, 72–73).

The LRJR reorganized their army group in Kawarang in a relatively simple way.⁹⁾ Inspired by the heroic struggle in Surabaya, they planned to push away the Dutch and British by launching a massive attack on Jakarta. Thus, they needed to strengthen their forces by connecting the struggle with other armed groups in the region (*ibid.*, 75). With the help of these groups, the LRJR succeeded in controlling a strategic position in the front line. Purwakarta was an important city for their struggle, and it was from this city that they broadcast political programs to gather mass support using transmitters of the Radio Republik Indonesia (Radio of Republic of Indonesia).

It should be remembered that the Indonesian Revolution involved various groups with competing ideological perspectives (see Anderson 2001). The armed groups were generally divided based on religion, nationalism, and socialism. The LRJR itself had numerous affiliated units, and the LRJR in Karawang was closely associated with Pesindo (Indonesian Socialist Youth) although never a part of it (Cribb 1991, 75). Interestingly, the LRJR extended their struggle into educational activities so that they could improve political consciousness among their members and common people in the region. This strategy certainly reflected their mass-based politics. There was a high level of illiteracy among the people in the region, and the educational work was a struggle of its own. On the other hand, the LRJR realized that providing a political education was important to build up a system of village defense (*pertahanan desa*), which in turn would help the organization.

Rukiah in Purwakarta¹⁰⁾

Rukiah was born on April 27, 1927 in Purwakarta. She went into education training during the Japanese occupation and worked as a teacher at a girls' school in her hometown. According to Sidik Kertapati, her interest in writing led her into contact with leftist artists in Purwakarta and Bandung (Shackford-Bradley 2000, 254). In the coming years, her

9) Cribb (1991, 749) notes, "Although Sutan Akbar was leader, with R.F. Ma'riful as his deputy, the organisation's policy was directed by a political council (*dewan politik*) consisting of Khaerul Saleh, Armunanto, Johar Nur, Kusnandar and Akhmad Astrawinata, with later also Mohammad Darwis, Syamsuddin Can and Sidik Kertapati, all of them capable and experienced young politicians."

10) This part relies mainly on Gallop (1985).



Fig. 1 Rukiah, c. 1952–53 (Photo: Family collection)

network of artist friends was instrumental in her accessing the literary world.¹¹⁾ Rukiah's first poem was published in *Godam Djelata*,¹²⁾ a magazine edited by Sidik Kertapati (1920–2007), a prominent revolutionary, member of the LRJR, and Rukiah's future husband.

After finishing her training, Rukiah rapidly developed her literary career. When she was 21 years old (May 1948), she worked for *Pudjangga Baru* as its Purwakarta correspondent. In the same year, she worked for *Mimbar Indonesia* and *Indonesia*. It was during this time that Rukiah developed genuine concerns about the cultural life of her hometown. In 1949 she founded the cultural magazine *Irama* (based in Purwakarta) and became its editor. Despite her literary activities, Rukiah maintained her job as a schoolteacher. Purwakarta was not simply a hometown in a nostalgic sense but became the breeding ground for her to launch a writing career on her own. According to Sidik Kertapati, Rukiah stayed home during 1948–49 (*ibid.*, 257) and produced a number of poems, short stories, and a novel and prepared them for publication in the following years.

In another testimony, Pramodya Ananta Toer shared a memory that gives another nuance to Rukiah's literary activities:

In 1949 Rukiah created [the journal] “Indonesia Irama” and held her position as editor while engaging in activities to help the guerilla forces. . . . She avoided being arrested for these activities on

11) Sapardi Joko Damono (1997, 276–279) concludes that most writers in the revolution, in fact, started their writing career before the war. Therefore, Rukiah was an exceptional writer at that time.

12) Brief information on *Godam Djelata* can be found in Cribb (1991, 74).

numerous occasions, through her associations with the local Wedana, but she witnessed the killing of one of the guerilla fighters who she had been harboring in her house. In 1949 she was given the task to visit prisoners of war being held in Bukit Duri. (*ibid.*, 257–258)

Pramoedya's testimony confirms Rukiah's involvement in the revolutionary struggle that took place in her hometown. Her "engaging in activities" may have been due to her educational background and nationalist ideals, which inspired her to take risks by harboring independence fighters. In turn, Rukiah was inspired by her experiences among the independence fighters. As we shall discuss below, she expressed her thoughts and restlessness about this subject in her stories.

Rukiah's Entry into the Literary World

Rukiah moved to Jakarta in 1950 and began working as an editorial secretary at *Pudjangga Baru*. In the same year, her novel *Kedjatuhan dan Hati* was published. It seems that it received a lukewarm response within literary circles in Jakarta. But that changed with the publication of her collection of poems and short stories, *Tandus*, in 1952. In 1953 she won a literary prize from the Badan Musjawarah Kebudayaan Nasional (National Cultural Board) for *Tandus*.¹³⁾

It should be noted that the early years of postcolonial Indonesia were marked by the attempt of several Indonesian artists to define the future of Indonesian culture. On February 18, 1950, a group of Indonesian artists declared the *Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang* (Gelanggang Testimonial). This manifesto emphasized that Indonesian culture was part of the world's culture rather than an isolated phenomenon. A few months after the declaration, a group of leftist artists founded the Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakjat (LEKRA, Institution of People's Culture) on August 17, 1950. In contrast with the *Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang*, in its manifesto LEKRA underlined that the people were the sole creator of culture and the new Indonesia must be based on the struggle against feudal and imperialist cultures. In short, LEKRA criticized *Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang* supporters as adopting the culture of the capitalist class (Dharta 2010).

It is difficult to conclude when exactly Rukiah joined LEKRA. In the first congress

13) Badan Musjawarah Kebudayaan Nasional was an important cultural institution founded by the Indonesian government to support national cultural development in the 1950s. Rukiah married Sidik Kertapati in 1952 and gave birth to their son in 1953. It is interesting to note that H.B. Jassin (1962) wrote a bitter critique on *Tandus* 10 years after it was published. That is partly because in 1962, LEKRA and its opponents were very tense, and this might have influenced Jassin's view on Rukiah's earlier work.

of LEKRA on January 28, 1959, she put forward the ideal that progressive artists should visit peasants' villages and labor camps.¹⁴ She was elected as a member of the National Council of LEKRA, along with some of her artist friends such as the painter Affandi (1907–90), Hendra Gunawan (1918–83), and the writer Rivai Apin (1927–95).¹⁵ Yet, her choice to join LEKRA was not surprising. In her works she already expressed, to a certain degree, her support for leftist ideas.

Women and the Revolution in *Tandus*

Although *Tandus* as a collection was published two years after *Kedjatuhan dan Hati*, some of the poems and short stories were written much earlier. The collection consists of 34 poems and six short stories, and Rukiah wrote them before she worked on the novel. In fact, some poems were already published elsewhere before 1950: for example, *Buntu Kejaran* was already published in *Pujangga Baru* in 1948.

As Gallop (1985) has discussed Rukiah's poems extensively from a literary point of view,¹⁶ the focus here is on Rukiah's short stories in *Tandus*.¹⁷ The background of these stories is mainly the revolution, and the main character is the common people. Although most of the narrators are female, male protagonists play a key role. This structure reminds us of Du Perron's critical commentary on Soewarsih's work that Sudarmo (the husband) is the hero, not Sulastri (the wife) (Du Perron 1975, xii). Indonesian women's writings show that women had an inferior position to male activists and guerrillas in the Indonesian political context of the period.

Like her poems, Rukiah's prose employs a simplicity of style ("kesederhanaan baru"), a new genre in Indonesian literature at the time that was invented by Idrus (1921–79), a well-known Indonesian writer (Gallop 1985, 44). In this context, Purwakarta and its people became an essential part of Rukiah's works to represent the simple life in the region. In contrast, newness and revolutionary ideas always came from the foreigner. Rukiah has successfully highlighted the presence of common people in the region when they confronted or embraced revolutionary ideas.

The simplicity in style is clearly presented in Rukiah's first short story, "Mak Esah"

14) Njoto (1959).

15) Rukiah wrote a poem titled "Sahabatku" (My friend) as a dedication to one of her painter friends.

16) Gallop (1985) classifies her poems in seven categories: life, truth, desire, revolution, inner struggles, love, and writing.

17) I do not discuss "Sebuah Tjerita Malam Ini" because it was written in 1951, after the revolution was over. The other five short stories were written between 1948 and 1949.

(Esah's mother).¹⁸ It tells of an elderly woman who lives alone in a house 4 kilometers from a *kampung* named Tandjungrasa. This is the only story in which Rukiah details the location of the protagonist's village, as if she wants to highlight that it is based on a true story.

The story describes the woman as an honest person who lives in her own world with her simple thoughts, as she believes that she has done good deeds in her life and thus expects God will help her. Ironically, her kindness and simplicity do not protect her from being affected by political events. The story informs readers that people actually have forgotten her name and instead call her by the name of her oldest son, who died during the Communist insurrection in 1926. Since then, misery keeps coming into her life. Her husband dies at the beginning of the Pacific War, and her daughter, Rumsah, passes away from malaria during the Japanese occupation (1942–45). During the revolutionary period, the elderly woman does not believe in political change as she does not see the difference in the meaning of *merdeka* (freedom). For her, *merdeka* simply means another king: an Indonesian king with a *pitji* (traditional cap). Nonetheless, when a group of guerrillas seek shelter in her house, she willingly lodges them simply because they look nice and polite. The next morning when a group of Dutch soldiers raid her house to look for the guerrillas, they burn down her house and shoot her dead while she is still unable to understand what happened and her role in it. Her "simple" life illustrates the political gap between the guerrillas and common people whose lives are still miserable and who have to bear all the costs despite the political changes after *merdeka*.

In "Isteri Peradjurit" (The soldier's wife), Rukiah tells of a couple who live in a village in West Java, somewhere near Garut. The story revolves around its protagonist, a beautiful young woman named Siti, who is the couple's only child. The couple are known simply as Pak Siti (father of Siti) and Mak Siti (mother of Siti). Pak Siti works on the family's vegetable farm and is supportive of his daughter's education despite Mak Siti insisting that a woman's place is in the house. At the age of eight, Siti goes to the school for girls in town. After Siti finishes her studies, Pak Siti gives her sewing equipment so she can work as a tailor. This background gives the reader a sense of the simplicity in the lives of the characters as something they can relate to their own situation.

As the story unfolds, however, the family's simple life is complicated by the arrival of the Japanese occupation army. Pak Siti refuses the order of the Japanese, who have mobilized the people to plant castor beans (*Ricinus communis*) to serve the needs of war. His main concern is his farm and the survival of his family, as the family has no interest

18) Gallop (1985, 43) notes that the story was first published in the *Pujangga Baru* in 1948 and titled "Gambaran Masyarakat" (A picture of society).

in political matters. His refusal to follow orders costs him his life: one morning he is picked up in a truck (*mobil tidak bertutup*) and never returns home. The story continues by introducing Hasjim, a young man from Garut, who is rumored to be a fugitive from the Kempeitai (Japanese secret police). He falls in love with Siti, and three months later they get married. Hasjim introduces Siti to politics, books, and his friends. When the revolution breaks out, Hasjim wants to join the army but Siti worries about it as she is pregnant. Eventually, she lets him join the revolution when their child is born.

Although the story illustrates the troubles of a simple family who live in a small town, it shows how politics affects the lives of its characters based on their gender. Readers see how the male characters can do whatever they please based on their political outlook (they are either politically naive like Pak Siti or politically engaged like Hasjim). As a result of the males' political outlook, it is the female characters (Siti and Mak Siti) who have to cope with the burden of life on their own shoulders. While the male characters are free to act on their political outlook, the female characters are compelled to follow what their husbands want to do. It seems the message that Rukiah wants to convey is how revolution (even in a small town) was experienced differently by males and females, and it was the females alone who had to strike a balance in their life. Even when females wanted to express their political outlook, the conditions of the revolution did not allow them to do so. Thus, the story works as a criticism of unequal gender-based political expression of revolutionary ideals.

This notion of women's political outlook is described also in "Antara Dua Gambaran" (Between two perspectives), the story of Ati, a young female teacher and writer who lives in a small town during the Japanese occupation. Ati has a lover, Irwan, a law student who is a political activist. Irwan introduces Ati to one of his classmates, Tutang. The story describes Tutang and Irwan as two young men of completely different characters. While Irwan is a passionate political activist, Tutang is a quiet, obedient, and tidy person from a middle-class family. Despite her mother's preference for Tutang, Ati chooses Irwan as her lover as she sees Tutang as an *orang kosong* (empty person). Yet, Irwan reminds her to be more friendly and patient with Tutang and even suggests that she learn writing from him. Ati follows Irwan's suggestion, and from there her perception of Tutang gradually changes.

The proclamation of independence in 1945 transforms the lives of these three characters. Irwan has been getting more involved in politics and has become the leader of a people's militia in West Java (Lasjkar Rakjat se-Djawa Barat). Meanwhile, Tutang works as an editor of a magazine in Jakarta. Ati continues her work for a while as a teacher and spends more and more time reading and writing. The political situation with the revolution forces Irwan to continue his armed struggle in the mountains. Later, Ati hears of

Irwan's death and chooses to marry Tutang. The story portrays the limitations of women's political outlook during the revolution. They had the freedom to read and write, but their political expressions were confined within males' prerogatives. This story also shows that advice from a male protagonist (Irwan's suggestion to Ati to approach Tutang despite her objections) is always correct.

In "Surat Pandjang dari Gunung" (Long letters from the mountains), Rukiah narrates the love story of Hambali, a guerrilla fighter, and Isti, a schoolteacher of Taman Siswa in a small town. The title of this short story refers to the love letters Hambali sends to Isti, in which he discusses political issues and difficulties during the war, as well as the educational activities carried out by guerrillas in the mountains. As communications between guerrilla fighters and the general population are difficult and closely monitored by the Dutch, Isti receives these letters discreetly from a courier boy, Haja, one of her students. Haja is an orphan: his mother has passed away, and his father was killed by the Dutch army. Having no family, Haja later chooses to follow Hambali to war and thus has to leave school. Isti fails to persuade Haja to remain in school. Isti represents the life of many women during the revolution who were unable to intervene in decisions made by males to go to war. She is allowed to know about the revolution only from the letters sent to her, and nothing else. Ironically, these letters could be confiscated by the Dutch and used to implicate her as a sympathizer. In the end, Isti chooses to burn all the letters.

"Tjeritanja Sesudah Kembali" (His story on returning) is the story of a 26-year-old man, Nursewan, narrated by his close friend, a young woman. The young woman is known only by her nickname, Rus. Rus informs the reader that Nursewan is a simple man who has uncertain feelings about his future. Having failed to date women of his choice, Nursewan decides to join a guerrilla army. Rus cannot believe that Nursewan is capable of doing such a thing. When Rus leaves her hometown for work in Yogyakarta, she loses contact with Nursewan. However, one of her friends later informs her that Nursewan did, in fact, join the guerrilla fighters. Toward the end of the story Rus finally meets Nursewan in a hospital in their hometown, where he explains in detail his reasons for joining the guerrilla fighters. The story illustrates how men had the option of joining the guerrilla fighters (and could make a claim to being heroic) even though their reasons may have had nothing to do with the revolution. As the story is narrated in the first person by a woman, it highlights how women saw the revolution, which was used by men as an excuse to escape from women's rejection of their love and at the same time to claim their masculinity.

The Fallout of Revolution in *Kedjatuhan dan Hati*

As does *Tandus*, *Kedjatuhan dan Hati* reflects factual problems experienced by common people during the revolution. The story is about Susi, a young woman who lives in a small town (presumably Purwakarta) with her two sisters and parents. Susi's mother is the most dominant person in the family, and she is obsessed with materialistic achievements. Meanwhile, Susi's father is a quiet man. The eldest sister, Dini, is described as an independent young woman who has less self-confidence and feels a little unhappy in the family for being pressured by their parents to marry. The second sister, Lina, is described as the most beautiful and their mother's favorite daughter. Susi is described as a sincere young woman.

The story informs the reader that Dini and Susi are expected by their mother to marry wealthy men. Under such pressure, they decide to leave their family home. Dini continues her studies abroad, while Susi joins the Red Cross.

It is at work that Susi meets Lukman, a Communist guerrilla, and falls in love with him. However, Susi and Lukman have different views of marriage. Susi would like to have a traditional wedding ceremony. Lukman, on the other hand, does not like ceremonies and is unable to guarantee a "normal" life as he is devoted to politics and revolution. After having a long debate, Lukman accepts Susi's request:

Karena engkau jang minta, apa sadja perintah itu, aku patuh menurut, sekalipun perintah itu mengambil sepotong kejakinanku. (Siti Rukiah 1950, 54)

Because you asked for it, I will follow and obey whatever your request is although it may eat away some parts of my belief.

They end the night with some time in private. The following day, Susi demands an immediate marriage but Lukman responds that he has to leave for war. Susi is very disappointed and decides to return home.

Upon coming back home, Susi finds Lina, her youngest sister, has matured greatly. Their mother, however, is becoming more insecure. To reconcile with these changes, Susi finally agrees to marry Par, a wealthy man who helped her family through difficult times. It is then that Susi finds out she is pregnant (by Lukman). When finally Lukman comes to see her again and asks her to live with him, she refuses.

The story illustrates male superiority by showing Lukman leaving Susi behind even though initially he had agreed to stay with her. This story also shows the dilemma of a young Indonesian woman during the revolution. Susi has to choose between living with the new revolutionary values or old traditions, between romantic love or arranged mar-

riage, while maintaining her own independent life. Facing this dilemma, Susi chooses to make a practical decision. As such, the story informs us that revolution failed to change the oppressive traditional social structure and create a more egalitarian postcolonial society, and women were caught in the middle. Women's aspiration to be independent and have a family of their own choice was not fully realized. In postcolonial Indonesia, women still have to depend on their partner, financially and emotionally, and to disregard their own ideals. Thus, the story shows the limited impact of political changes on women's status.

Conclusion

Like Kartini and Soewarsih Djojopoespito, who came before her, Rukiah expressed her concerns about the status of women. Kartini represents the enlightened female author of the early twentieth century under the colonial ethical policy. In her novel, Soewarsih Djojopoespito represents the rebellious female activist at the dawn of nationalism among the natives. This article shows how, in her own context, through literary works Rukiah was able to express herself as an independent woman to challenge the "normalized" ideals of her revolutionary male friends.

Aside from their literary value, Rukiah's literary works provide an important documentation of the revolution for the historiography of Indonesia. *Kedjatuhan dan Hati* and *Tandus* are based on her experiences and observations during the revolution in Purwakarta that allowed her to write detailed accounts of the common people and beyond their seemingly simple life. Rukiah provides a detailed picture of how revolutionary ideas brought by outsiders drastically changed the lives of simple people in Purwakarta, regardless of how ignorant the latter might have been on political issues. This article also shows how her short stories uncover the complex issues of revolution, such as the political gap among the people, the old traditions that were still maintained in the lives of many young women, and the unequal gender-based political expression of revolutionary ideals. In that sense, Rukiah's literary works provide a deeper picture of the revolution beyond the revolutionary heroism and political rhetoric of *merdeka* for all.

Rereading Rukiah's literary works in the present time brings us to a deeper understanding of the development of the nation's consciousness for gender equality and liberation from the oppressive social structure. Female authors have come a long way in expressing their thoughts and aspirations about the ideals of an independent woman who is not afraid to express her critical thinking and political outlook. Post-1998 Indonesia has legally ensured women's rights, but it falls short on providing space for women's

political empowerment. Rukiah's literary works provide fruitful insights on the status of Indonesian women today.

Accepted: December 11, 2017

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to Rukiah's family for generously providing me with their mother's photo and to Ita Nadia and Hersri Setiawan for LEKRA's materials. I would like also to thank anonymous reviewers for their constructive suggestions. Any errors that remain are my sole responsibility.

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Jit Phumisak and His Images in Thai Political Contexts

Piyada Chonlaworn*

Jit Phumisak (1930–66) is one of the most well-known figures among Thai leftist scholars and activists in the 1950s. He was born slightly before monarchical absolutism was abolished, and he grew up in an anti-American atmosphere when socialism was booming. Apart from his numerous writings, what makes Jit different from other socialists and Marxists of his time is his legendary life and untimely death. He became a cultural hero and a legendary figure among young activists in the mid-1970s democracy movement. His image, however, was constructed and modified by different actors under different agendas. This paper reviews Jit's life and work by focusing on the construction of his image by the military regime, Communist organization, scholars, political activists, and local authorities from the 1970s to the present, taking into account the different political situations in Thailand throughout these periods.

Keywords: Jit, Marxism, radical intellectuals, Cold War era, political polarization

Introduction

After Thailand changed from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy in 1932, the country fell into a vicious cycle of elected civilian governments and coup d'état-led military regimes. The authoritarian military regime after the end of World War II can be divided into three periods: the Phibunsongkram era, 1948–57; the despotic Sarit-Thanom era headed by Sarit and his clique between 1958 and 1973; and the recent royalist military regime that overthrew Thaksin and his sister Yingluck's governments in 2006 and 2014 respectively.

Each despotic era saw attempts to resist the authoritarian government and calls for social revolution. As Craig Reynolds and Lysa Hong point out, in each period—notably the first two—“the climate for political, economic, social and historical analyses as well as for imaginative literature was shaped by the nature of the regimes in power” (Reynolds and Hong 1983, 78). Roughly three generations of radical movement can be identified.

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The first generation was mainly Sino-Thai Communists—*lookjin* according to Kasian Tejapira—who had close ties with Communist Parties in China and Vietnam before and during World War II. Together with participants in the Boworadet rebellion, they were taken in as political prisoners (Kasian 2001, 26–27). Some were journalists and writers who co-founded the Siamese Communist Party in 1930, which was renamed the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in 1952. The second generation was Thai and Sino-Thai urban intellectuals who introduced and spread Marxism and socialism throughout Thailand through print media during the Phubun and Sarit eras from the late 1940s to the 1960s. The third generation consisted of university student activists who opposed the military regime of Thanom in 1973 and 1976 and were crushed by police and paramilitary forces in the October 1976 riot; they went into the jungles and carried out an underground movement. It was in the postwar era, during a short civilian government, that Marxism entered the Thai cultural market in the form of considerable numbers of printed commodities (*ibid.*, 59). Apart from numerous books, radical newspapers such as *Mahachon* and magazines such as *Aksornsarn* were produced by socialists and Marxists such as Supha Sirimanond, Asanee Pholachan, Thawee Woradilok, and Seni Saowaphong.

Among leftist intellectuals of the 1950s, one cannot overlook the poet, musician, and intellectual named Jit Phumisak (1930–66). Jit was born slightly before monarchical absolutism was abolished and grew up in an anti-American atmosphere when socialism was booming. He was among many socialist writers of his time who were influenced by socialist predecessors, but what makes him different from other socialists and Marxists is that after his untimely death his works that had been banned were secretly reproduced by young activists (Reynolds 1987). The year 2016 marks 50 years after his death, and it is interesting to see how his image has changed through the times: from a Communist to a revolutionary figure, a scholar, and recently an adviser on lucky numbers. This paper reviews Jit's life and work by focusing on the construction of his image by different actors—the military regime, the Communist Party of Thailand, scholars, political activists, and local authorities—from the 1970s to the present, taking into account different political situations in Thailand throughout these periods.

Life and Work

Those who have studied Thai political history would know Jit as a Marxist intellectual, while linguistic and literature students would know him as a talented poet representing peasants and the working class. But most of all, he is probably known and remembered by socialists and political activists as a rebellious and progressive thinker who dared to

criticize the Thai monarchy and Buddhism.

Jit was born on September 25, 1930 in a typical Thai middle-class family. His father was a civil servant working in a tax office, and his mother was a housewife. He was born in Prachinburi Province, in the east of Thailand. Because of his father's job he moved from place to place in his childhood, and he moved to Bangkok when he was 16.

Jit showed an interest in writing from the time he was in high school. He wrote many poems, most of which were about love, flirting, and travel. In his childhood he lived in Battambang, which used to be part of Thailand during World War II but is now in the northwestern part of Cambodia. There he gained knowledge about the Khmer language, history, and archeology and was able to read stone scripts, which led to an interest in Thai classical literature. When he was young he wrote, "I have a dream of becoming one of the literature intellectuals, but in the real life I was so poor. . . . I wanted to buy books but had no money" (Wichai 2003, 167). Even though the poems he wrote in this period were about love and flirting, there is one he wrote in 1946 that showed his patriotic feelings when Thailand lost Battambang to the French. In the poem he said that if Thailand became strong and powerful again, all the lost territories would be returned to it (Wichai 2007, 5–6).

Being talented in linguistics and a voracious reader, he enrolled in the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University in 1950. During his college years he adopted Marxist ideology and wrote a number of articles that were published within and outside the university. Two articles that he wrote for Chulalongkorn's prestigious yearbook, of which he was an editor in 1953, provoked a controversy in the university, resulting in his being thrown from the stage by conservative students. This became known as the *yonbok* incident. In the yearbook he wrote an article criticizing Buddhist monks for their greedy and materialistic behavior and a poem condemning fun-loving women who got pregnant, saying that they did not deserve to be called mothers.¹⁾ These articles did not only cost him a suspension from the university for one and a half years, but raised suspicions among the police that he was a Communist. This was because criticizing Buddhism and women, two core values in Thai society, was regarded as a Communist act at the time (Prachak 2015, 150). However, during and after his suspension Jit continued producing a large number of works criticizing Thai feudalism, imperialism, and monarchy-centered historiography in the form of poems, articles, literature reviews, and translations of socialist novels.

One of his most well-known works, *The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today*, made known to non-Thai scholars by the English translation and analysis by Craig Reynolds

1) Samosorn (1953); Prachak (2015, 150–158).

(1987), explicitly criticizes Thailand's social structure based on *sakdina*—or feudal values—that has long persisted in the monarchy and the ruling class and points to the feudal remnants in Thailand in the late 1950s. It was first published in a journal in 1957 and was banned not long after. Amid the anti-Communism policy of pro-American oligarchy, Jit was arrested and imprisoned in 1958, the year Marshall Sarit Thanarat imposed a coup d'état. He was in jail with other political prisoners for six years without trial and was released in 1964 with a verdict of "not guilty." Then he went into the jungles to join the CPT in the northeast, only to be shot to death by a village headman and paramilitary force in 1966 at the age of 36. Since he was labeled by the authorities as a Communist, his murder was justified—the village headman who shot him was said to have been rewarded by the American authorities with a rifle and a round-trip ticket to Hawaii. After Jit's death, his body was not properly cremated, and the details about his death are a mystery until today (Reynolds 1987, chapter 1).

As stated above, Jit was not the only leftist writer at the time. From the 1932 revolution until the post-World War II period, there were Sino-Thai Communists and left-wing intellectuals who introduced Marxism to Thai intellectual society through print media such as books, newspapers, and journals. But what made Jit distinct from previous and later generations was probably that, apart from his academic writings being debated among academics, because of his controversial biography he became a cultural hero and a model revolutionary among young generations in the mid-1970s democracy movement (*ibid.*, 14).

During his lifetime Jit produced many genres of work: essays, poems, academic monographs, and songs. His works can be divided into different themes: academic work on Thai and Khmer history, etymology, ethnography, reviews of Thai classical literature and art, translations of Marxist novels, and others such as critiques on women, Buddhism, and his memoir about life in prison. Being influenced by Marxist ideology, almost all of his works had a clear purpose: to criticize the Thai ruling class, call for social change, and serve as a voice for peasants and the working class. Among the 16 songs he composed, "Saengdao haeng sattha" (Starlight of faith) is probably the most well known. He composed this song while in prison to encourage himself and others to overcome trouble and injustice (Wichai 2009, 153–154), and it became a symbolic song among social resistance protesters from the mid-1970s democratic movement to recent years, as will be discussed below.

Socialism and Marxism in Thailand

Even though Phibunsongkram imposed a coup d'état in 1947, ousting the civilian regime led by Pridi Phanomyong, the period between 1945 and 1958 is seen as a golden age of Thai social literature and an important formative period for the postwar Thai left-wing and national liberation movement (Flood 1975, 62). The Thai left-wing movement had started a bit earlier with the founding of the Thai Communist Party during World War II by those who got inspiration from the Chinese Revolution, gaining support from left-wing members in the Free Thai (or Seri Thai) group.²⁾ At least 23 Thai radical publications in the form of newspapers, weeklies, and biweekly and monthly magazines were released during 1946 and 1967, though most of them were short-lived due to Sarit's suppression after the 1958 coup d'état (Kasian 2001, 150).

Among the radical publications of that time, a monthly journal called *Aksornsarn* was one of the most well known. Founded by the pro-Pridi veteran journalist Supha Sirimanond in 1949, it became a platform for Thai socialist intellectuals to spread their ideas and studies on Marxism through the translation of foreign works. Even though the journal was not all left wing, as half the writers were right-wing intellectuals, the articles written by socialists such as Kulap Saipradit, Asanee Pholchan, and Samak Burawat were influential in spreading Marxist ideas.³⁾ Asanee, using the pen name Intrawuth, wrote a number of articles criticizing the ruling class for legitimizing their power through Buddhism and literature. For example, he criticized a famous classical work written during the Ayutthaya period called *Lilit Phra Lor* (The narrative poem of Prince Lor), a tragic love story of a handsome prince and two princesses from another country. Intrawuth argued that the novel was nothing more than a shallow and erotic story widely read among the ruling class and that it led people to be submissive to the royalty.⁴⁾ Other articles by him include an introductory study of Marxism and translated works by the Chinese socialist Lu Xun and Joseph Stalin's work on historical materialism (Suthachai 2006, 148). It is said that through *Aksornsarn* avant-garde writers such as Asanee played an important role in introducing a new concept of art—art and literature for life. They believed that art and literature should be created to represent peasants and the working class, leading

2) The Party evolved from the Communist Party of Siam, the earliest form of a Communist Party in Thailand. It was established in 1930 by Chinese migrants in Thailand but was dissolved in 1936. For further information, see Somsak (1993) and Kasian (2001).

3) The journal was later criticized by the Right as being too radical and by the Left for being insufficiently militant. Most writers—both right wing and left wing—deserted the journal.

4) *Aksornsarn* 2(1) (2493) (1950). The title on the front page reads "Does *Lilit Phralor* Lead People Astray?" (Suthachai 2006, 157).

to a revolutionary society (*ibid.*, 164).

Aksornsan was closed down in 1952 by Sarit's order due to its Communist character. Despite its short life, the journal inspired many young readers who later became serious socialists, including Jit. He got both the methodology of analysis and the content of his works from earlier writers who contributed to *Aksornsan*.⁵⁾

When and how did Jit embrace socialism and Marxism? It can be said that Chulalongkorn University, ironically a right-wing and conservative institution, was the place where he learned about Marxism and embraced its ideas. It was not a coincidence considering the socialism and Marxist study that was getting more attention in the early 1950s by leftist intellectuals of that time. Jit was probably inspired by many articles in *Aksornsan* and came to know about and admire the Chinese revolutionary Lu Xun through the journal.⁶⁾

Jit's Critique of *Sakdina* Literature

Even though Jit was well known for his seminal work *The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today*, there are other writings that deserve attention. This section will focus on one of his reviews of Thai classical literature.

As a keen reader of Thai and Khmer classical literature, Jit reviewed a number of Thai classical literary works written from the Sukhothai to the mid-Bangkok period (thirteenth century to the 1860s). Parallel with *The Real Face*, his purpose was to criticize a traditional way of poem writing that focused on the monarchy or courtiers rather than the lives of ordinary people, and to call upon readers to pay more attention to the social aspect of these works.

He first reviewed *Nirat Nongkhai* (Travelogue to Nongkhai), a long travelogue written in 1869 by a low-ranking court official named Tim Sukhayang (official name Luang Phatthanapongphakdi). It was about a military expedition from Bangkok to Nongkhai in the Northeast to suppress rebels in Laos, then Thailand's vassal state. Tim was in that expedition, too, and he described in his work how hard the journey was and pointed to the wrong decision and lack of strategy of the supreme commander who ordered the expedition, Phraya Borommahasrisuriyawong (Chuang Bunnak), an influential high-

5) For example, Asanee Pholchan, or Nai Phi. Jit's argument on the function of art that should reflect lives of the working class in *Art for Life, Art for the People*, the only book published when he was alive, was influenced by earlier writers in the magazine.

6) *Aksornsan* 4(1) (2495) (1953). The title on the front page reads "The Real Story of Ah Q by Lu Xun."

ranking courtier in King Chulalongkorn's reign. Upon finding out that he had been criticized, the commander was very angry and used his influence to pressure King Chulalongkorn to punish Tim. Not long after the travelogue was published, it was banned and burned by a court order and Tim was physically punished and imprisoned. Jit pointed out that Tim had been punished because of his courage in criticizing his commander, if not disobeying him, which was considered unacceptable in Thai society. The uniqueness of this work is that while most *nirat* or travelogues written in those days are descriptive narrations of the scenery of each place the poet visited and about his subjective feeling of missing home and his loved ones—by and large using erotic expressions—*Nirat Nongkhai* goes beyond the traditional style by touching upon the political factions in the palace at that time. The author also describes the social and economic lives of the people and places he encountered, which, from Jit's viewpoint, serves well as a historical source. On the one hand, Jit urged his readers not to read travelogues just for pleasure but to look deeper at their social implications (Jit [Sithi] 1975, 4–13). On the other hand, he used this work to demonstrate a hierarchy and patron-client system in Thai society from the old times to the present (*ibid.*, 89).

Jit also reviewed a classical work titled *Lilit Ongkan Chaengnam* (Oath of allegiance), one of the oldest works of literature in Thai history, written anonymously in the early Ayutthaya period (mid-fourteenth century). The poem is mainly about the scary curse and calamity if one betrays or becomes disloyal to the King. It was written in parallel with the oath of allegiance ceremony held twice a year by Brahmin monks, when court officials were required to drink “sacred” water as a symbol of allegiance to the King. The ceremony, being influenced by the Angkor kingdom, has a long history dating back to the Sukhothai period and lasted until the 1932 coup d'état (which Jit viewed as a commoners' revolution) (Jit 1994, 111–112, 116). The literature is considered by Thai conservative scholars as a piece of great writing that helped to unify civil servants from different parts of the kingdom, and the ceremony itself was viewed as protection from all calamities. However, in Jit's view, it was written with the purpose of elevating the status of Thai Kings as God-Kings, or Devaraja in Hindu ideology, and legitimizing the King's power by making an oath of allegiance look sacred and thus making people submissive. He argued that this ceremony actually took place in order to threaten the King's subjects, as those who failed to make their oath to the King would be regarded as rebels and face the death penalty, which in his opinion was irrational and a form of exploitation (*ibid.*, 102–113). In the context of anti-Communism at that time, he compared the act of insurrection in ancient times to his times, when the government viewed Communism as an insurgency (*ibid.*, 103).

In contrast to the court-centered literature discussed above, Jit reviewed a popular

novel titled *Raden-Landai* (The story of Raden and Landai). Written in the early nineteenth century by Phra Mahamontri, a police department commander in the King Rama III reign, whom Jit regard as a *sakdina* civil servant, *Raden-Landai* is the story of a beggar of Indian origin named Landai and two women—Kra-ae and Pradae. Kra-ae is Landai's girlfriend, who sells sweets in a market. Pradae is a beautiful Malay woman from Patani who is taken to Bangkok as a slave and later is sold into marriage to a man named Pradua, a cow breeder who is probably of Indian origin as well. Landai meets Pradae and falls in love with her, leading to their adulterous affair and awkward confrontation with Pradae's husband. Things get complicated when Kra-ae becomes jealous and involved in the love affair (*ibid.*, 36–73).

Written in a funny and satiric style with some erotic scenes, *Raden-Landai* seems to have been enjoyed by both courtiers and commoners of the time, as it was later adapted as a play. According to Jit, the distinctive feature of this novel is that it is a story of poor and marginalized people, in contrast to the conventional and narrow-minded mainstream theme of the time, which was usually a love story involving a King or prince. Little is known about the author, but Jit praised him greatly for his “courage to break the conventional style of *sakdina* literature and his progressiveness a state civil-servant of that time could have” (*ibid.*, 28–29).

Except for *Raden-Landai*, Jit labeled this literature “*sakdina* literature” as it was written to serve Thailand's monarchy. He pointed out how influential and proactive the monarchy was in boosting its legitimacy through literature. His purpose was thus to make readers aware of the influence of the monarchy, not by excluding these literary works but by critically reading them from a new perspective, that is, a socialist viewpoint (*ibid.*, 116).

Jit in Thai Politics

Jit was born shortly before Thailand changed from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. During his lifetime Thailand was under Marshall Phibunsongkram and Sarit's dictatorship. Within the context of the Cold War, Phibun, who initially lacked a firm grip on his government, strengthened his position by allying with the United States. One of their common agendas was anti-Communism. Sarit, who overthrew Phibun's regime in 1958, adopted an anti-Communist policy that he used also to crack down on his political rivals. Under the government's agenda, Communism was regarded as a foreign threat that was anti-Buddhism and anti-monarchy. This discourse easily gave authorities the power to detain suspects without trial. The CPT became an underground

organization after briefly enjoying its freedom of expression during the civilian government of Pridi Phanomyong after World War II.

Prior to Sarit's coup, Jit had written a number of poems and articles criticizing the materialism and imperialism that was sweeping Thai social and political life. Unsurprisingly, this led to the arrest and imprisonment of Jit and other leftist journalists and anti-royalists between 1958 and the 1970s on the charge of being Communists and Communist sympathizers. As Reynolds points out, the Sarit government's attempt to attribute the ideas and activities of Jit and other leftists to a Communist foreign power was a way of reducing the danger of those ideas and activities and of diverting attention away from any substantial problems at home (Reynolds 1987, 28–29). While in Lard Yao prison, Jit called himself a “political poet” and continued to write over 60 poems and monographs to raise political awareness against dictatorship and the pro-capitalist regime. In prison he got to know many members of the CPT, which was probably the reason he joined the Party in late 1965. His relationship with the CPT was, however, somewhat ambiguous. Reynolds points out that his relations with the Party were not smooth, and that Jit was not a Party member in his lifetime as the CPT conferred membership on him only after his death (*ibid.*, 38). Somsak contradicts these statements arguing that Jit was closely involved with the Party in many ways, such as composing songs for it, and that many Party leaders recognized him (Somsak 1993, 22–36). Some CPT members were close friends of Jit's family, and that was the reason they obtained Jit's manuscripts and printed them after his death. Whatever the argument might be, it can be asserted that Jit was labeled a Communist even before he joined the Party and it was actually the anti-Communist regime that pushed him and many others to join the Communist Party.

The Image of Jit in the Mid-1970s

Almost 10 years after Jit's death, Thailand experienced a popular uprising in October 1973 that overthrew the authoritarian regime of Thanom and Praphat and called for a constitution. This was, for the first time in Thai political history, a victory of the democratic movement led by university students and the royalist masses. After that the country enjoyed a couple of euphoric years of democracy, while the Communist movement was revitalized by the CPT. In the 1970s, leftist publications that had been banned during the oligarchic years were reprinted and republished. Jit's provocative works such as *The Real Face*, *Collected Poems and Literary Reviews* by “Political-Poet,” and *Thiphakorn: Artist, Warrior of the People* (*Collection of Jit's Essays on Literature*) were reprinted, and his hidden monographs were discovered and made public (Somsak 1993, 29; Kengkit

2014, 128).⁷⁾ The works of Jit and other Marxists became widely read and reinterpreted by young students who found inspiration from them and were ready to take part in politics and demand for democracy.

The attempts by the CPT and new leftists to radicalize young people did not involve only publishing socialist and thought-provoking books, but also the myth-making of revolutionary heroes. Che Guevara is the most explicit example: he was popularized by the Party as an intellectual who joined an armed struggle. But later, the focus seemed to shift from foreign figures to domestic ones, and Jit came to be regarded as the “people’s warrior” and a patriotic figure: a Thai version of Guevara.⁸⁾ Apart from his biographies, songs and poetry about him were composed by famous artists of the time.

While the CPT was at its peak in spreading propaganda in October 1973 and October 1976, there was at the same time resentment among the urban middle class toward the increasing radicalism of students. This middle class later became a social platform for newly emerged rightists with support from conservative elites, which led to the tragic massacre of university students at Thammasat University on October 6, 1976 (Prachak 2015, 136).

The demonstration originally took place to oppose the return of ex-Prime Minister Thanom to Thailand after his exile, but it ended in the mass killing of over 100 university students by right-wing government and paramilitary forces. More than 3,000 were arrested and 19 were charged and put on trial for “rioting” and threatening the nation, religion, and monarchy (Thongchai 2002, 253–254). As a result, many thousands of students who fled the arrest had no choice but to join the CPT in the jungles.

What is the connection between the CPT and the student movement in the October incident? There was an allegation that the CPT might have manipulated the demonstration in order to end radicalism among urban students and force them to join the armed struggle in the jungles, even though the claim was viewed as lacking substantial basis (*ibid.*, 251–252). The direct result of the massacre was that the CPT was able to recruit many young students and continued publishing underground books about Jit, making him a “revolutionary hero” along with other socialists such as Asanee Pholchan (Thikan 2014, 157). His poems about revolution in the jungle and the marching songs that he composed

7) “The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today” was first published in the journal *Nitisat* in 1957 and then banned, and was reprinted several times—in 1974, 1977, and 1979. *Thiphakorn* was also first published in 1957 and reprinted in 1974 and 1978. *Collected Poems and Literary Reviews by “Political-Poet”* was first printed in *Prachatipatai* newspaper in 1964 and reprinted in 1974 by Naew Ruam Naksuksa Chiangmai (Chiang Mai). For further information, see Reynolds (1987, 177) and Somsak (1993, 26).

8) The key figure who spread Jit’s image as a revolutionary was one of the CPT’s members, Manot Meethangkool, or Uncle Prayote, who had a personal relationship with Jit’s family. For further information, see Somsak (1993, 28), Chusak (2014), and Thikan (2014).

while in prison were later sung by young people. His most well-known song, “Saengdao haeng sattha” (Starlight of faith), inspired young people who joined the underground movement to fight against the authoritarian regime and boost their sense of socialist patriotism. Students who joined the CPT in the jungles after the October incident already knew about the legendary Jit, so they were eager to learn more about him and his works (Reynolds 1987, 39).

Jit might be regarded as a Communist and revolutionary-cultural hero. But at the same time we should bear in mind, as some studies point out, that his image was heavily created, modified, and reproduced by CPT members and leftist activists in the mid-1970s, largely with the aim of inspiring young people to join the armed struggle under the Party’s leadership, and that the construction of Jit’s image 10 years after his death was focused more on his life and mysterious death than trying to understand or materialize his political ideas. In other words, the CPT seemed to put more effort into creating a hero than into spreading Marxist ideology among young people (Chusak 2014, 46–47; Kengkit 2014, 117–120).

Jit in the Post-Communism Era

After the student uprising/massacre incident in 1976, Thailand’s political ideology was split into the urban-based right wing and the jungle-based left wing led by the CPT. But due to several factors, such as the alliance between the Thai and Chinese governments in the 1980s and the divisions between students and key members in the Party, the CPT began to lose popularity among leftist elites (Thongchai 2002, 259–261). At the same time, there was a decline in Marxist studies and the rise of trends such as nationalism and community studies in Thai academic circles. This change paved the way for another group of intellectuals who never joined the Party and resented Communism. They attempted to replace Jit’s image as a revolutionary with that of a scholar whose academic works shed light on Thai literature, etymology, and history. As a result, there was a changing trend in the publication of his works during this period by some publishers and scholars—from a socialist theme to various other themes under linguistics and history.⁹⁾

9) For example, *Phasa lae nirukkatisat* (Linguistics and etymology) (Bangkok: Duang Kamol) was published in 1979 by the editors of the *Lok nangsue* Journal; *Ongkan Chaengnam lae khokhitmai nai prawattisat Thai lumnam Chaophraya* (The oath of allegiance and new thoughts on Thai history in the Chaophraya Basin) (Duang Kamol) was published in 1981 by Suchat Sawatsi; and *Sangkhom Thai lum Maenam Chaophraya kon samai Si-Authaya* (Thai society in the Chaophraya river basin before the Ayutthaya period) (Bangkok: Mai-ngam) was published in 1983 by Wichai Napharasami (Thikan 2014, 160–161).

In other words, with the decline of the CPT Jit's image was "de-radicalized" and de-politicized (Kengkit 2014, 118–126).

Jit's works have also been analyzed from the approach of gender studies by recent academics. His viewpoint about women can be seen in many of his poems, articles, and translations of foreign novels. In his article "Adit pachuban lae anakhot khong satri Thai" (The past, present, and future of Thai women),¹⁰ he used Marxist theory to analyze the social status of Thai women from traditional *sakdina* to the contemporary period. He pointed out that in Thai feudal society, women were treated only as providing men with sexual pleasure and as servants, and despite the rise of the middle class following the regime change in 1932, the status of Thai women—especially in rural areas—was still undermined by the economic, political, and social monopoly of the ruling class and capitalists. In Jit's eyes, Thai women had long been exploited and needed to fight for justice (Jit [Somchai] 1979). Although his studies on women under Marxism have their limits and need more explanation with regard to the patrimonial system in Thai society, Jit is regarded as a pioneer in women's studies who provided a systematic framework for analyzing the social problems of Thai women (Sucheela 1997, 142–143). His work has inspired later generations of scholars to develop more research and theories on women's studies in Thailand.¹¹

Jit in Contemporary Thai Politics

Following a coup that overthrew Thaksin Shinawatra in 2006, Thai politics has been trapped in a color-coded polarization between the anti-Thaksin faction, known as the Yellow Shirts, and the pro-Thaksin faction, or the Red Shirts. The Yellow Shirts—consisting mostly of the urban middle class—are led by the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and the aristocratic Democrat Party and attempt to protect the monarchy and democracy from Thaksin's family politics and alleged corruption. On the other hand, the Red Shirts—led by the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), Thaksin's representatives—are formed mostly of low-income grassroots citizens in the northeast region who have been mobilized and view themselves as commoners fighting for democracy and justice against the aristocrats.¹² This yellow and red polarization

10) Jit [Somchai] (1979).

11) For example, Sucheela Tanchainan's studies examine Jit's works and his discourse on the role of women and how they inspire the present status of gender studies in Thailand. See Sucheela (2014a; 2014b).

12) UDD leaders used this discourse as a slogan to mobilize their supporters, but their discourse remains ambiguous as to who belongs to the aristocratic class and who belongs among the commoners.

presents not only a political divide but also the division between the urban middle class and the rural grassroots that has long existed in Thai society—as some have pointed out, a “crisis of identity” (Nostitz 2009).

In this scenario, Jit’s image as a warrior who stands beside weak and marginalized people has been utilized again, interestingly by both the Yellow Shirts and the Red Shirts. In the protest against the Thaksin regime in 2005 and 2006, the Yellow Shirts-PAD acted upon their slogan to “fight (the tyranny) for our King” while denying the existing democracy. To reinforce their patriotism, they sang many songs—including Jit’s “*Saengdao haeng sattha*”—that were once sung by the CPT and leftist students back in the 1970s. Ironically, the PAD compared “the stars” to the King without realizing that the composer of the song was actually anti-monarchy (Prachak 2015, chapter 10)!

Similarly, when the Red Shirts and UDD protested against the military dictatorship and military-backed Abhisit government in 2006–10, causing many casualties, Jit’s song was sung among other revolutionary songs, as a symbol of the “people’s revolution” and “democratic fighters” against dictatorship. The image of Jit was used this time to fit in with the UDD’s political discourse of “commoners (or subjects) against aristocrats,” or commoners overthrowing aristocrats. Pictures, posters, and books of Jit together with those of other legendary socialists such as Nai Phee and Pridi Phanomyong were sold at the protest site, a scenario similar to the October 14 student uprising. As a result, together with speeches by its key members and other methods, the UDD was able to mobilize over 10,000 people each time it held a demonstration. Not only rural commoners but a number of urban middle-class people also joined the protest.

Furthermore, following Prayuth’s military regime, which ousted the Yingluck government in May 2014, a number of anti-coup groups were arrested under different charges including *lèse-majesté*. Among them, a group called New Democracy recently marched to a police station demanding the release of a woman who was suspected of *lèse-majesté* and put in jail with other suspects. Her son, who was a police officer, and other supporters lit candles and sang “*Saengdao haeng sattha*.”¹³ Under these circumstances, it is notable that regardless of Jit’s true purpose, his song has become a symbol of dissidents fighting for justice against the authorities, and he himself has been made a “free-floating signifier” by different political dissidents (Chusak 2014, 63–64).

13) Ja New nam rong phleng “*Saengdao haeng sattha*” chut thien na Kongprapram (2016).

The (Ironically) Changing Image

As part of an attempt to construct local identity in many parts of Thailand in recent years, Jit's image ironically changed from a Communist threat to an important figure in Sakonkakhorn Province, once a stronghold of the CPT. The village where he was killed and his statue there became attractions, drawing not only locals but also tourists who passed by.¹⁴⁾ In Nongkung village, where he was killed, a group of activists and academics built a statue commemorating him 47 years after his death. At the same time, a big billboard sign saying "Jit Phumisak Memorial Road" was built at the entrance of the village by the Sakonkakhorn Provincial Administration Organization. Villagers reportedly hold an event to commemorate his death every year on May 5.¹⁵⁾ Moreover, more than 30 years after his death Jit was recognized again, this time by the local people—not only as an intellectual, but surprisingly as a "sacred spirit" who gave hints for the underground lottery. Locals respectfully call him "Achan Jit" (Teacher Jit) or "Chaopho Jit," a term for someone of power and influence, or part of the Mafia. People coming for a lottery hint worship him with cigarettes and a certain brand of beer, which they believe are his favorites.¹⁶⁾

This paper has examined some of Jit's biographies and the creation of his image by different actors from the 1950s to recent years. All in all, what is Jit's influence and legacy for the younger generation of Thais? Suffice it to say that he remains a cultural icon for political antagonists, especially in an era of a military regime. Jit might not be regarded as Thailand's most influential writer compared to the award-winning Kukrit Pramoj, but for a certain group of people—especially those who joined the student uprising in 1973 and those who went into the jungles after October 1976—he remains a legendary figure from an intellectual as well as political stance. It can also be noted that, though not directly, Jit's life has inspired people to fight for democracy and the rights of free speech, as we can see from the case of an independent and non-profit Web newspaper like *Prachathai*.¹⁷⁾ Similarly, in 2006 Samesky (Fa-deokan) publishing house was founded as an attempt to publish thought-provoking books about politics and history, especially the October 1973 uprising and its repercussions.¹⁸⁾ Despite sporadic state

14) Special report, Samanchan (2016).

15) Ken (2013).

16) Special report, Samanchan (2016).

17) Founded in 2004, *Prachathai* does not only provide news and information to the Thai public under strict state censorship, it is also a platform for alternative political and cultural ideas not welcomed by the mainstream media.

18) The publisher plays a leading role in collecting and reprinting Jit's old monographs and discovering new ones. Six volumes have been published since 2004 under the project titled "Krongkan Sanpaniphon Jit Phumisak" (Collection of Jit Phumisak monographs), edited by Wichai Wipharasamee.

censorship and pressure, these alternative media continue to serve as a platform for the anti-authoritarian movement and demands for freedom of the press. Despite its low profile and limited budget, *Prachathai* has gained a number of readers and supporters during the past 10 years. Jit's discourse on social justice might often be neglected by the contemporary social resistance movement, as some suggest (Kengkit 2014, 117–137), but as long as political struggle continues in Thailand, Jit and his various images will undoubtedly continue to be remembered and live among anti-government dissidents. That is probably his true legacy.

Accepted: December 11, 2017

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The New Way: Protestantism and the Hmong in Vietnam

TÂM T. T. NGÔ

Critical Dialogues in Southeast Asian Studies. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2016.

Ever since the release of James Scott's *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009), academic research on the peoples of "Zomia"—upland Southeast Asia and Southwest China—has been gaining popularity. Scott's controversial thesis has been critiqued nearly as much as it has been quoted, but the debate has opened more space for scholars of this vast highlands region to explore and expose its unique socio-political dynamics and demonstrate its influence on contestations of power across states, regions, and beyond. If Scott overemphasizes the historical role of state evasion in highland-lowland dynamics, he also underestimates its ongoing significance to understanding contemporary Southeast Asian society by claiming that his analysis "ceases to be useful" after 1945 (Scott 2009, vii). Tâm Ngô's book about the growing influence of Protestant Christianity among the Hmong in Vietnam is a timely and important case in point, using rich ethnographic data to reveal how recent religious change is still profoundly influenced by highland-lowland, state-periphery, and transnational relationships.

The book's title, *The New Way*, is a literal translation of the Hmong name for Protestant Christianity, implying a radical break with the "old way" of traditional Hmong culture and religious practice toward modernity. Over the past 30 years Vietnam's northern highlands have witnessed phenomenal mass conversions among the Hmong, an impoverished and marginalized ethnic minority group, with perhaps up to a third of the one million Hmong population in Vietnam now identifying as Christian. In this context, Ngô's ethnography attempts to give both in-depth insights about the complex factors involved in individual conversion narratives as well as a broad overview of Hmong religious change across Vietnam and beyond. Indeed, although this book is ostensibly about Hmong Christians in Vietnam, in fact Ngô devotes a significant proportion of the text to the US Hmong diaspora and maintains that transnational ethnic and Christian relationships are crucial to understanding how faith is articulated in the Vietnamese highlands.

Ngô opens and closes the book with Karl Marx's famous thesis that "men make their own

history, but they do not make it just as they please" (p. 170), yet her emphasis of Hmong agency throughout the book challenges this thesis to some extent. Instead, she argues that Hmong people make different and unexpected decisions based on their cultural resources and are not ultimately determined by the "weight of their traditions" or external forces. In the first chapter, Ngô sets the scene for her fieldwork site before giving a historical synopsis of Hmong marginality to the Vietnamese state, starting from the colonial legacy of French Catholicism and decolonial conflict, moving on to various state assimilation and development initiatives. Here Ngô makes a unique contribution to understanding Vietnam's ethnic politics by exposing the 1950–78 "eliminating the bandits" (*tiểu phi*) policy program, which, along with land reform and other campaigns, had a destructive impact on Hmong social structure and further alienated Hmong communities from national government agendas.

In Chapter 2 Ngô relates the remarkable story of Christian conversion via Hmong-language radio broadcasts from the US-based Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC). While Ngô situates this religious change within the wider context of ethnic minority conversion to world religions, this case is unique in that no missionaries were physically present to evangelize to the Hmong of Vietnam in the late 1980s. Instead, highlands communities accidentally stumbled across the FEBC radio channel to hear a diasporic Hmong pastor sharing an indigenized gospel message, before rapidly spreading the message from village to village. Chapter 3 then explores the complex transnational relations formed between Vietnamese and US diaspora Hmong Christians who are recently making more contact as Vietnam opens its borders and highland regions to tourism. This nuanced study reveals how it is not only Hmong in Vietnam who receive "remittances" of faith and modernity, but also how the Hmong diaspora—who are themselves a marginalized minority in the United States—are impacted, regaining a new sense of ethnic identity as they encounter more "authentic" Hmong in the Asian homeland.

Chapter 4 deals with the millenarian tradition embedded within Hmong culture, opening with a fascinating account of some reactions to apocalyptic rumors of the imminent return of the mythical Hmong King Vang Tsu, whose name is also used to refer to the Christian God. Conceptualizing Communism and Christianity as competing paths to modernity and noting their similarities, Ngô claims that neither has managed to quench Hmong millenarianism, but rather the latter continues to activate it. However, her account of the most well-known recent millenarian event at Mùòng Nhé in 2011 tends to replicate "official" discourses—either from the FEBC or the government—but does not give voice to the full range of interpretations by other actors, such as Hmong participants themselves. In Chapter 5 Ngô digs deeper into conversion testimonies to draw out the different material and spiritual motivations at play, being careful not to reduce the actors to "rice-bowl Christians." The importance attached to socioeconomic and political forces, as well as the pragmatic responses and aspirations for modernity, is largely consistent with this reviewer's fieldwork among Hmong Christians in Vietnam.

Ironically, by undermining the traditional Hmong religious structure, the government's "anti-superstition" campaigns have paved the way for Hmong Christian conversion, which is now considered a threat to national security. This theme is picked up in Chapter 6, where we get a glimpse into the state perceptions of Hmong "backwardness" as well as "illegal" religion and its heavy-handed attempts to "persuade" Christians to abandon their faith. Moreover, religious change has opened fault lines *within* communities as non-Christian Hmong perceive conversion as an act of betrayal, while Christian teaching demonizes some aspects of traditional culture. Finally, Chapter 7 brings a Foucauldian analysis to the new morality adopted by Christians, especially with regard to sin, subjectivity, and sexuality. Ngô argues that strict Protestant teachings against premarital sex and polygyny constitute a new "technology of the self" and cause further social conflict by discouraging interfaith marriage, but regrettably she does not reconcile this with an earlier claim about conversion being seen as empowering for Hmong women (p. 109).

This book represents a great achievement as the summation of extensive independent fieldwork on a topic that is essentially the convergence of three "politically sensitive" topics in Vietnam: religious change, ethnic politics, and transnational groups. Ngô has become the first academic to publish English-language research about this topic based on ethnographic methods, which is no mean feat given the government restrictions placed on academic research in upland Vietnam (Turner 2013). Being a Vietnamese national was surely an advantage, helping Ngô to both secure research access and give detailed linguistic insights on the Vietnamese discourse about the Hmong—although peculiarly she omits reference to the Vietnamese-language academia related to Hmong Christianity. On the other hand, her positionality as a member of the ethnic Kinh (Vietnamese majority) in the context of ethnic and religious discrimination is potentially problematic. Ngô is very reflexive about engrained racism and shows no trace of the Kinh chauvinism that is present in some related research coming from Vietnam. Nevertheless, by limiting the account of religious persecution to the official documents rather than the numerous harrowing testimonies of human rights abuses to Hmong Christians (see Reimer 2011), perhaps Ngô underemphasizes the brutality of the Vietnamese authorities' response to mass conversions.

Other questions left unanswered by the book include which denominations and variants of Protestantism are active among the Hmong, and how Ngô arrives at the figure of 300,000 Hmong Christians—a contested figure that other sources (based on equally scant evidence) estimate to be much lower, or sometimes higher. In spite of a few oversights, however, this book remains a deeply impressive, well-written work that combines compelling personal narratives with erudite and useful theoretical analysis. Themes about religion as a "way" or "medium"; transnational identities; the competition (and overlap) between Christianity, Communism, and millenarianism will certainly be useful not only for Hmong scholars but also for those researching religious change in other parts of the world. Hopefully Ngô's ethnography will inspire other scholars from Southeast Asia to challenge stereotypes regarding supposedly "backward" ethnic minority groups and move

toward a deeper understanding of social transformation in Zomia.

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The Pearl Frontier: Indonesian Labor and Indigenous Encounters in Australia's Northern Trading Network

JULIA MARTÍNEZ and ADRIAN VICKERS

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015.

Transnational histories from below are notoriously difficult to access through conventional archives. *The Pearl Frontier: Indonesian Labor and Indigenous Encounters in Australia's Northern Trading Network* rises to this challenge by tracing the economic and social worlds of the waterways framed by the islands of Eastern Indonesia and Northern Australia. Labor—its movement and agency—is at the center of this inquiry. The monograph seeks to track the submerged history of indenture in the pearling industry that lies at the geographical fringes of two colonies, and later, nation-states. The historical experiences of “pearling indents,” as these workers became known, are a means for Julia Martínez and Adrian Vickers to discuss issues of race and the “color line” in Australia. Such themes remain pertinent today as Australia grapples with its refugee policy and the attendant questions of who gets to become Australian and why. In a study that spanned the late nineteenth century to the 1960s, the authors of this book clearly demonstrate that this dilemma is not new. The spotlight here is on migrants from Eastern Indonesia who were accepted as temporary casual labor at Australia's frontiers but repeatedly barred from accessing the mainland during this period.

This interest in movement between borders distinguishes this monograph from extant histories of Eastern Indonesia, many of which are focused either on the spice trade from European sources or nationalist, anticolonial figures that are of interest to the history of the Indonesian state.¹⁾ The first three chapters of *The Pearl Frontier* establish that the pearling zone “joined the areas of

1) See Hägerdal (2015, 75–98) for a historiographical overview of Eastern Indonesia.

Indonesia and Australia that were most remote from their centers of government . . . much that happened on the frontier was at the edges of state control” (p. 11). This argument is made from three perspectives: geographically, environmentally, and socially. Drawing on the work of naturalists such as Alfred Russell Wallace, these chapters demonstrate that this region, whose flora and fauna have been described as a “zoogeographical area constituting a transition zone between Sundaland and the Sahul” (Schepper 2015, 99–152), also had a long history of maritime mobility. The Timorese town of Kupang functioned as a regional hub, and pearling became a major economic activity from the 1860s and 1870s. Chapters 4 to 6 reveal that the development of this industry occurred with minimal state control, thus allowing a different socioeconomic world to take shape. Even as the “White Australia” policy became law in 1901, the pearling industry appeared to exempt itself from the letter of the law by continuing to recruit non-white labor on temporary contracts and evaded official scrutiny as these non-white workers were only stationed ashore for a few months. As a result, the Northern Australian towns of Broome and Darwin became increasingly diverse. Paired with the Eastern Indonesian hubs of Aru and Kupang, Indonesian, Japanese, and aboriginal labor as well as Arab and Chinese capital came into the region. The social world in these towns had its own hierarchy, with pearling masters of European descent at its apex but considerably more fluidity in social status.

Biographies, newspaper accounts, and oral histories of white pearling masters and their non-white labor are the sources that underpin this analysis. Martínez and Vickers read these for the perspectives of both the masters and their indentured labor. What emerges is a nuanced picture of the indenture system in the pearling industry, where the masters adopted various strategies to maintain control over labor, ranging from constant surveillance and discipline to a form of traditional patron-client relations between employer and employed. However, large parts of this history remain stubbornly submerged, especially the relations between the various non-white groups themselves. For example, the book opens with an intriguing anecdote about an Alorese migrant worker named Abdoel Gafoer who came to Broome in the early 1920s and eventually married an indigenous Australian woman, becoming a respected member of the Yaruwu community. His repeated movements across maritime borders over several short-term contracts become a running thread in the book, suggesting deeper interactions between minority groups in the industry. Those deeper interactions are not fleshed out, given how Gafoer’s story serves to string the chapters together with little sustained explanation of how his experience illustrates social mixing among non-whites.

Similarly, the experiences of Japanese labor do not receive adequate attention, although the Japanese constituted the largest proportion of foreign divers in the pearling zone. As a result, the book leaves the reader with more questions than answers about the intersecting encounters between foreign labor and indigenous Australians. Such caution in treating the available sources might be warranted, in view of relatively recent criticism that indigenous historians in Australia

read too much into sparse indigenous sources.²⁾ That said, *The Pearl Frontier* seems to skirt direct engagement with historians such as Keith Windschuttle. Although it briefly revives an argument that the latter dismissed, which is that “pearling masters engineered antagonism as a means of labor price control” (p. 106), no new evidence has been presented to justify the revival. What is clear from the monograph is that antagonism as well as cooperation coexisted between the Indonesian, Japanese, and indigenous groups, but the causes, consequences, and relative intensity of these dynamics remain murky. Consequently, the book’s arguments remain somewhat aloof from the mainstream historiography of Australia.

It is, nonetheless, a great achievement to fish a marginal figure such as Gafoer out of the archives. That he even surfaced at all was due to his struggles to obtain Australian citizenship in order to stay with his indigenous wife and daughter, despite his marriage being unrecognized by the Australian government. A pathway to citizenship cracked open with the advent of World War II, which is the subject of Chapter 7. Many indentured workers were evacuated from Thursday Island, Broome, and Darwin to Australian cities in the south. The final two chapters track the decline of labor migration as Indonesia replaced the Dutch East Indies. Existing labor migrants on the Australian side of the border then struggled to gain recognition and citizenship in a country that had benefited from both their labor and, in some cases, their wartime service. Naturalization was made possible only when the White Australia policy was weakened in the 1950s, underscoring the racist bias of such exclusion.

Pearls are centralized in the title of the book, and the authors use them as an insightful lens into the social processes of migration and integration into society. There is, however, surprisingly little about how pearls were formed, their watery habitat, and the methods of extracting pearl shells, especially in the last third of the book. A few dispersed pages over the middle of the book highlight the dangers and risks posed to humans who dive for pearls. The latter themselves remain an ahistorical object in this study. And yet, the pearl underwent considerable transformation as the seas became increasingly polluted over the twentieth century, while the area has become a space for resource contestation (Carino and Monteforte 2009, 48–71). Increasingly, scholars are also acknowledging that a story of labor is often a story of the environment. Antje Missbach (2016, 749–770) recently highlighted that the environment in Eastern Indonesia factored into the decisions of underemployed fishermen to turn to smuggling people into Australia in order to supplement their meager income from overfished waters. Along this vein, *The Pearl Frontier* could have benefited from greater attention to the changing environment in which pearls were extracted. Specifically, the discussion on disputed borders between Australia and newly independent Indonesia in Chapter 8 appears to be incomplete without deeper inquiry into the shift from harvested to cultured pearls after World War II, and its impact on technology as well as labor in the pearling

2) See, among others, Windschuttle (2002).

industry.

In sum, this lively and ambitious monograph is solidly researched and pushes the envelope on how we might define and study an economic zone by successfully sailing around national boundaries. However, more could have been done to interrogate theoretical paradigms in the writing of transnational as well as indigenous history. A few suggestive analytical frameworks such as cosmopolitanism in indenture are introduced at the beginning of the book but remain regrettably underdeveloped in the content chapters. Consequently, it is a volume that piques further curiosity rather than forges new ground. Still, it is a valuable addition to a growing literature on Eastern Indonesia and revisionist Australian history. It is highly recommended for scholars of migration and those with an interest in Indonesia-Australia relations.

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Ship of Fate: Memoir of a Vietnamese Repatriate

TRẦN ĐÌNH TRỤ. Translated by BAC HOAI TRAN and JANA K. LIPMAN

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press in association with UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 2017.

Among the first words to describe Trần Đình Trụ's *Ship of Fate: Memoir of a Vietnamese Repatriate* is “resilience,” for his South Vietnamese perspective admirably intimates the many trials that test—without budging—his one goal of reuniting with his family. The reader sympathizes with Trần Đình Trụ very early in his memoir, because despite long days away at sea at the beginning of his career, he always patiently looked toward going home. And yet when Jana Lipman writes in the introduction that this memoir has “survived multiple iterations and reflects more than one moment in time” (p. 4), she highlights the possibility of the memoir, as a written work of memories, to also be resilient in the face of its own tests of time. Indeed, it would not be the first time the

author writes about his life, since for many months during his first year in the reeducation camp self-examinations were a daily exercise. And this being a translation, we are duly reminded of the time and the challenges that go into the work. This latest iteration, contributed by Lipman with Bac Hoai Tran, is a crucial one, for they have managed to render the resilience of both story and storyteller relevant and accessible to a wider audience.

Based on my knowledge of the Vietnamese language, one of the language's more beautiful but also difficult aspects to grasp is the extensive use of implied and figurative speech. Meanings that are inherent in simple, everyday words—pronouns, for example—can make the language elusive and even arduous to translate. Where Lipman has mentioned Trần Đình Trự less generously with details, such as in his relationship with his wife and in encounters with his family, I genuinely wondered what other clues, possible those untranslatable, I might have been able to parse out from the Vietnamese version. Perhaps subtle implications such as those behind personal pronouns might more satisfyingly reveal the intimacies beyond the English “you” or “me.” This curiosity is one indulged by a speaker of Vietnamese but does not speak to the quality of the translation. Eloquent and intricate, the translation brings non-Vietnamese speakers and readers a concise narrative that respects the palpability of Trần Đình Trự's struggles put in writing. Able word choices manage to evoke the same specific sentiments as the Vietnamese equivalent: the recurring “rest easy” is very much the reassuring “yên tâm,” and the connotation of a gentle wife is immediately that of “người vợ hiền.” In both the original and the translation, however, accessibility remains at stake. In making a text more widely accessible with an English translation, the risk of filing away nuances that are exclusive to the language is inherent. But as important as the accuracy of words or nuances are, the translators also seem to acknowledge that certain sentiments do not translate easily into words for the writer. In other words, sometimes the parts that remain untranslatable are beyond the linguistic problem of going from one language to another.

Specialists and non-specialists alike will find this translation into English enriching and useful; the historical elements along with the pull of betrayal, loss, and suspense make the memoir an informative and intriguing read. One learns another angle of the Vietnamese refugee experience and reevaluates the generalized trajectory of refugees escaping Communism and evacuating a “lost nation.” Trần Đình Trự's own reflections also shed light on the ambivalent Vietnamese perception of the American presence in Vietnam, for not everyone who lived in the South identified as pro-American or anticommunist or both. While officers such as Trự were grateful for the resources and training provided by the United States, they were also well aware of the latter's power and ability to withdraw aid at any point. Trự's narrative, along with its translation, contribute an important perspective that, while being indeed a Southern Vietnamese perspective, draws upon the complexities of political positions and sides rather than advocates them.

The author begins with his childhood, which does more than set up the story chronologically, for it also provides the reader with crucial historical context as well as the author's own develop-

ment of values. We learn of his travels to other countries as well as the privileges and liberties reaped by Southern Vietnamese officers in the late 1960s at the pinnacle of US intervention. Writing about the days leading up to April 30, 1975, when many political leaders and civilians were pining to leave the country, Tru openly questions one's sense of duty to the country. While the United States has always been associated with the weight of abandoning what was started in Vietnam, Tru directly calls out the responsibility of the South Vietnamese officers who were trained to defend their country. What purpose did any US intervention serve if these officers did not stay to utilize the tools that were given to them? On the one hand, this critical perspective prompts us to reconsider how the idea of patriotism can change when one feels defeat or loss for one's country. It is understandable that people should leave, for how can they feel patriotic or even connected to their country when everything recognized as such is removed, replaced, or destroyed? Yet on the other hand, Tru very much resists the idea that Vietnam depended on the United States, without skills of its own, because such reliance also relinquishes the effort and responsibility of nation building solely to the Americans. It is a stark reminder of the different ways "nation" can be understood at the time of nation building. For Tru, who was evacuated to Guam, his strong desire for repatriation speaks to *his* understanding, which is that while the leaders of his nation were replaced, his land and country still remain.

The struggle for repatriation occupies much of the narrative, which focuses on the author's time as a refugee on Guam during the latter half of 1975. The memoir thus provides important details regarding the refugee population on Guam, the divisions within the refugee community, and the bureaucratic obstacles dealing with the UNHCR, the United States, and the Vietnamese government. The horror of the reeducation camps is also presented, but the passing of the years in these camps is reflected in the length of the section: a single chapter, where years of a mundane but uneasy life are conflated without precise indications of time. In this sense, the memoir is more informative than it is lamenting; where Tru dwells are where facts can be recalled more objectively. In fact, the gratuitous passages about protests and shady characters seem to overpopulate his retelling of events and unfortunately do not compensate for the brevity of the already few intimate moments.

Lipman's introduction very deliberately prepares the reader for Tru's matter-of-fact, simple, and reserved tone throughout the memoir. Her introduction convincingly defends Tru's overall style in order to point to an important quality of the memoir for the attentive reader. Often, the instances in which language seems to be missing reflect the difficult nature of instances being retold and revisited. In more superficial ways, this tone does seem to glide over the suffering and the pain we can sense the author experienced. But the "strained, stilted passages" (p. 18) that describe his reunion with his family for the first time after six years correspond to the guarded and even insular nature of memories. While the idea of a memoir seems to promise truth and transparency in its accounts, the way memories are actually inscribed in our minds is not straightforward.

Whether it is an experience of trauma, trial, relief, or even joy, the memory or forgetting of these experiences will occur differently. An event is not simply stored as a memory, and a memory is not simply reiterated as a memoir. Trữ testifies in his own words where he stands in the process of writing the memoir and retelling his story—"we each had our own sorrow"—or again later when leaving the ship *Việt Nam Thương Tin*, "our memories remain locked in our own minds" (p. 164). While these statements follow particular events in his story, they reflect a consistent adherence to the privacy, specificity, and intangibility of an individual's sorrow and memory of it. In a way, it is similar to the untranslatable, that which slips through words, from one language to another, from one interlocutor to another, that which, for what it is worth, should be left intact.

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Writing the South Seas: Imagining the Nanyang in Chinese and Southeast Asian Postcolonial Literature

BRIAN BERNARDS

Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2015.

Wrought from Water: "Nanyang" as Transoceanic Imaginary of the South Seas

This book is one of expanse. Of waterways, currents, borders shifting over time with the sheer influx of people, the aspirations that propelled their journeys, settlements evolving into communities and cultures, the slow, hesitant returns to places of origin, the fertile rain forests not only of their imaginations but of an entire ecological system—all these serve as the scaffold to the recent book by Brian Bernards, *Writing the South Seas: Imagining the Nanyang in Chinese and Southeast Asian Postcolonial Literature*.

Writing the South Seas is not only a remarkable inventory of the discursive productions articulating the Nanyang as a literary trope but inescapably a work on travel theory which resonates with recent retrievals of travel writings under a new critical lens. For a long time, travelogues were relegated to the category of "subliterary." They were adjudged mediocre for not being on a par with so-called serious literature. Their style and intent cut across disciplinary fields that defied easy categorization into conventional genres. But it is basically this discursive ambivalence that renders these narratives a fertile source of sociocultural extrapolations. Orientalism, for instance, as it is invoked in this book underlies a production of knowledge of the South Seas as an imagined geography by imperial China. Such a construct was circulated by earlier explorers and perpetuated through various time periods.

Moreover, the theme of movement as it is indelibly captured in the Nanyang imaginary is further engaged in *Writing the South Seas* for its variations—upward mobility, return voyages, extended passages—against the multifaceted circumstances that spurred them. Hence, what permeates this entire volume is a maritime vocabulary representing not only the physical passages of people across the seas but, more important, the consequent traversals occurring in the realm of culture, language, and literature as Chinese immigrants adapt to a new environment. The result is a rich tapestry of writings that embody the experiential gamut of Chinese immigrants physically uprooted from their place of ancestry but unfailingly re-visioning a world amidst the changes.

It is here that Bernards's work achieves a veritable contribution to the growing work on Southeast Asian postcolonial literatures as he surveys the spectrum of writings that materialized from a century (1850s–1940s) of voyaging to the South Seas of almost 20 million Chinese, mostly from cities in Southern China such as Amoy, Swatow, and Hainan Island. This was a crucial historical time of colonial and national upheavals that coincided with the opening of strategic oceanic pathways for maritime exploration and mercantile goals. For many others, the arduous crossing was simply in pursuit of a dream of a brighter future.

The key destinations were Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand, where earlier heavy Chinese influence could be traced. Looking at the map that opens the book reveals at once the extent of the outward movement from China into the South Seas. The thickest passage can be glimpsed where the waters are most unimpeded, the direction effortless, perhaps borne by the current winds, guided by the nightly constellation, driven by the utter need to discover a new frontier. This was how new vistas were opened: the life-changing passage, the perseverance, and, most of all, the steadfast imagining.

To chart the scholarly command undergirding Bernards's work is akin to the perils and triumphs of navigating the seas: one can get lost in its immensity. But Bernards, in this feat of a book, systematically provides his readers with anchors in appreciating the complex cultural and literary configurations by which Nanyang, as a literary trope, has been discursively inscribed into the future lives of Chinese voyagers, emigrants, and settlers. At the outset, Bernards disabuses his readers of the use of "Southeast Asia" as it has recently been made fashionable. Arguing that many of today's geographical delineations are creations of Western hegemony, Bernards insists on a far-reaching view of how the waters, in their fluid state, make the notion of geography more malleable.

Yet it is not as if the South Seas—the itinerary, the place of destination—was an altogether uninhabited region for China. It had been imagined as the "fantastical realm of 'southern barbarians' in the patriarchal worldview of imperial China" (p. 30). Also, its etymology as a maritime zone locates it as "outside of civilization" (p. 15). But how the transformative passage of the Chinese forged the South Seas into the literary trope of the "Nanyang" demands a closer look at the process of displacement, encounters, and exchanges, the inadvertent commingling of cultures. Bernards,

in illuminating the book's conceptual framework, lays out terms such as "hybridity," "diaspora," and "multiculturalism" to highlight how these may fall short of capturing the dynamism intrinsic in the Nanyang imaginary. Drawing from the various thinkers on creolization such as Benedict Anderson, Nancy Morejón, Supriya Nair, and Edouard Glissant, Bernards argues that "creolization" is the most apt as it encompasses the ongoing phases of encounters and changes among cultures toward the creation of a distinct one. In brief, "it is the unceasing process of transformation" (p. 22).

Each chapter of the book embodies the textured imagining from which Chinese sojourners have wrought Nanyang. Chapter 1 foregrounds the New Literature arising from the dichotomous sentiment of the southbound writers against Western imperialism and Chinese feudalism as configured in the China-Western-Japan tripartite. As a takeoff from the massive 1919 May Fourth student movement, Chinese writers left for distant voyages in pursuit of the "enlightenment ideal via the South Seas itinerary" (p. 53). Writing in the vernacular but looking to the modern world for inspiration through their travels, the writers who experienced Southeast Asia in their itinerary were captivated by the region's tropical contrast. The "South Seas color" teeming in the New Literature reflects a heightened perception of tropical peoples and cultures. However, much of these views did not fully depart from the patriarchal Chinese views of the "feminized" and "erotic" other. This "Nanyang orientalism" muddles the cosmopolitanism pervading the times. Foundational writers of the New Literature were Xu Zhimo (1897–1931) and Xu Dishan (1893–1941).

From the search for the "enlightenment ideal," Chapter 2 focuses on the theme of "national salvation." The South Seas as a literary trope was at best an intellectual prism for the southbound writers to appraise their nationalist fervor hostile to Western incursion and imperial China's feudalistic beliefs. Those who inspired such a stringent reflective stance among the writers were the Nanyang Hauaia (South Seas Chinese) who were acknowledged as the region's true "hands-on architects of its modernity and cultivators of its wealth" (p. 55). The works of the southbound writers that came out of their travels during the decade of the 1920s–30s were viewed as "writing back to China" while simultaneously creating a niche in the local Sinophone literary scene in Malaya and Singapore. Two of the pioneering writers of the era were Lao She (1899–1966) and Yu Dafu (1896–1945). Lao She produced canonical novels that celebrate multiethnic, multi-linguistic colonial environs, while Yu Dafu, known as an uncompromising literary critic, was recognized for his role in encouraging the articulation of a homeland Nanyang among creole communities.

Chapter 3 scrutinizes the deepening process of creolization among the Sinophone Malaysian writers as they found themselves at a crucial postwar, postcolonial turn. To defy nativist conceptions of Malaysianness, Sinophone Malaysian writers adapted a "transnational" mode in addressing their predicament. Taiwan became a cultural haven for these writers' "Nanyang diaspora" as it revitalized their Chinese origins. Sinophone Malaysian critics of this time—Ng Kim Chew, Tee Kim Tong (Zhang Jinzhong), Lim Kien Ket (Lin Jianguo)—wrote from Taiwan with a vigorous revisionist aim about the Sinophone Malaysian literary history. As racial tensions peaked in Malay-

sia with the 1969 Kuala Lumpur ethnic riots, a surge of Malaysian students found their way to Taiwan. Writers during this time found not only a refuge in Taiwan but also an accommodating sanctuary that was bound in a symbiotic relationship with the local literary scene.

The lush rain forests of Borneo become a site for the enquiry into cultural identity as manifested in the extensive works of Li Yongpin (1947–). Chapter 4 draws from the critical framework of postcolonial ecocriticism to take stock of the effects of decades of colonial, neo-imperialist, and multinational exploitation of the Bornean environs that led to the displacement of indigenous communities. The ecopoetics of two other writers, namely, Pan Yutong (1937–) and Chang Kuei-hsing (1956–)—the latter described by Bernards as “Sinophone literature’s foremost architect of the Borneo rainforest” (p. 124)—successfully couple aesthetic elements with political efficacy. In the sensuous setting of the loamy marshland, many of the characters found in Chang’s novels are embroiled in narratives of love, alliances and betrayal, and victimization.

Chapter 5 delves into the literary transformations of the term “Nanyang” within Singapore’s multiethnic and multilingual population. What distinguishes Singapore’s national literature is how it is defined as the “sum total of its literatures in the official languages of English, standard Chinese (based on spoken Mandarin), Malay, and Tamil” (p. 137). This upholds the nation’s individual racial groups while recognizing their literary origins, and simultaneously instilling a transnational spirit to its literary yield. Attendant to this is the nation’s policy of multiracialism and meritocracy, which overrules the nativist tendencies inherent in such demographics and levels the playing field among socioeconomic sectors. The works of the Sinophone authors Yeng Pway Ngon and Chia Joo and the Anglophone novelist Suchen Christen Lim, however, engage in-depth neat national categories of self-representation to revisit the heritage historically entrenched in a maritime Southeast Asia (p. 140).

A successful story of Chinese integration in Thailand is the focus of Chapter 6. However, this “successful story” is not without its intricacies. Framing the integration are measures of assimilation and accommodation that the Thai monarchy imposed to stem the growing economic influence of the Chinese migrant population in Thailand. A majority of these voyagers came to Siam (then Thailand) as early as the eighteenth century as rice traders. But with a Western-educated monarch, King Vajiravudh, ever watchful of his constituents, and fired by the anti-Semitic sentiment in Europe, policy measures such as the Nationality Act diffused the highly visible Chinese Other. Chinese names, for instance, had to be registered using Thai appellations. More repressive political moves strengthened the direction for a “Thai for Thais” conviction (p. 171) that included the closure of Sinophone schools and ban of Teochew opera performances (p. 172). The literature spawned during this period, such as the writings of the Sinophone Thai author Fang Siruo (Phonlacet Kitaworanat, 1931–99), drew on multiple spaces from which struggles and identities were continually redefined against concerns such as censorship and disenfranchisement.

The book concludes with a reference to a 2008 television serial drama titled *The Little Nyonya*

that riveted a sizeable portion of the Singaporean population. The drama reawakened the Nanyang imagination in an engaging platform—audiovisual. The Nanyang imagination was enlivened, given a voice. With the serial drama successfully reaching millions of people, Bernards notes that the “aesthetic possibilities” of the “Nanyang imagination” may exponentially increase if represented in film and theater, music, and the arts as a contrast to the “written word” of literature that has been the concern of this book.

Bernards proposes future studies on the Philippines and Indonesia, which in his view best represent the archipelagic spirit of Southeast Asia. While these countries have been referred to tangentially in individual chapters, there is definitely much more to explore in the Chinese reimagining of Philippine literature, for instance. There have been pockets of studies on contemporary Filipino-Chinese literary writings; but a scholarly undertaking with the breadth and depth of *Writing the South Seas*, outlining the range of assimilation, resistance, and integration of Chinese immigrants into the local community, will open up new areas of historical and literary relations that have eluded official narratives.

Lastly, the 2017 celebration of the 50 years of the founding of ASEAN is a historic milestone. The region’s growing presence in the global geopolitical arena has spurred the establishment of formal studies of the region so as to encourage a deeper knowledge among neighboring states. As a reservoir of people’s memories and aspirations, literature has been at the core of these studies. In this regard, Bernards’s *Writing the South Seas* has broken through a critical threshold. It provides readers with a more progressive view of what may now comprise postcolonial Southeast Asian literatures. While some of the titles mentioned in the book have been visible on a standard Southeast Asian literature syllabus, they often stand as discrete titles lacking the wide-range contextualization found in Bernards’s work. This is to state that readers can now come to the writings with the knowledge that the novels, essays, plays, and poems were produced not only in a distinct place and time; it was the seas that enabled the thoughts, the images, the words. And however the southbound writers imagined their destination, the waters, in calmness and rancor and, most important, in the crossings they allowed, blurred geographies, renewed identities, and moored the voyagers to a new homeland.

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The Divine Eye and the Diaspora: Vietnamese Syncretism Becomes Transpacific Caodaism

JANET ALISON HOSKINS

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015.

Founded in 1926 in colonial Cochinchina, Caodaism remains one of the least understood Vietnamese religious traditions. Although the Great Temple of Caodaism in Tây Ninh attracts thousands of visitors each year, most people stop at an impressionistic understanding of the tradition, marveling at the colorful architecture, the eclectic veneration of Eastern and Western religious figures, and elaborate ceremonies. However, carved into this spectacle is a story of religious imagination and political schisms, of struggles against colonization, of desires for national sovereignty and reconciliation, and of the establishment of a global Vietnamese community in the diaspora. Janet Hoskins's *The Divine Eye and the Diaspora: Vietnamese Syncretism Becomes Transpacific Caodaism* provides us with a comprehensive and sympathetic study of Caodaism and its connection to the struggles of the Vietnamese people, in both Vietnam and the diaspora.

Based on 10 years of fieldwork in California and Vietnam, and interviews with Caodaists in France, Canada, Cambodia, and Australia, Hoskins tells two narratives, one of the historical development of Caodaism in colonial French Indochina and the other of the postwar diaspora of Caodaists and their projects of developing a global Caodaism that is "at once cosmopolitan and indigenous" (p. 6). Hoskins interweaves these two narratives by presenting five paired biographies (Chapters 1 through 5) of members of the founding generation and their followers or descendants in California. Such a historical-ethnographic approach provides readers with a sense of how the colonial past informs and inspires the contemporary development of present Caodaist practices and institutions in the context of postwar diaspora.

The Divine Eye presents significant contributions to the examination of Vietnamese syncretic and transnational religion. Examining the biographies of the founding members of Caodaism in colonial Indochina, Hoskins dispels the characterization of Caodaism as a peasant "traditionalist movement" founded on confusing and "outrageous syncretism" of both Eastern and Western elements, including Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity, and European Spiritism (Fitzgerald 1972). Rather, she argues, Caodaism "represented a conversion to a kind of modernity" in which "Caodaists . . . wanted to sit as equals with Catholic religious leaders, to have their own Vatican and their own high-ranking clergy, and thus have Vietnamese spirituality recognized on the same plane as the faith of their French colonial masters" (p. 5). This argument is noteworthy considering that the founding members of Caodaism were educated in French institutions and/or held appointments within the French colonial administration.

Early Caodaists were particularly conscious and selective in their incorporation of Western cultural and religious elements in their vision of Caodaism. On the one hand, while Caodaism

includes Jesus in its pantheon to represent the way of the saints (*đạo thánh*), the son of God is relegated to the third level of spiritual practices, underneath the Buddha, Lao Tzu, and Confucius. On the other hand, French historical figures, such as Victor Hugo and Jeanne D'Arc, were venerated because these figures had either engaged in Spiritist practices or demonstrated anticolonial sentiments and sympathy toward the subjugated subjects. As Caodaism was created based on the practice of spirit *sénance*, both in the Chinese tradition of phoenix basket writing and French Spiritism, important religious figures and French historical figures were said to have communicated directly with the Vietnamese people and endowed them with a vision of a new millenarian religion that redeemed them as the chosen people who would lead the world spiritually (p. 83). Thus, the historical founding of Caodaism demonstrates a form of historical consciousness—one in which colonial subjects not only claim the same status for their Asian traditions as Western ones, but also attempt to transcend the Western façade of modernity and create a modernity with a more encompassing Eastern spiritual doctrine (p. 5). Building on theories of religious syncretism and religious fields (Chen 2010; Goossaert and Palmer 2011), Hoskins argues that Caodaism represents a form of *explicit syncretism*—the conscious project of mixing and combining different traditions to produce new doctrines and a new religious field in which religious elements are hierarchized, as opposed to idiosyncratic and instrumental *implicit syncretism*—whose goal is to create a *self-defensive* religious field against colonial encroachment on Vietnamese tradition and religion (p. 15).

Of course, there were competing visions of what constituted Caodaism. Hoskins's reading of the biographies of the five founding members of Caodaism reveals the conflicting personalities and agendas of Caodaist leaders and how these were situated within the shifting socio-political contexts of South Vietnam from the early 1920s to the fall of Saigon in 1975. Chapter 1 of *The Divine Eye* tells the story of Ngô Văn Chiêu, the "invisible" founder of Caodaism who had the first contact with the Supreme Being Cao Đài in the shape of a radiant Left Eye. While seen by many Caodai followers as the founder of Caodaism, he declined to take on the position of the "Pope" (*Giáo Tông*) and subscribed instead to a life of ascetic meditation (p. 41). The institutionalization of Caodaism was subsequently developed by Phạm Công Tắc, whose flamboyant and charismatic leadership is discussed in Chapter 2. A French-educated Saigon Spiritist and a civil servant, Phạm Công Tắc played an essential role in crafting the Caodai official declaration in 1926, in compiling the Caodai Religious Constitution based on his direct communication with the divine, in establishing the Caodai Holy See in Tây Ninh, and in composing spiritual messages in the Romanized cursive of *Quốc Ngữ* (pp. 71, 78). Different from the quietist Ngô Văn Chiêu, Phạm Công Tắc developed a modernist millenarianism that relied on divine guidance to establish religious authorities and mobilize the masses against colonial rule (pp. 71–72). His leadership produced schisms within Caodaism and increasing Caodaist engagement in the political sphere.

From the early 1940s, Caodaists witnessed the establishment of the Caodai military forces under the leadership of Trần Quang Vinh, the adopted spiritual son of Victor Hugo featured in

Chapter 3. The fate of Caodaists from 1940 to 1975 was determined by the shifting alliances among Caodai forces, the French, the Japanese, the Viet Minh, the Communists, and the South Vietnamese government that during critical junctures led to the killing of many Caodaists, the exile of Phạm Công Tắc, and attacks on Caodai leadership and establishments. The Fall of Saigon in 1975 resulted in an exodus of South Vietnamese, a large number of whom were Caodaists, to North America, Europe, and Australia. Among these Caodaists was Đỗ Vạn Lý, featured in Chapter 4, an intellectual educated in Japan and the United States who served as a diplomat under South Vietnamese President Ngô Đình Diệm and who established the Caodai Saigon Teaching Agency dedicated to the teaching of meditation, religious doctrine, and esoteric philosophy (pp. 132, 134). The Teaching Agency, still operating today in Ho Chi Minh City, declared no affiliation to the Holy See in Tây Ninh and promoted a form of intellectual Caodaism that does not rely on religious hierarchy and titles (p. 134).

In the diaspora, Caodaists have been called by the divine to reestablish Caodaism. They continue to face disagreements over theology, religious practices, and institutional arrangements, while attempting to innovate and construct a Caodaism that is transnational in nature. Across Chapters 1 through 5, but particularly in Chapter 6, Hoskins documents how Caodaists in the United States have been able to use the resources of the diasporic community and of virtual technology to establish various Caodai temples in California, and to reach out and gain new followers, including those who are not Vietnamese. For many of these “converts,” Caodaism offers a universal message of unity, redemption, and forgiveness (pp. 198–202). For the Vietnamese, Caodaism has been transformed from a “religion in diaspora”—that is, a religion of the people who were displaced as “victims” of the Vietnam War—into a “religion of diaspora” reformulated based on the 1926 prophecy given by the Supreme Being Cao Đài, designating the Vietnamese as the chosen people who would “become the master teacher of all humanity” (p. 147). Caodai’s millenarian, syncretistic, and universalist message provides overseas Vietnamese with a sense of connection to both the religiously and ethnically plural American society and the international network of Vietnamese in Vietnam and abroad (p. 231). This is not to say that all Caodaists abroad have a fond opinion of the Communist government and even the Caodai Holy See in Vietnam. In fact, Caodaist leaders abroad are divided in terms of their relationship with the Hanoi government and the Holy See, with leaders like Trần Quang Cảnh (Chapter 3) attempting to work with the Communist government and get Caodai temples in California to be affiliated with the Holy See, and others vehemently criticizing such an attempt.

Rich in historical-ethnographic data, *The Divine Eye* provides scholars of Southeast Asia with a nuanced and sympathetic understanding of the syncretic tradition of Caodaism. Hoskins engages with and builds on the scholarship of religious syncretism and transnationalism, examining not only the historically conditioned process of religious imagination, but also how diasporic communities rearticulate and rework religious messages and boundaries to “manage and overcome religious

differences and geographical challenges.” Readers of *The Divine Eye* will also appreciate the documentary on Caodaism produced by Janet and Susan Hoskins in 2008 as a companion to the book. While Janet Hoskins has conducted interviews with Caodaists in Canada, France, and Australia, little of these non-US materials are presented in the book. Moreover, since she focuses predominantly on Caodai leaders, the voices of ordinary Caodaists are not heard. *The Divine Eye* portrays Caodaism as a rather elitist project formulated by colonial French-educated intellectuals who aspired for a particular form of Asian modernity. What were—and are—the motivations for ordinary practitioners of Caodaism to participate in the religion? If they were to aspire for a form of modernity, would their understanding of modernity be similar to that of the anticolonial intellectual elites? And how would the “conversion” process to Caodaism by ordinary Caodaists differ from that of intellectual Caodaists, and more interestingly, how would it differ from that of Christian conversion in both colonial and contemporary Vietnam? Despite these shortcomings, *The Divine Eye* is a remarkable contribution to a rather thin scholarship on Vietnamese religious and diasporic studies.

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Animism in Southeast Asia

KAJ ÅRHEM and GUIDO SPRENGER, eds.

London and New York: Routledge, 2017.

Animism in Southeast Asia is a rich study that reaches well beyond the bounds of regional and disciplinary expertise. Surely, anthropologists of religion in Southeast Asia will have some commentary on the work, but so should scholars who work in the fields of global history, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, politics and society, and any number of subdisciplines. The rich comparative approach between Amerindian—in particular, Amazonian along with Ojibwe—animism and Southeast Asian animism broadens the possibilities of analysis for experts who work in East,

South, and Central Asia, and the Middle East as well as African contexts. It would be useful for courses such as “Introduction to World Religions” and “Asian Religions in a Global Perspective,” and a necessity for courses on the study of Southeast Asian religions. While most individuals understand animism to be the worship of animal spirits, and many would still posit there are particular pejorative connotations to the usage of the term, even when the term is used without such intent, *Animism in Southeast Asia* completely reforms the foundations of the study of animism through a collection of detail-driven case studies and theoretical revelations.

Animism in Southeast Asia is conveniently organized for ease of use. With theoretical discussions by Tim Ingold, Kaj Århem, and Guido Sprenger bookending the work, it is divided into two simple parts by nature of the location of the case studies. In the first part, readers will find case studies from mainland Southeast Asia and the Philippines, while in the second part they will find case studies from insular Southeast Asia. There are absences in the work, as with any single volume attempting to cover the vast diversity of Southeast Asia, a region that boasts a significant variety of large, well-known religious communities (Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, and so on) and where the most popular traditions have hundreds of millions of adherents. Furthermore, it is a well-known fact that the politics of Southeast Asian governments often put bounds upon the limits of scholarly inquiry. Cases from the study of animism in Burma and Thailand are conspicuously absent from the current collection. That said, this is a strong collection of essays that provide valuable studies of many understudied communities in Southeast Asia. For example, Signe Howell’s study on the Chewong upland minority of Peninsular Malaysia provides rich stories associated with the solidification and explanation of animistic practices, as well as an innovative rethinking of animistic ontology based upon the Chewong conception of the *ruwai*, which Howell takes to be “analogous to ‘the Fruit’” from Karl Marx’s discourse on *The Holy Family* (p. 69). The *ruwai* in this sense is a critical otherworldly substance that can present itself in various “this-worldly” forms, as it were, ranging from an elephant, to a leaf monkey, or a rambutan fruit.

After Howell’s study of the Chewong, *Animism in Southeast Asia* moves toward an explanation of personhood, particularly among the Rmeet community in upland Laos, in which Sprenger expertly highlights how interethnic relations are transformed and transposed upon interspecies relationships in animist conceptions of the cosmological order in Rmeet religious understanding. This, in turn, is followed by two studies among the Katu of Vietnam and the Central Annamite Cordillera, by Kaj Århem and Nikolas Århem respectively. The particularly innovative theoretical work of Kaj Århem, in this case, draws upon the Katu practices of animism to propose a distinction between symmetric (restricted) exchange and asymmetric (unrestricted) exchange, as they are practiced in animist worlds, and what the implications of this difference might be. As Århem posits:

Symmetric and asymmetric worlds are curved cosmologies, to borrow a natural science metaphor. Elementary social facts such as exchange, reciprocity, and notions of intersubjectivity take fundamentally different shapes in the two worlds. So also, the idea of predation and its human form,

hunting—with great implications for notions of existential security, illness and curing, and human-animal relations: in a symmetric world, hunting and the consumption of game food carry the threat of counter-predation, a possibility which is ruled out—perhaps inconceivable—in an asymmetric world. However, in both worlds, the conceptualization of the human-animal relationship is diagnostic of their particular forms of animism. (p. 111)

In a volume of detailed theoretical explorations, Århem's suggestions about the problem of the hunter in an animist community, calls readers to entirely rethink what they thought they knew about animism. Drawing upon the example of hunting practices, the distinction between the symmetric and asymmetric types of animism becomes clear. It is also through substantial comparative work in the Amazon that Århem is able to take the position that there are different forms of shamanism in Southeast Asia and Latin America, a position that he clarifies later in the volume.

The issue of the problems created by the relationship between animistic spirits and humans is taken up in Jon Henrik Ziegler Remme's study of Ifugao communities in the Philippines. In the end, Remme posits that there are two ontological life forms of animistic spirits or essences: one that humans *can* perceive, and one that humans *cannot* (p. 151). Although the book then moves on to studies in insular Southeast Asia other than the Philippines, after Remme's contribution—with a notable study of Bentian Dayak communities put forward by Kenneth Sillander—the question of human-spirit relations remains as a theme moving forward. However, Sillander shifts the focus of the conversation by emphasizing the sets of taboos and "precepts of *adat*"—often described by scholars as "customary law"—that further shape the contours of these relationships. Monica Janowski then shifts the location and emphasis of the conversation again, by focusing on beliefs about spirits among the Kelabit and Penan of the upper Baram River in Sarawak state, Malaysia, on the island of Borneo. Janowski provides a useful thematic categorization or, rather, typology of the spirits of Sarawak, examining spirits of humans, animals, trees, places, and hard objects to build substantial evidence leading to at least two major theoretical suggestions. The first suggestion highlights the position of grain crops in establishing the relative "separateness" of human society from the natural world, in a sense, while the second questions the long-standing categories of "physical" and "interior"—positing instead a relational understanding of the animist features of Penan and Kelabit cosmology (p. 199).

The final four case studies in *Animism in Southeast Asia* dance across the island world, although they remain mostly in the eastern archipelago. Matthew H. Amster's research on animism and anxiety focuses on the Kelabit of Sarawak. Timo Kaartinen's study of the boundaries of humanity is also concentrated in the eastern archipelago, although it focuses on the animism of the Kei Islands in Eastern Indonesia. Sven Cederroth's study then island-hops to provide a rich, thick description of the cosmological order of the gods and spirits of Wetu Telu communities in the Lombok region of Nusa Tenggara Barat Province, Indonesia. This study is particularly innovative as Cederroth has taken care to record and translate prayers, providing beautifully fluid English-

language versions that could be cited as primary source material in university-level teaching. Similarly, David Hicks's comparative work on the myth cycles of the peoples of Sumbawa, Flores, Kei, the Alor Peninsula, and Timor provides rich, accessible source material for studies on Eastern Indonesia. Furthermore, Hicks highlights a series of motifs that emerge across these narratives: water, life and abundance/plentitude, an instrument of impalement or entrapment, the quest, the social/familial relationship, deception, and visibility/invisibility. The themes help to construct how Hicks thinks about animism from a theoretical perspective, but it is also important to highlight that they demonstrate a particularly useful and important method of comparative narrative analysis, which scholars may well find useful in other contexts.

In the concluding chapter of Århem's substantial contributions to the *Animism in Southeast Asia* volume, the author highlights two forms of shamanism: one Southeast Asian and the other Amazonian, made possible at least in part by Århem's over three decades of expertise on the subject. In the portrayal of these two types of shamanism, Århem points directly to their different forms of spirit possession. In the Southeast Asian form, Århem highlights that the spirit essence is an external presence that enters the shaman/medium as a receiving subject and acts through them. This contrasts with Amazonian shamanism, where the animal spirit physically transforms the shaman into the actual spirit during the ritual. In other words, in Amazonian shamanism "ritual possession" is "ritual transformation by an animal spirit," whereas in Southeast Asia "ritual possession" is just that—possession by an external force. His point is well taken, although it does raise the question of whether Århem is willing to consider Hmong shamanism a Southeast Asian tradition. It is possible that Århem considers Hmong shamanism an East Asian tradition, and therefore under a different field of study. At the same time, because of the substantial Hmong population of Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam, there are many scholars who would consider Hmong shamanism a Southeast Asian tradition. The reason this point is notable is because, unlike other forms of Southeast Asian shamanism that fit Århem's model, in Hmong shamanism the shamans themselves travel into the spirit world to commune with spirits in another realm, and hence the relationship between the shaman and the non-human world takes on a third form that is not comparable to either of Århem's Amazonian or Southeast Asian models.

While there is much more to these distinctions than can be briefly summarized in this space, Århem and Sprenger's work has begun a useful conversation, especially since colleagues in the field of religious studies, history, and Southeast Asian studies might view Århem's theories as provocative findings, pushing toward a comparative understanding of Southeast Asia and Latin America, and a deep analysis of Southeast Asian religious communities.

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Essential Trade: Vietnamese Women in a Changing Marketplace

ANN MARIE LESHKOWICH

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014.

Bến Thành Market, where Ann Marie Leshkovich did her field research for *Essential Trade: Vietnamese Women in a Changing Marketplace*, is the most famous market in Ho Chi Minh City. Built more than 100 years ago and still standing at the heart of the city, this market and its iconic clock tower are a familiar sight for all Saigonese, domestic and overseas tourists, or simply anyone who has read a guidebook about Ho Chi Minh City. The market still holds firm to its reputation as a traditional Vietnamese market, where transactions of goods and money have never ceased since its opening in 1914 under the French colonial regime. As a long-standing market that has witnessed myriad political, economic, and social transformations in Ho Chi Minh City, Bến Thành Market was a fruitful site for Leshkovich to conduct her research on commercial activities, social and political transformations, petty traders' trading practices, and subjectivity formation during a turbulent period of shifting to socialism and to post-socialism in southern Vietnam.

Starting her fieldwork in 1988, when Renovation (Đổi Mới) started and gradually reformed Vietnam's socialist economy into a market economy following a socialist direction, Leshkovich observed myriad transformations in politics, government, and state regulations targeting private businesses. Alongside these vigorous changes, Leshkovich encountered many timeless claims about gender, trade, class, kinship, and social relations that were constantly reproduced in state narratives and in public perceptions about women petty traders. Intriguingly, these forms of essentialism were also internalized by the petty traders themselves in their daily work and social interactions, although many of these essentialist perceptions about their trade and womanhood did not match the reality; some even denigrated them as ignorant, low-class, superstitious, greedy, and incapable of being virtuous mothers and wives.

In her book Leshkovich explores essentialist perceptions about gender, class, and trade that traders used to talk about themselves, and which the government used to classify traders as low class and trade as a feminine activity. However, instead of completely accepting or debunking these essentialist claims, Leshkovich uses essentialism as an analytical lens that offers an insightful understanding of traders' formation of subjectivity in response to these dominant social and cultural conceptions about their gender, class, and trade. Leshkovich argues that women traders embody and enact these essentialized claims about their gender and trade to become socially legible subjects who can react meaningfully to the social, political, and economic circumstances that they are enmeshed in. In so doing, they also manage to secure a strategic advantage for their businesses during highly volatile political and economic periods.

The seven chapters of the book gradually unfold Leshkovich's engaging ethnography, theoretically integrating discussions and analyses on the operations of essentialist perceptions about

gender, class, family, kinship, and social relationships in southern Vietnam's marketplace, and how these ideologies are enacted and performed by women petty traders in their everyday work to cultivate a socially desirable gendered and classed subjectivity. All the chapters are eloquently interconnected by the same characters appearing several times in the book, giving the reader an easy-to-follow storyline and many opportunities to get to know the traders and their world by turning the pages.

In Chapter 1 Leshkowich carves out the setting in which the traders' stories will be developed. This chapter chronicles the history of Bến Thành Market since its construction following the French colonial regime's master plan to civilize and modernize the Vietnamese indigenous trade. The chapter discusses space-human interactions by illustrating how the market's space was eventually transformed by stallholders and their ways of doing business to become an icon of Vietnam's traditional chợ (marketplace). Stallholders who inhabited such a traditional space were also naturalized as those who performed traditional kinds of trade.

Chapter 2 introduces the reader to the essentialism about gender and trade, which is a theme that recurs in the following chapters. It tells the story of the socialist government's configuration of commerce in the south right after 1975. During this immediate postwar period, women had more advantages than men in owning market stalls to earn a living for their families. This endorsement of women's trade was based on the socialist state's belief in a naturalized notion that women were an underclass whose productive activities were merely to support their own families and thus were not associated with bourgeois capitalism. This movement led to petty trade being dominated by women, and thus further reinforced the essentialized beliefs that women, unlike men, had the natural skills for trade, and that petty trade was naturally a woman's domain. By defining petty trade as a feminine activity, the socialist state reshaped southern Vietnam's political economy. In response to this, women stallholders consciously internalized the state-endorsed narrative that entangled trade, class, and gender as a strategy to secure their businesses during this difficult period.

Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 characterize personal and social networks that have a direct impact on women's trade, and discuss how through their performance of these interpersonal relations for pragmatic reasons, as well as for conformity to gender essentialism, women enact a socially recognizable gendered, relational, moral, and classed subjectivity. Chapter 3 describes the family nature of many businesses operated in Bến Thành Market. Leshkowich points out that while familism reflects traders' performance of the naturalized perception of Vietnamese people as being family oriented, it is also traders' pragmatic response to the postwar social and political circumstances. In keeping their stalls looking "small" and classified as family businesses, stallholders defend their enterprises from appearing "capitalist." Their family businesses are also evidence of their conformity to the state-idealized image of a Vietnamese cultured family as an economic unit and a repository of Vietnamese traditional values and culture amid the threat from a Western

market economy, excessive materialism, and individualism. By presenting themselves and their stalls surrounding this rhetoric of traditional family-centeredness, women traders bestow a sense of virtue upon their identities as traders, whose morality is often questionable in Vietnamese traditional thought.

Continuing the discussion in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 portrays the rich personalistic network that traders rely on to facilitate their businesses. This chapter characterizes the binary of inside and outside in the Vietnamese conceptualization of social relationships. Leshkovich argues that this essentialist distinction between inside and outside is, in reality, made in fluid and permeable ways by the traders to grow their networks, sustain and develop their businesses, and make the marketplace appear not just as a harsh environment for profit-seeking but also a community infused with an ethic of care and feminine sensibility. While relying on their “inside” network of kin for assistance, stallholders also focus on turning “outsiders” such as customers, competitors, creditors, or moneylenders into “insiders” by cultivating mutual obligations, sentiment, and trust. Leshkovich concludes that in utilizing insider tactics to cope with the uncertainties and anxieties of doing trade under market socialism, traders are also crafting a sense of self infused with feminine care and morality.

Chapter 5 discusses one of the prominent outsiders in the traders’ network, which is the government. In describing disputes over resources between traders and cadres, this chapter opens up a complex discussion on memory of war, postwar differentiation in status and class between non-revolutionary traders and revolutionary cadres, and traders’ experiences of market socialist governmentality during Renovation. This chapter unfolds many unexpected twists of analysis and narrative. For example, traders’ warning about wandering ghosts inside Bến Thành Market was in fact a metaphor for the never-diminishing existence of the state’s control. Wandering ghosts also speak to the lingering memory of the war, and the postwar hardship and humiliation that many traders and their families experienced. This chapter makes a valuable contribution to the literature of gender and war in Vietnam, especially when it highlights the voices of people whose memory of war is marginalized in official history making. Leshkovich argues that gender essentialism was again drawn upon by both women traders and the government in their narratives of the present conflicts, to conceal and divert attention from the unspeakable past tensions between them. This argument would benefit from further development as it may illustrate another dimension in traders’ formation of gendered subjectivity through their embeddedness in the present connections with male authorities, while delving into the memories of their past aspirations and social status.

Chapter 6 turns to another dimension in the everyday interpersonal relations of traders, which is with spirits and deities. Spiritual activities enable traders to inculcate a moral and caring femininity that conforms to social and cultural expectations. They also reinforce the commonly held image of female traders as superstitious, weak, and ignorant. This image, however, affords women a protective rhetoric for their status as traders. Engagement in spiritual practice turns the mar-

ketplace into a community where care, obligation, and sentiment are cultivated not only between humans but also between humans and spirits.

The seventh chapter nicely bundles up elements of gender, class, subjectivity, traders' social and political status, and socialist governmentality into an elaborate discussion on class making and classed subjectivity. Leshkovich draws attention to the contradiction between the socialist ideologies of "class-ification" and the actual process of class making and class performance, which both the state and women traders pursue for their own needs and advantages. The book closes with an epilogue where Leshkovich's narrative zooms back out to an overview of Bến Thành Market as a marketplace and an icon of traditional petty trade, and how it is positioned in the redevelopment plans of Ho Chi Minh City in the 2000s. Through updates on what has happened to the market and its traders, the epilogue shows that Bến Thành Market continues to embody both timelessness and change.

Essential Trade is a fantastic ethnography of the everyday life of women petty traders in Ho Chi Minh City, and an important contribution to the literature on southern Vietnam's society, history, and economy. It offers a brilliant analysis and insightful understanding of commercial practice, gender dynamics, class making, social stratification, and the operations of socialism and post-socialism in people's lives. One aspect that may benefit from further exploration is the empowerment that women get from owning a business and playing an important economic role in their families. Leshkovich briefly mentions the potential empowering aspect of matrilineal familism in trade, in the ways women traders create jobs for relatives, afford middle-class lifestyles for their own families, and mobilize their husbands to help them at their stalls as well as in household tasks. It would be intriguing to find out how women traders balance their internalization of gender essentialism with their obvious economic power in their performance of a socially acceptable gendered subjectivity as family-oriented moral and caring women. Further exploration may reveal a dimension of gendered subjectivity that is formed through negotiations between power and modesty, or between the enactments of timeless feminine traits in their interactions with the "outside" society versus the "inside" kin network.

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Electoral Dynamics in Indonesia: Money Politics, Patronage and Clientelism at the Grassroots

EDWARD ASPINALL and MADA SUKMAJATI, eds.

Singapore: NUS Press, 2016.

A central theme in the debate regarding Indonesian politics after democratization concerns its underlying logic. Democracy *qua* institution promises a heightened mobilizational power of the *demos*, and thus some scholars argue the salience of political participation in contemporary Indonesian politics. The implication is that institutional logic underpins post-New Order Indonesia (Pepinsky and Ford 2014). Some other scholars, however, propose that democracy does not necessarily come with such empowerment of the people. The institutional effect of democracy can go hand in hand with oligarchy, defined as a form of politics where wealth defense is its central motive (Winters 2011). The financially endowed few, who wield disproportionate material power to protect their oftentimes non-democratic interest, can hijack democracy in this kind of politics (Hadiz and Robison 2004; Winters 2011). Indonesia after democratization, according to this camp of scholars, is one such case of entanglement between oligarchy and democracy. Not surprisingly, accompanying the presence of competitive elections since 1999 in Indonesia is the recurrent reference to “money politics,” especially at the local level (see, for example, Erb and Sulistyanto 2009).

The central contribution of Edward Aspinall and Mada Sukmajati’s edited volume is its pioneering effort to clarify such so-called money politics. More specifically, this remarkable book describes the varieties of electoral strategies that involve the distribution of material benefits as well as the central mechanism through which politicians wield their material power to win an election. These themes have arguably been neglected in the literature despite the abundant references to money politics in Indonesia.

The authors of the book operationalize money politics into concepts such as patronage and clientelism and scrutinize voter-politician linkages during Indonesia’s 2014 legislative election. Patronage is defined as the material benefit politicians distribute to voters in exchange for political support in the form of votes. Relatedly, clientelism is defined as a personalistic relationship within which that material benefit is distributed. Patronage distribution must meet three additional requirements, however, to qualify as clientelism. These requirements are: (i) reciprocity on the part of voters in the form of political support, (ii) the hierarchy of power relations between politicians and voters, and (iii) iteration, understood as the ongoing nature of their relationship (pp. 3–4).

With the distinction drawn between patronage and clientelism and their relationship made explicit, it is possible to conceive that not all patronage distributions qualify as clientelistic. Some are not clientelistic since not all patronage is reciprocated by political support in the form of votes. Also, very few practices of patronage distribution are built upon personalistic, face-to-face interaction between voters and candidates. Even fewer such distributions develop into ongoing relation-

ships. These tensions inherent in patronage distribution, especially one regarding achieving reciprocity on the part of voters, are well captured by the analytical purchase of the two concepts. In addition, the two concepts enable us to ask empirical questions such as: What are the strategies that politicians employ to ensure reciprocity from voters? This excellent conceptual groundwork of the book serves as the foundation for a set of 22 empirical chapters documenting dynamics of patronage distribution during the 2014 election campaign. The rich and textured narratives in each chapter speak volumes about the rigorous ethnographic method the authors employ. Unifying all these chapters are several key findings that compose the primary value of the book.

First, the book codifies the varieties of patronage found during the grassroots campaigns. Of all possible forms of patronage, outright vote buying is the most common. A set of chapters covering West, Central, and East Java (Chapters 13, 14, 15, and 16) mainly document vote buying in remarkable detail, including the social legitimacy accorded to it by voters. Despite its illegality, voters accept the practice of vote buying and take it as either an expression of gratitude on the part of candidates or a means to punish their alleged corrupt behavior (pp. 245–247). The terms utilized to euphemize the distribution of money are numerous, including *uang makan* (food money), *uang pulsa* (money for mobile phone credit), *uang lelah* (literally “tired money,” meaning money to compensate for labor performed), and *uang transport* (transport money) (p. 93). This set of chapters is a novel contribution to the empirical literature on Indonesian electoral politics. Other varieties of patronage that the book registers include individual gifts to voters in the form of consumables and merchandise bearing the name and image of candidates, community services such as free medical checkups, club goods such as donations to targeted communities, and pork barrel projects.

Second, the book demonstrates that patronage distribution is not merely one among many campaign strategies of candidates in the 2014 legislative election. It is *the* dominant mode of campaigning. All chapters register the practice of patronage distribution as the dominant strategy, with only a few candidates trying to refrain from engaging in this practice. Even those candidates who pledge not to buy votes end up distributing some form of patronage (see Chapter 18 by Ahmad Muhajir, covering South Kalimantan). It is, therefore, largely a question of what kind of patronage candidates distribute rather than whether candidates engage in patronage distribution at all.

Third, the central mechanism of distributing patronage in Indonesia is dominantly informal networks of vote brokers rather than party machines. This intermediary actor between voters and politicians is commonly referred to as *tim sukses*, or success team. The informal networks of *tim sukses* are preferable to party machines since they often have close personal relationships with voters. These close relationships between *tim sukses* and voters elicit trust as well as “the feeling of gratitude and obligation” that helps mitigate the problem of reciprocity after patronage distribution (p. 29).

As the introduction of this review has mentioned above, the entanglement of democracy and oligarchy is a central theme in contemporary Indonesian politics, which this book helps to clarify.

The cases of Blora and Southeast Sulawesi, for example, demonstrate that local oligarchs, or politico-business elites, are the dominant players in the election game (see Chapter 15 by Zusiana Elly Triantini, and Chapter 20 by Eve Warburton). In the case of Blora, they are *the very actors* that introduced vote buying in the 2004 legislative election. A decade after, vote buying had become an established practice in Blora (p. 252). *Sabet*, a local term in Blora for brokers, are the actors helping local oligarchs as candidates distributing patronage. This patronage might take the form of goods, cash, or even services such as holding a local volleyball competition (pp. 252–253).

Intensity of patronage distribution, however, does not guarantee victory to candidates. As Eve Warburton demonstrates in her excellent chapter on Southeast Sulawesi, a materially powerful local oligarch could lose despite the huge amount of money he distributed days before the election (pp. 348, 358–360). In the context of various candidates employing a similar strategy of patronage distribution, the strength of local networks that brokers mobilize makes a difference. Vote buying alone cannot guarantee victory since the amount of money that candidates wield to win an election does not necessarily correspond to the number of votes they project to gain. Candidates always get fewer votes than they initially expect. Thus, only candidates that have both money and active networks, or *basis*, come up victorious.

The book explicitly limits its aim to presenting descriptive accounts of the dynamics of patronage distribution. However, it is not without opportunities for theory building. These opportunities, unfortunately, are left unexploited and are only suggested as a further research avenue (pp. 34–37). For example, consider the following theoretical questions regarding the organizing logic underlying the distribution of patronage. Under a condition of the uncertainty of where and to whom to distribute patronage, what explains the decision of brokers to target a specific demographic and not others? Relatedly, under the condition of multiple patronage distribution from various candidates, what explains the decision of voters to cast votes for certain candidates and not others? It seems that ethnicity and religion play a significant role in answering these two related questions, as the cases of the legislative election in Medan and Bangka Belitung suggest (see Chapters 4 and 5 respectively). Brokers in the two regions tend to distribute patronage to targeted religious or ethnic groups that share their candidates' ethnic or religious background. This strategy of ethno-religious targeting (pp. 74–77) is intended to ensure victory in areas that demonstrate potential as their voter base. Similarly, voters in the two regions in the context of patronage distribution by several candidates tend to cast their votes for candidates who share their religious or ethnic background.

This minor comment regarding a possible addition to the book should by no means be taken as discounting the value of the book. Aspinall and Sukmajati's edited volume undoubtedly is a major empirical contribution to the study of Indonesian democracy as well as patronage and clientelism in the context of developing countries. Students of Indonesian electoral politics will engage and build their work upon this pioneering volume.

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Yearning to Belong: Malaysia's Indian Muslims, Chitties, Portuguese Eurasians, Peranakan Chinese and Baweanese

PATRICK PILLAI

Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2015.

What are the experiences of ethnic minority communities in present-day Malaysia? How do they negotiate their often multiple and fluid identities with national policies and politics that are based primarily on ethnicity? Patrick Pillai, drawing on years of fieldwork in different locations in Peninsular Malaysia and long-term interactions with ethnic communities, provides valuable observations on not one, but five cases of less-studied minority communities in *Yearning to Belong: Malaysia's Indian Muslims, Chitties, Portuguese Eurasians, Peranakan Chinese and Baweanese*. This book investigates Indian Muslims in Penang, Chitties and Portuguese Eurasians in Malacca, Peranakan-type Chinese in Terengganu, and Indonesians from Bawean Island, all in one volume. This itself is an admirable achievement as such a variety often comes from an edited volume by multiple contributors, yet Pillai manages to pull them all together, assembling historical backgrounds, second literatures, and firsthand data to create a panoramic picture of ethnic relationships in Malaysia today.

We start with the first group, Indian Muslims in Penang, in Chapter 1. After a brief history covering the precolonial and colonial eras, the chapter looks at the religious and cultural impacts of this long-standing Muslim community on Malaysian society, in the form of religious buildings, political leadership, and intellectual influence as well as aspects of everyday life such as food and language. It then focuses on the identity challenge of the community, which finds itself in an awkward position being Muslim yet not ethnic Malay (although the constitutional definition of Malay itself is not strictly an ethnic one). Due to this ethnic ambiguity, Indian Muslims are often

classified into three different types of (non-)citizenship: Malay Muslim citizens, Indian Muslim citizens, and Indian Muslim permanent residents (non-citizens). The strict classification comes with significant differences in access to state resources. The rest of the chapter explores the difficulties and discriminations it brings, and some feasible solutions adopted by individual members.

Chapter 2 brings us to Malacca, a port renowned for its hybrid history and multiethnic heritage. It focuses on one minority group, the Chitties, or descendants of Hindu settlers from South Asia who arrived in Malacca around the time when Islam was introduced to the peninsula. This group, sometimes known as Peranakan Indians, maintained extensive interactions with other communities in Malacca and underwent a sequence of decline, dislocation, and dispersion under Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial rule over the following five centuries. Like the Indian Muslims in Chapter 1, the Chitty community follows a highly hybrid tradition in its religious rituals, material culture, and performing arts. The interethnic exchange has been so extensive and complicated that in some cases the Peranakan Chinese, instead of other Indians (Chitties' closer ethnic "relatives") or Malays (the major group), functioned as its cultural intermediary (p. 49). Today the Chitty community, despite its shrinking population and diminished influence, has managed to keep a residential, religious, and ethnic space in the "Chitty village" near central Malacca and is actively seeking *bumiputera* (indigenous as recognized by the constitution) status for "land security, social recognition and economic opportunity" (p. 66) to cope with unfavorable ethnic policies and aggressive commercial developers.

Remaining in Malacca, Chapter 3 discusses the Portuguese Eurasians, who have managed to obtain *bumiputera* status, and their own identity search through another ethnic space, the Portuguese settlement on Malacca's seafront where poor Eurasian fishermen live and work. The ancestors of Portuguese Eurasians came slightly later than the first arrivals of the Chitties, as a result of the Portuguese conquest of Malacca in 1511. As in so many other cases in this cosmopolitan port, its unique Portuguese cultural elements merged widely with the Malaysian culture in terms of food, costumes, language, and songs over centuries of intermingling, while Catholicism remained a defining feature. The most interesting part here is the community's unconventional route to claim *bumiputera* status, with partial success (pp. 101–109). The process is not lacking controversy, especially when this was entangled with the changing agenda of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the country's ruling political player, in the mid-1980s to solicit wider support from non-Malay voters, and a personal interest taken by Mahathir, the most influential prime minister in postwar Malaysia. So far this is an unfinished story, as the community is now facing a potential intra-ethnic income gap (p. 109) and over-tourism (p. 92) in addition to continued efforts to obtain full recognition as *bumiputera*.

In Chapter 4 we move to Malaysia's east coast and investigate the Peranakan-type Chinese in Terengganu. Terengganu is a Malay-majority state that has Thailand on its northern border (although this further layer of potential ethnic hybridity is only slightly touched upon in the chap-

ter) and whose minority Chinese population accounts for merely 3 percent. Therefore, unlike other Peranakan or non-Peranakan Chinese from the west coast, the Chinese in Terengganu are often isolated from the mainstream Malaysian Chinese. Yet, recent historical discussions suggest that Terengganu, located on the historical China-Southeast Asia maritime corridor, might well be one of the earliest Chinese settlements on the peninsula, perhaps dating back to as early as the visit of Cheng Ho's fleet in the fifteenth century. Today, the Terengganu Chinese experience differs by location (rural vs. urban) and by generation (grandparents and parents vs. youth), some contributing factors being access to Chinese-medium schools and improved transportation and social mobility. Remarkably, this is a community that does not utilize its multiple identities, as eligible as it might be, to seek social recognition in the constitutional framework. Instead, certain segments of the community are disappointed over prevailing policies (p. 143).

Perhaps the most unique story amongst all is of an Indonesian-origin group, the Baweanese, and their migration to and settlement in Peninsular Malaysia. The last chapter is based on Pillai's 2005 doctoral thesis, with detailed fieldwork supplemented by follow-up visits in later years. Unlike other groups discussed so far, the Baweanese began migrating to Malaysia in the British colonial era and continued, almost without interruption, well into the current century. Originating from a tiny island in the Java Sea, the Baweanese have a long tradition of emigration to Singapore and Malaysia as workers as well as religious teachers. The labor shortage in Malaysia during its economic boom in the 1970s and 1980s brought a particularly large number of Baweanese workers. Although relative newcomers, the Baweanese are Muslim with close connections to the Malay majority historically, ethnically, and religiously. Therefore, the Baweanese case sheds new light on the road to *bumiputera* and its fluid nature. Starting from a less marginalized position, the community utilizes its multiple identities to form strategic working and social relationships with its Malay neighbors and colleagues. Still, it takes three generations to become a full-fledged Malay citizen of Malaysia (pp. 173–178), and a significant generational difference is ensured in terms of lifestyle, socioeconomic prospects, and realities.

Such an amalgamation is a result of years of painstaking fieldwork, long-term relationships with the communities, a deep understanding of their challenges, and firsthand experience of the country's ethnic policies. As a journalist-turned-sociologist, Pillai is well positioned to bring these pieces together, often from an insider's vantage point. In addition, his narrative interweaves a wide range of opinions from observers and actors on the ground, including scholars, politicians, community leaders, stakeholders, and members of the community. The rich information and easy-to-read style make the book a good read not only for academics who seek up-to-date case studies, but also the general public within and outside of the region who want to know more about intermingled communities in a multiethnic country and their shared experiences, past and present.

Running through all five cases is one core story: the process of assimilation and acculturation in an ethnicity-conscious country. Some common themes appear repeatedly, such as material

culture, performing arts, religious practice, and communal festivities. Knowing the key position of assimilation and acculturation, Pillai defines them at the opening of the book, claiming that acculturation is “cultural change in the direction of another ethnic group” that can be mutual, while assimilation is “the adoption of the ethnic identity of another group, thus losing one’s original identity” and is one-way (p. xviii). However, readers may wonder why certain themes are categorized as leading to acculturation while others are considered to facilitate assimilation. What is the significance of each theme in our understanding of a community’s experience and identification? And if some themes are about acculturation and others are related to assimilation, what are the decisive factors that set them apart? If all themes appear to be cultural, then why, for instance, is religion more fundamental in defining an ethnic identity than is language or cuisine? Where does culture end and identity begin? Given the book’s numerous and succinct examples, it feels particularly important to further investigate these key concepts.

Despite the large amount of data collected by the author, in more than one case readers may find there could have been better-organized and more critical ways to present these valuable primary sources. For instance, narratives quoted from local historians on the early arrival of Indian Muslims in Penang could be further supported by archeological and textual evidence (p. 10), and the discussion of their contribution to popular Malay food might be supplemented with sources other than from the Internet (pp. 17–18). A large portion of the author’s participatory observations, questionnaires, and interview transcripts remain unprocessed in the appendix of some chapters. It might be worth further analyzing them and weaving the results into the main text.

Reading about all five communities’ challenges and adaptations, and the fascinating life stories of individual members, one wonders what exactly they are “yearning to belong to.” Pillai mentions that his motivation in writing this book is to highlight “shared histories and cultures, common universal spiritual values and . . . interlinked future” (p. xv). In the conclusion he reflects on Malaysia’s ethnicity-based policies and provides helpful recommendations to improve interethnic understanding and increase ethnic harmony. The ethnicity problem might have administratively started under the British colonial system (p. 206), but postwar politics continue to transform the ethnic minority communities’ collective identity. Apart from the Terengganu Chinese, all other communities in the book strategically employ their hybrid histories and fluid identities to maximize their political, economic, and social standing in a uniquely Malaysian way by obtaining constitutionally acknowledged *bumiputera* status, with various degrees of success. Indeed, apart from acculturation and assimilation via cultural channels, a process that has been convincingly elaborated in this book, perhaps we also want to further explore another vital element that determines the experience of postcolonial Malaysian minority communities, that is, the political influence of prevailing ethnicity-based policies. This single element, as the book has more than sufficiently revealed with details, above all defines the ethnic experience for minority communities in Malaysia and differentiates it from any other context. We may even ask whether, if there were no

ethnicity-based policies, these communities would be the same as we see them today. Would they still yearn to belong, and if so, what would they want to belong to?

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The Penguin History of Modern Vietnam

CHRISTOPHER GOSCHA

London: Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2016.

The Penguin History of Modern Vietnam by Christopher Goscha traces the story of modern Vietnamese nationbuilding back thousands of years. The titles of its 14 chapters cover in chronological order events that are commonly seen as milestones in the forming of modern Vietnam: Chinese invasion (Chapter 1, “Northern Configurations”), French colonization (Chapter 2, “A Divided House and a French Imperial Meridian Line?”; Chapter 3, “Altered States”; Chapter 4, “Rethinking Vietnam”; Chapter 5, “The Failure of Colonial Republicanism”; and Chapter 6, “Colonial Society and Economy”), the First Indochina War (Chapter 7, “Contesting Empires and Nation-states”; Chapter 8, “States of War”; and Chapter 9, “Internationalized States of War”), the Vietnam War (Chapter 10, “A Tale of Two Republics”; and Chapter 11, “Towards One Vietnam”), and stories of a unified Vietnam (Chapter 12, “Cultural Change in the Long Twentieth Century”; Chapter 13, “The Tragedy and the Rise of Modern Vietnam”; and Chapter 14, “Vietnam from Beyond the Red River”). Nevertheless, amidst a wide range of scholarship about the history of modern Vietnam, Goscha’s *The Penguin History of Modern Vietnam* is unique in constantly stressing on the multiplicity of modern Vietnam’s past. Thus, it implicitly criticizes contemporary scholarship on Vietnamese history that has been produced under postcolonial theory and criticism by foreign scholars and under nationalist historiography by Communist Vietnamese historians.

Throughout the book Goscha uses synonyms for the word “multiplicity,” such as “plurality,” “diversity,” and “heterogeneity,” typical terms of postmodern literature, to highlight his vision of “multiple Vietnams.” Moreover, the author explicitly states in “Introduction: The Many Different Vietnams” that “rather than positing one Vietnam, one homogenous people, one history, one modernity, or even one colonialism, this book investigates modern Vietnam’s past through its multiple forms and impressive diversity” (p. xxx). Accordingly, as presented in the book, the history of Vietnam includes a series of interlocking forces and people; they occurred and acted at specific points in time and space, each generating its own range of possibilities and eliminating others at the same time. As evidence, the author begins his story of Vietnam’s past with “a mosaic of a hundred Vietnams” in the open zone running between present-day central Vietnam and South-

ern China, where diverse people, routes, and ideas intersected. For thousands of years, as Goscha describes, people arrived in the low-lying Red River basin via the eastern coast and overland; Austroasiatic peoples also arrived in this area by way of Southern China; and the Dong Son civilization, home to vibrant and diverse peoples and cultures, was constantly in rivalry and fragmentation.

Emphasizing pluralism in writing Vietnamese history, the book differentiates itself from existing scholarship about modern Vietnam, which exclusively celebrates the Vietnam of Ho Chi Minh—Vietnam as winner, as Ho Chi Minh, or in general as a Communist nation-state—and Vietnam of Western colonialism—modern Vietnam as the product of only Western colonialism. Instead, the history of Vietnam written by Goscha is derived from the perspectives of the “others” that are largely silenced in official Vietnamese historiography. Goscha calls these perspectives “thoughts of alternatives,” which are the perspectives of competitor states and their leaders, with whom Ho Chi Minh’s Vietnam had to engage and won over. These others, as shown in the first three pre-1858 chapters, include non-Viet peoples; and, as shown in the following five post-1858 chapters, include French Vietnam administered by different French colonialists, the Associated State of Vietnam led by Ngo Dinh Diem, the Republic of Vietnam forged by different presidents, and highland Vietnams managed by different men. Goscha believes that these alternative polities help to understand present-day Vietnam. This present-day Vietnam is characterized by Communist leaders authorizing a capitalist economy and inclusive nationalism since their official adoption of Reform policy, while ceaselessly maintaining the legitimacy of the single Party in “a post-communist world” through school texts, official histories, museums, billboards, and the media (pp. 484–485). Therefore, Goscha’s book definitely provides audiences in Vietnam with a new story of modern Vietnam in which voices of “the others” or the “alternatives” are counted as integral forces, a story that is different from the one written by Party historians.

Goscha’s history of modern Vietnam is groundbreaking also with its approach that goes beyond the Franco-centered one: Goscha affirms that today’s Vietnam is not only a product of French colonization but also of pre-French Asian empires’ expansions, and even of its own colonial history. In other words, understanding the modern Vietnams, according to Goscha, means recognizing that they have been constructed through the intersections of imperial projects of the Chinese, French, Vietnamese, Russians, and Americans. Accordingly, modern Vietnam started with the brief “Chinese colonization” in the early fifteenth century when the Ming created “gunpowder empires” and brought new forms of modernity, statecraft, and violence to the region while imposing direct political rule and cultural assimilation. Goscha’s belief in the plurality of modern Vietnam is evident also in his telling stories of reform-minded Vietnamese mandarins following models of economic, political, and scientific modernization from Japan and China for their nationalist projects. For Goscha, even during the French colonial period, French and European expansion was not the only source for creating a modern Vietnam; Asian connections were.

Interestingly, the way that Goscha tells stories about the pre-existing “Asian colonization” of “Vietnam” seems to echo historiographies of French-colonized Vietnam written by postcolonial scholars. In other words, Goscha’s stories about colonization and decolonization, regardless of time and space, follow similar directions: colonialists culturally, politically, and economically dominate their subjects with armed forces and cultural assimilation; in response, local elites maintain an anticolonial stance regardless of their ambiguous choice between resistance and colonial collaboration. When telling stories of Chinese colonization, Goscha uses terms and ideas that accord with those appearing in postcolonial analyses of French colonization. Reading chapters in which the author describes Chinese rule spreading aspects of Han culture into Jiaozhi, audiences would easily be reminded of accounts of the French colonialization of Vietnam in works by postcolonialist scholars such as David Marr, Nicola A. Cooper, and Gail Kelly. For example, Goscha tells the reader that the Ming conquest of Dai Viet was undertaken with brutal military force, modern weapon technologies, and discourses of natives as “barbarians”; in response, a certain segment of the Dai Viet elite joined the empire while other stood up arms to gain independence. Many Sinitized elites resisted the Chinese imperial expansion, but they also wanted to build a better life within the empire. These descriptions of Sinicized native elites during the Chinese colonization sound similar to accounts of politically, culturally, and economically ambiguous French-educated Vietnamese intellectuals in postcolonial works about Vietnam such as *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920–1945* by David Marr and *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon, 1916–1930* by Philippe Peycam.

Noticeably, Goscha points out, native leaders of pre-French Vietnam built a postcolonial Dai Viet based on the Chinese legacy of culture, military, civil service, and bureaucracy. As described, the Ming empire destroyed native intellectuality and culture but also modernized Dai Viet by introducing the Confucian canon, print technology, paper, a legal code, and notions of statecraft. While native leaders successfully repulsed Chinese colonization, they also took the colonizer’s Confucian culture, technology, statecraft, and economy as models in their postcolonial state-building: Le Loi and his successors promoted Confucian statecraft through the construction of more schools and academic institutions, the acceleration of the civil service examination program, and the promulgation of a law code with Confucian characteristics. This way of constructing postcolonial Dai Viet is similar to the way that leaders of the two republican Vietnams and the unified Vietnam, as Goscha describes in Chapters 10 and 11, built their postcolonial states. According to this view, the modernity of present-day Vietnam has multiple forms that were created at different points in time and space by multiple colonial forces; these forms “often blend with and build upon pre-existing ones” (pp. xxxiv); modernity coexists with the “pre-modern.” This approach argues against postcolonial scholarship about Vietnam, such as *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* by Nicola Cooper, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858–1954* by Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery, and *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam*

by Shawn Frederick McHale. These works implicitly share the idea that the French were the sole force to create the history of modern Vietnam.

Another interesting point in Goscha's story of modern Vietnam is that it is viewed from a comparative world history perspective. According to this view, the modern Vietnams are not historically exceptional; instead, they run parallel and are similar to modernizations of other states in the world. For example, Goscha notes that the process by which Vietnam entered into and extended its participation in the Chinese empire is similar to the way Gaul entered the Roman empire. As such, the "Vietnams" have, at different times and spaces, been products of larger historical processes in the world. In other words, the Vietnams have hardly ever been alone and isolated in the larger dynamic regional and world modernizations: they were either forced to participate in or actively participated in modernizing circles around them. As such, the history of modern Vietnam is part of the histories of the modern world at large.

The comparative world history perspective effectively allows Goscha to view "Vietnams" not as passive victims of foreign forces as commonly seen in existing scholarship about this country. Pre-French Vietnam and post-1975 unified Vietnam, for Goscha, are products of colonial expansion and modernizing forces themselves: Le Thanh Tong and Ming Mang were remarkable colonizers that modernized ethnic communities such as the Cham and Khmer, and unified Vietnam has been a colonizer of many ethnic minorities throughout the country. Goscha's story of the modern Vietnams, including stories of how they were colonized and modernized by others and how they colonized and modernized others is groundbreaking. This groundbreaking position is especially true in the context of most existing scholarship by postcolonialist academics outside Vietnam viewing modern Vietnam as a passive product of French colonization, and most existing scholarship by nationalist historians within Vietnam emphasizing the modern Vietnam as a victory of the Party's effort. Overall, Goscha's book offers alternative ways of looking into modern Vietnam that go beyond European modernization and Party consolidation.

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