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Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University

# SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

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# Caring for the Dead Ritually in Cambodia

John Clifford Holt\*

Buddhist conceptions of the after-life, and prescribed rites in relation to the dead, were modified adaptations of *brahmanical* patterns of religious culture in ancient India. In this article, I demonstrate how Buddhist conceptions, rites and dispositions have been sustained and transformed in a contemporary annual ritual of rising importance in Cambodia, *pchum ben*. I analyze *pchum ben* to determine its fundamental importance to the sustenance and coherence of the Khmer family and national identity. *Pchum ben* is a 15-day ritual celebrated toward the end of the three-month monastic rain retreat season each year. During these 15 days, Buddhist laity attend ritually to the dead, providing special care for their immediately departed kin and other more recently deceased ancestors. The basic aim of *pchum ben* involves making a successful transaction of karma transfer to one's dead kin, in order to help assuage their experiences of suffering. The proximate catalyst for *pchum ben*'s current popularity is recent social and political history in Southeast Asia, especially the traumatic events that occurred nationally in Cambodia during the early 1970s through the 1980s when the country experienced a series of convulsions. Transformations in religious culture often stand in reflexive relationship to social and political change.

**Keywords:** Cambodia, buddhism, Khmer Rouge, death, ritual, *pchum ben*, family, national identity

Death is an inevitable fact of life. For the religious, its occurrence does not necessarily signal life's end, but rather the beginning of a *rite de passage*, a transitional experience in which the newly dead leave behind the familiarity of human life for yet another mode of being beyond. We may never know with certainty, but it is possible that thoughtful ruminations about the significance of death, and therefore about the meaning of life, accompanied by ritual practices designed to provide emotional solace in facing the loss that death entails, are seminal to the foundational origins of religious belief and practice. Within the comparative study of religious cultures, rites in relation to the dead are as ancient as they are ubiquitous.

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Buddhist interpretations of death, and rites in response to its occurrence, did not originate in an historical or cultural vacuum. Buddhist conceptions of the after-life, and prescribed rites in relation to the dead, were modified adaptations of prevailing *brahmanical* patterns of religious culture in ancient India. In this article, I shall demonstrate how Buddhist conceptions, rites and dispositions regarding the dead have been sustained and transformed in a contemporary annual ritual of rising popularity and importance in Cambodia, *pchum ben*. Moreover, I shall analyze the ritual in terms of its fundamental importance to the sustenance and coherence of the Khmer family and national identity.

## Remembering the Dead in Cambodia and Vietnam

*Pchum ben* is a 15-day ritual celebrated in the Khmer month of Potrobot (in September or October depending on the timing of the lunar calendar), toward the end of the three-month *sangha* (monastic) rain retreat season (*vassa*). During these 15 days, Buddhist laity attend ritually to the dead, providing special care for their immediately departed kin and other more recently deceased ancestors. The basic aim of the collective rites comprising *pchum ben* is making a successful transaction of merit-making and karma transfer to one's dead kin, in order to help assuage their experiences of *dukkha* (suffering). *Pchum ben* is now celebrated as the most popular religious occasion of the Khmer Buddhist liturgical calendar year and, in addition to the April New Year celebrations, is one of the two most widely observed holidays throughout Cambodia today.

The proximate catalyst for *pchum ben*'s current popularity is recent social and political history in Southeast Asia, especially the traumatic events that occurred nationally in Cambodia during the early 1970s through the 1980s when the country experienced a series of convulsions: first, the civil war precipitated by Cambodia's proximity to an unsettled Vietnam, itself completely engulfed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indo-China War<sup>1</sup>); second, as an outcome of Cambodia's concomitant civil war, the establishment of a radical revolutionary government led by the ultra-Maoist Khmer Rouge from April, 1975, until early January, 1979; and finally, after the Khmer Rouge had baited the Vietnamese into a military conflict along their eastern border, a foolish adventure that ultimately resulted in a country-wide Vietnamese military occupation, the autocratic rule of yet another communist-inspired government which then controlled an enervated Cambodian society and political economy for the ensuing decade. During the first 10 of these 20 years, from 1970 until 1980, close to one-third of Cambodia's population, almost two million people (Chandler

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1) Better known in the United States as the Vietnam War.

2008, 15), died from violence and neglect caused by political and military conflicts and economic experiments that turned into mad social misadventures: first from the massive number of American bombs that were dropped in the eastern regions of the country in the early 1970s (an aspect of the escalation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indo-China War that directly precipitated Cambodia's own civil war<sup>2)</sup>); second, from the intense military fighting that occurred between the U.S. supported and rightist Lon Nol (the Republic of Cambodia) who had staged a coup against the long time neutralist government of Prince Norodom Sihanouk in 1970 on the one hand, and the China-backed Khmer Rouge revolutionary forces on the other, the latter of which eventually established Democratic Kampuchea in 1975; third, and especially, from the insidiously forced reorganization of society and the menacing maltreatment of its own citizens by the Khmer Rouge for the 3 years, 8 months and 20 days that they remained in power; and finally from the appalling rate of starvation that occurred during the earliest phases of the Vietnamese occupation in 1980 and thereafter.

The vast majority of Cambodians who died during the intense American bombing campaign, the civil war, the period of Khmer Rouge power, and the Vietnamese occupation, were civilian noncombatants. During the civil war, especially after May, 1970, many innocent people in the countryside, perhaps as many as 150,000,<sup>3)</sup> were killed by the devastation brought about from the intense American bombings dropped on the eastern zones of the country. Many more innocent people were subsequently killed in the consequent fighting that broke out between the Lon Nol government that had come to power with the overthrow of Prince Sihanouk's regime in 1970 and the rising forces of the Khmer Rouge.<sup>4)</sup> Another 100,000 were to die haplessly as refugees while the war dragged

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2) "Richard Nixon's May 1970 invasion of Cambodia (undertaken without informing Lon Nol's new government [the very military government that the CIA had helped to overthrow Prince Sihanouk's neutralist government]) followed simultaneous invasions by Saigon and Vietnamese communist forces. It created 130,000 new Khmer refugees, according to the Pentagon. By 1971, 60 per cent of refugees surveyed in Cambodia's towns gave U.S. bombing as the main reason of their displacement. The U.S. bombardment of the Cambodian countryside continued well into 1973, when Congress imposed a halt. Nearly half of the 540,000 tons of bombs were dropped in the last six months. From the ashes of rural Cambodia arose Pol Pot's Communist Party of Kampuchea. It used the bombing's devastation and massacre of civilians as recruitment propaganda and as an excuse for its brutal, radical policies and its purge of moderate communists and Sihanoukists" (Kiernan 2002, 19).

3) Kiernan (2002, 24); perhaps only Laos suffered more casualties from these intense American bombing campaigns.

4) On the American responsibility for the breakdown of order that led to Khmer Rouge's rise and eventual control of the country, Ben Kiernan, who has written the definitive study of Pol Pot's rise to power and its subsequent policies of genocide, (2002, 16) says: "Although it was indigenous, Pol Pot's revolution would not have won power without U.S. economic and military destabilization of ↗

on to its conclusion in 1975.<sup>5)</sup> However, the massive number of innocent people who were simply abandoned and left to die, maltreated in baleful ways that led to their deaths, or were simply murdered in cold-blooded, systematic fashion during the period of the Khmer Rouge regime, is staggering.<sup>6)</sup> I will write more about the nature, aspirations and impact of the Khmer Rouge on Cambodian society, especially its impact on the family, in the next section of this article, but for now I want to make the simple but very fundamental point that the vast majority of those unfortunate people who died in Cambodia during the 1970s amidst all of this social and political mayhem died “unnatural deaths.”

In popular Khmer Buddhist perspectives, consistent with earlier Indian and Sinhala perspectives, which have been nurtured by Buddhist tradition as well, those who die a tragic death, whose final moments are violent, who die unjustly, or who “die in the street” rather than peacefully at home, are thought to experience grave difficulties in making the transition to the next life beyond or to a new positive rebirth in this world. While it is a question that has been debated many times throughout the history of Buddhist thought, what transmigrates from this life to the next, at least karmically speaking, is the very quality of the mental conditioning process that is consciously in play at the moment of death. In Pali, this consciousness is known as *vinnana* and more literally means “knowing awareness.” For this reason, Buddhists almost always try to assist their dying family members to engage death as peacefully as possible. In Theravada tradition, this means attempting to make the dying feeling the warmth and love of *metta* (loving kindness) and

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↘ Cambodia which began in 1966 after American escalation in next-door Vietnam and peaked in 1969–1973 [under President Richard Nixon] with the carpet bombing of Cambodia’s countryside by American b-52s. This was probably the most important single factor in Pol Pot’s rise.” David Chandler, perhaps the foremost American student of Cambodian history, writes similarly: “The Vietnam War destabilized the Cambodian economy and eventually drove Sihanouk from office. Otherwise he probably would not have been overthrown, and Cambodia’s Communists would not have come to power” (Chandler 2008, 236).

5) About the desperate conditions of the country on the eve of the Khmer Rouge take over in 1975, Keyes (1994: 54) writes: “The refugee population [in Phnom Penh] could not be supported on food produced within the country since so much land had been abandoned or had fallen under Khmer Rouge control, while transportation had come to a near standstill. Despite a massive airlift by the United States of food into the country, starvation became a fact of life—or rather a fact of death—to perhaps tens of thousands of Khmer in 1974 and 1975. Starvation accelerated after the fall of the country to the Khmer Rouge and the concomitant ending of the airlift of food supplies by the Americans. The new government was incapable of feeding its large refugee population even if it had been willing to do so. While it is impossible to calculate the number of deaths from starvation between 1973 and the end of 1975, they could not have been fewer than a hundred thousand.”

6) The most recent estimates put the figure of dead under the Khmer Rouge at 1.75 million, though Chandler (2008, 25) continues to use the approximate figure of 2 million in his most recently revised *A History of Cambodia*.

*karuna* (compassion). Chanted, soothing, gentle and reassuring words are given to the dying while death impends. Ideally, one's last experiences should be the mirror opposite condition of violent and agitated frightful terror. Moreover, those whose deaths have not been addressed properly through ritual are regarded as not having been "laid to rest," or "put in their place," as it were, and are also thought to be experiencing badly the suffering of *dukkha* in the world beyond. People who die in terrible ways, without benefit of the comfort of their family's care, without benefit of effectively performed ritual, or those who commit questionable moral acts that require retribution, are the very types of people who become lingering ghosts, the *petas*<sup>7)</sup> of the Buddhist "Pali imaginaire,"<sup>8)</sup> the suffering beings who roam the margins of the world. Hence, *petas* often appear, according to ancient Buddhist literature, especially in the *Petavatthu* (Stories of the Departed) of the *Khuddaka Nikaya*,<sup>9)</sup> or in the reports of contemporary Khmer Buddhist folk, in the "betwixt and between" condition of liminality. They often are said to appear to their loved-ones in dreams, during twilight hours, at crossroads, at the edges of the temple *sima* (consecrated boundaries), etc. The rituals constituting *pchum ben* are basically celebrated to help these suffering and wandering beings to become settled ancestors who can garner the respect and karmic patronage of the continuing family.

Shortly after the Vietnamese forced the Khmer Rouge out of their control over Cambodia in 1979, they initiated commemorations of the massive number of Khmer dead in ways reminiscent of how they had commemorated their own dead in Vietnam. That is, they emphasized commemorating the dead as fallen heroes in the war against imperialism and/or as victims of genocide. The latter strategy is quite understandable, especially in light of the fact that Vietnamese and other ethnicities suffered persecution in even greater percentages than the Khmer under the Khmer Rouge reign in Democratic Kampuchea. In fact, one of the first official acts that the Vietnamese promulgated after they had wrested control of Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge was the establishment of the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide (the infamous "S-21" interrogation center in Phnom Penh)<sup>10)</sup> and what is now the "Killing Fields" memorial at nearby Choeung Ek, both established in an effort to provide heroic commemoration of the dead, and to disgrace the

7) As in the vernaculars of other Theravada-inclined cultures, Sanskrit *preta* has been adopted in common use rather than the Pali *peta*. I will use *peta* only within the context of Pali literature and *preta* on all other occasions.

8) The phrase belongs to Steven Collins who introduced it as his chief hermeneutical device in his *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities* (1998). See especially his General Introduction.

9) This the fifth, last and most recent of the collections of *sutras* that make up the *Suttapitaka* section of the *Tripitaka*. Those texts are regarded as *Buddhavacana*, "words of the Buddha," according to Theravada tradition.

10) For a careful and thorough analysis of this torture chamber, see Chandler (1999).

Khmer Rouge simultaneously. Hinton (2008, 68) has described the Vietnamese strategy in the following way:

Memory mixed with politics as the PRK [Peoples' Republic of Kampuchea] regime set out to establish a narrative of the recent past that would buttress their legitimacy both domestically and abroad. Genocide stood at the center of this story. The new political narrative centered around the theme of a magnificent revolution subverted by a small group of evil doers led by "Pol Pot," "Pol Pot—Ieng Sary," or "Pol Pot-Ieng Sary-Khieu Samphan clique." Inspired by a deviant Maoist strain of socialism, the narrative went, this clique misled or coerced lower-ranking cadre [including by implication, PRK leaders who were former Khmer Rouge] into unwittingly participating in a misdirected campaign of genocide. As a result, most former Khmer Rouge cadres, including, by implication, PRK officials, were not ultimately responsible for the events that transpired during DK.

The promulgation of this perspective benefitted their Cambodian collaborationists, including Heng Samrin and Hun Sen, who had originally been part of the Khmer Rouge but had defected to Vietnam about two years following the fall of Lon Nol's government when they, themselves, had felt personally threatened by the Khmer Rouge.<sup>11)</sup>

Anthropologist Heonik Kwon has written a remarkable book about how the dead have been memorialized in post-war Vietnam, a subject of great relevance for the situation in neighboring Cambodia, given the Vietnamese "administrative presence" in the Cambodia for a decade following the catastrophes inflicted on the population by the Khmer Rouge. Kwon's examination of how the dead have been treated and remembered in post-war Vietnam is complex, subtle and insightful. Essentially, he argues (2006, 4) that the new post-colonial political elite of Vietnam attempted to "shift the focus of festivals and commemoration away from the village and the family and toward the state . . . ." In the process, they attempted a "selective redemption of the past" for the purposes of rendering the state as the beneficiary of emotions for the dead. Those who had died heroically against imperialist enemies, who embodied the struggle for freedom in their heroic acts of self-sacrifice, were worthy objects of veneration and commemoration. Such was the initial manner in which the dead who suffered at the hands of the Khmer Rouge were fielded and interpreted for political consumption.

Unwittingly, this interpretation of the dead, casting them as heroic resisters to the evil acts of their inhumane enemies, actually plays out a critical element of the distorted

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11) Both Heng Samrin and Hun Sen would become key political players in the formation of a new government following the fall of the Khmer Rouge. Hun Sen eventually parlayed his position as Prime Minister within the context of the United Nations sponsored elections of 1993. Though his party, Cambodian Peoples' Party (CPP), did not enjoy an outright victory, Hun Sen has remained as Cambodia's Prime Minister until the time of this writing in 2011.



pathology of paranoia that plagued the Khmer Rouge. Documents discovered at the “S-21” Tuol Sleng “interrogation center” now analyzed in some depth reveal that the Khmer Rouge leadership suffered gravely from deep obsessions of mistrust and paranoia. They brutally tortured mostly innocent village or middle class people in their custody in order to extract confessions about alleged collusions with either the CIA or with the Vietnamese. They almost completely fabricated a sustained belief in conspiracy efforts allegedly directed against them by these two supreme enemies.<sup>12)</sup> The fact is that those who died at the hands of the Khmer Rouge, either in the detention centers where mass murder was committed, or in collectivized agricultural fields of toil and hunger, were not fallen heroes from the battle fields of war. They were simply victims of maltreatment born of a collectively-held sinister psychosis, most of them confused and terrified about why they had been relocated away from their families or singled out for torture.

In his study of post-war Vietnam, Kwon deftly points out the limitations and ultimate failure of the Vietnamese state strategy to co-opt the political significance of the dead through hero commemoration. The Marxist or revolutionary “scientific” doctrine of the Vietnamese state, of course, militated against all types of superstitious acts including ancestor veneration. The dead were to be regarded as “alive” or functionally useful only to the extent that their commemorations could serve to bolster the enduring moral voice of the party or the state. In their lives and in their deaths, serving the state is what made their lives meaningful. But in such a perspective, there are a vast number of dead whose memories or commemorations simply cannot be accommodated: the dead, for instance, who fought *against* the victorious side in Vietnam<sup>13)</sup>; or, the dead who simply died because they got in the way of the fierce fighting between combatants; or, the dead who Kwon writes about at great length in his book, those innocent villagers who were massacred by Korean and American troops in the villages of Ha My and My Lai in central Vietnam. Indeed, Kwon has joined other scholars in asserting that “[a]ncestral rites . . . became a critical locus for a contest of power between the state and family.” And as in Cambodia, so in Vietnam “the demise of the centrally planned socialist economy resulted in the revival of ancestral rituals as a way of strengthening the moral basis of the family—a principal unit in the new economic environment.” In his analysis, Kwon describes how

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12) The journalist Elizabeth Becker (2010) has culled and compiled the pathetic yet compelling story of one young woman, Hout Bophana, from letters and documents of her “interviews” while she was being tortured to death at Tuol Sleng. A documentary film made by a European filmmaker about Bophana is currently shown twice daily at Tuol Sleng in Phnom Penh.

13) Kwon (2006: 21) points out how “fallen soldiers who also fought for national independence, but who happened to have done so on the wrong side of ‘the puppet regime’, have absolutely no right to the space of the virtuous war dead . . .”

the return to privatized agriculture in post-war Vietnam, just as in post-war Cambodia, has led to the growing promotion of various family ritual activities and family memorial renovations “to console the spirits of the tragic dead.”<sup>14)</sup>

This is precisely the role of *pchum ben* in Cambodia. It has become the repository for the articulation of grief, veneration, and hope for the dead, regardless of the circumstances of their deaths. It has been the arena for the expression of actions that assuage the pains of a collective horror for some, and a way to manage a collective guilt for a few others (those who cooperated with the Khmer Rouge). It is a veritable ritual process reflecting how Cambodians are coming to terms with the tragedy of their recent past, and how some of them are dealing with the unknown facts of their own personal family histories.

It was only after the departure of the Vietnamese in 1989 that some relief came from the official sanctions of the “socialist struggle on the cultural front,” from the incessant governmental warnings about the wastefulness of religious ritual, and from the official sermons about the anti-scientific and anti-rationality of superstitious backward customs. That is, the hostility toward traditional forms of religious culture finally began to abate and people were free to publicly venerate the dead in familiar familial and religious fashion.

But there was another reason why the state-sponsored cult of the hero promulgated by the Vietnamese did not prove very effective among the Khmer in Cambodia in the 1980s. During the civil war and the subsequent Khmer Rouge period, the vast majority of those who died unnaturally did so largely at the hands of other Khmer, not against some external imperialist enemy. While it is true that many Vietnamese died at the hands of other Vietnamese during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indo-China War, the American presence and role in Vietnam was perceived as the dominant outside and western colonial power that threatened the future of the nation. The Americans were also understood as successors to the French, as a behemoth military power that needed to be overcome and defeated at all costs. The challenge presented by the American intervention was almost overwhelming. There is no question that the American force constituted the major enemy face and that the American presence lent itself to an oppositional perspective in which the Vietnamese

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14) John Marston makes a similar argument. In trying to account for the popularity of the practice of not cremating monks immediately following their deaths, he (2006, 503–504) muses that among the reasons may be the fact that “there is now a far greater circulation of money in Cambodia than there was during the socialist period, a development that has often favoured new religious projects and, logically, has opened up the possibility of conspicuous expense in the funerary expenses of monks as well.” He goes on to say that all of the monks involved in this practice were monks who can be identified with building up the religious community following the demise of the Pol Pot era.

could understand themselves as an oppressed underdog fighting heroically for independence and freedom against an invading imperialist power. Because of this, the end of the fighting in Vietnam signaled a clear victory to be claimed and cherished by that underdog, a victory won against the perception of very long odds. The very same logic obtained in Laos.<sup>15</sup> By comparison, in Cambodia in 1979, the major external aggressors, who styled themselves as liberators of a sort, were the Vietnamese whose presence, the longer it was sustained after the initial period, was not necessarily warmly welcomed. Nor were their interpretations of the dead.

Kwon has demonstrated how ancestor rites “became a locus for a contest of power between the state and the family” in the Vietnamese context. He also argues (2006, 5) that

[the] revived tradition of ancestor worship can help to bring the memory of victims to private and communal places of worship, especially a generation after the tragedy when the victims, the young ones included, become ancestors . . . . If revolutionary doctrine preaches against all superstitious practices, including unauthorized attention to the fate of the dead, the traditional religious ideals, when revived, may counter it by adopting some elements from the politically dominant hero worship.

Inadvertently, Kwon’s description of the dynamic in Vietnam squares up precisely with the contemporary Cambodian scene, insofar as “modernist” Buddhist monks argue how *pchum ben*, as a practice of ancestor veneration, is not really found in the canonical Pali *Tipitaka*, and therefore is not essentially Buddhist. Nevertheless, they do assert that *pchum ben* should be encouraged because it is such a cardinal expression of Khmer culture, national identity and custom. This argument, itself, constitutes a kind of political statement, especially when *pchum ben*’s origins are tied to the kingship of the nineteenth century Khmer king, Ang Duang, whose reign, as we shall see, is not only equated in popular memory with a revival of Khmer culture, but was the last Cambodian reign of kingship before the French colonial protectorate was established in 1863. I will argue that the assessment of *pchum ben*’s origins as a nineteenth century phenomenon is, in the final analysis, really not historically accurate, that instead its origins are actually rooted deep in the ancient Indian past, and probably have been influenced somewhat by the medieval Chinese ghost festival as well. But, the fact that *pchum ben* has been construed in this particular cultural manner by many “modernist” Buddhist monks, as a Khmer national past time, seems to be quite congruent with what Kwon has asserted (2006, 161–163) in the post-war Vietnamese context:

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15) For a detailed discussion of this scenario, see my *Spirits of the Place* (2009, 116–127).

[the] revival of ancestor worship in Vietnam, then, is not merely a restoration of traditional social ideals but rather an invention of a countermeasure against dominant political convention . . . . The revived ancestral worship in Vietnam contributes to undoing the legacy of the war by assimilating the historical duality of “this side” and “that side” to the traditional unity of the family.

In Cambodia, *pchum ben* seems to have functioned exactly in this kind of way once the Vietnamese left the country for good in 1989 and the Khmer were left to embrace their own social lives publicly once again: *pchum ben became a major celebration of the family on a national scale, and something of a celebration of the nation on a family scale*. In Vietnam, it seems to be the case that “the popular revival of ancestor worship frustrated the political leaders who saw it as hampering the prospects of an economically prosperous nation . . . . The family worship practices and the popular ritual economy appeared to some officials to be the apparition of an old ghost that would hinder the nation’s march forward into the prosperous commodity market economy” (*ibid.*, 111). Moreover, “[t]he forceful emergence of ancestors and ghosts into the public arena hitherto dominated by war heroes crystallizes the decisive shift in power relations between the state and society. Changes in the social life of the dead, in this context, mirror changes in the political life of the living” (*ibid.*, 178).

No such kind of state skepticism regarding ancestor veneration has been seen in contemporary Cambodia. Indeed, as Judy Ledgerwood (2008b) has insightfully demonstrated, Cambodia’s political leaders after the departure of the Vietnamese, despite the fact that some were one-time Khmer Rouge members themselves, have aligned themselves publicly since 1990 with traditional forms of Buddhist ritual practice, to the extent that Buddhism was declared the country’s state religion in 1993. While there may not have been skepticism from the political players about the emergence of *pchum ben*, it is also true that the changes in the public ritual life of the country mirrored corresponding changes in the relationship between state and society. From a political point of view, *pchum ben*’s popularity rests not only on the basis that it is a Buddhist practice, but because it is understood primarily as a Khmer practice.

I think, however, that more than national politics and Khmer identity is at stake in this discussion. *Pchum ben*’s popularity has more to do existentially with the fact that it celebrates the health and well being of the family and the village or community. As Kwon (2006, 182) has stated in the final conclusion to his study:

An ideal place for remembering the victims of mass death, if there is such a place, might be home, where they can be remembered as ancestors . . . . It should be a place where kinship, free from traditional ideologies and political control, reconciles with the universal ethic that all human beings have the right to be remembered. The revitalized memory of mass death relies on this universal

norm as well as on the morality of local kinship unity . . . .<sup>16)</sup>

Indeed, sociologically, it was the family unit in Khmer society that suffered the most from the social, economic and political spasms of the 1970s and 1980s in Cambodia. The current popularity of *pchum ben* seems to be a register of the relative reclaimed health not only of Khmer political fortunes that appeal to the culture of traditional Khmer Buddhist identity, but of the health of the nuclear and extended family as a social institution in Cambodia. Insofar as villages are often made up of intermarried extended families, the village is also the object of ritual rehabilitation as well.

Within the context of this discussion regarding commemoration of the dead in Vietnam and Cambodia in the aftermath of the 1970s and 1980s, it also needs to be emphasized, if we are going to understand why *pchum ben* is so popular in the Khmer milieu, that Khmer ancestor veneration and Vietnamese ancestor veneration do not exactly correlate. Vietnamese conceptions and practices of ancestor veneration have been much more conditioned by the historical presence of Confucian ideology and practice within Vietnamese society and culture. As a result, the worship of tablets symbolic of ancestral presence on an altar within the home, or the construction of small shrines dedicated exclusively for the worship of a family's lineage, are norms of cultic behavior in the typical Vietnamese household that are not found among the Khmer. Veneration in the Vietnamese family context is a continuous or daily cultic affair. In Khmer society, despite the fact the family is without a doubt the most important social unit in society, the worship of ancestors is much more the byproduct of indigenous beliefs in spirits and Theravada Buddhist conceptions of the afterlife, the latter of which I shall discuss in some depth shortly. A key difference, then, between the Vietnamese and the influence they have derived from Chinese Confucian and Mahayana Buddhists on the one hand, and the Khmer Theravada Buddhists on the other, is that the dead and the living in the Khmer context are not continuously intertwined. In Khmer Buddhist culture, in effect, the dead are given their own place and time, and their contact with the living is therefore limited to those times and places when and where the two are allowed to come together. That place is the Buddhist temple and that time is the *pchum ben* ritual season toward the end of *vassa*. The interaction at these times and places is intense, and it occurs within the

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16) Moreover, "[t]he memory of tragic death is left in a void in the monument of heroes, whereas in ancestor worship it becomes an essential part of the spatial structure of worship, representing a generalized anonymity worthy of a particular kind of respect" (Kwon 2006, 154–155). He continues by stating that further differences between hero commemoration and ancestor veneration, aside from the state and familial bases respectively are this: that in the state hero cult, the "politically challenged" and those who died unproductively in relation to the cause are excluded. In ancestor veneration, it is true that genealogy leads to exclusion, but almost everyone has a family to belong to.

context of an annual family reunion.

According to Ang Choulean, the noted Khmer archeologist and anthropologist, *pchum ben* solves a contradiction or paradox that is deep-seated in Mon-Khmer culture. In ancient Mon culture, the dead were dispensed with quickly, or “rejected,” as it were, and “kept at bay.” Following seven days after death, there was virtually no more exchange between the living and the dead. The dead were, at that time, laid to rest ritually and thereby divorced from the continuing reality of the living world. Ang Choulean believes that this notion of the rejection of the dead, or the separation of the living from the dead, remains unconsciously present among today’s Khmer and contrasts sharply with the emphasis placed on revering one’s ancestors that has come by way of Indian influence through Buddhism, or by way of Chinese influence through Confucian rites. The contradiction is resolved through the temporary period of 15 days during *pchum ben* in September/October when the spirits are permitted to gain access to their living descendants in the world.<sup>17)</sup> In other words, the dead have been given a limited time and limited space, and that time and that space is perhaps the most spiritually potent that can be imagined in Khmer religious culture: the intensified time period of ascetic religious pursuit among the monks in the Buddhist monastery during the last weeks of the *vassa* rain retreat and within the continuously sanctified ritual space of the *sima* (boundary) of the *wat* (temple).

### Family and Religion in Buddhist Cambodia: The Impact of the Khmer Rouge

The great popularity of *pchum ben* in contemporary Cambodia may be generally a byproduct of the social, economic and political upheavals of the 1970s and 1980s that resulted in such a huge spike in the death rate, but its surge in national importance is also due specifically to the manner in which it has abetted the recovery of the nuclear family. In pre-colonial Khmer culture, it can be argued that the family and the Buddhist *sangha* were not only the two most important social units in society, but they were essentially the *only* social units constitutive of Khmer society, with perhaps the only other social grouping being military units maintained by the royalty. This was not always viewed positively by outside observers. In the following passage, David Chandler (2008, 126) describes how this social fact was fielded, and rather poorly, by some European colonialists:

French writers in the nineteenth century often denigrated Cambodian society [one of them referred to its institutions as “worm-eaten debris”] and compared it unfavorably with their own “rational,”

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17) Personal interview with Ang Choulean, Reyum Institute, Phnom Penh, October 13, 2010.

centralized one or with that of the Vietnamese . . . . [I]n Thai and Cambodian villages, in the nineteenth century at least, there were no “durable, functionally important groups” or voluntary associations aside from the family and the Buddhist monastic order, or *sangha*.

One particular incident, the assassination of the French resident, Felix Louis Bardez, at Kompong Chhnang in 1925, is quite revealing with regard to the importance of the family and the *sangha* in Khmer society on the one hand, and the kinds of French insensitivities to local cultural norms that often left them held in contempt by the local people on the other. The event has been described in some detail by Chandler (*ibid.*, 191–194), but I briefly summarize it here to illustrate the larger point. While collecting taxes in the village of Kraang Laev, the chief monk of the local *wat* had told Bardez that local people simply did not have enough money to pay. Bardez, who even after 15 years of service in Cambodia could not speak Khmer, would have none of it, and told the chief monk to persuade the villagers that they should pay the requirement by whatever means possible. He used the rather unconvincing argument that just as one should honor one’s parents, since the French were now the parents of the Cambodian people, the villagers were duty bound to cough up the money. Bardez also allegedly insulted the villagers by suggesting that if they could afford to build their new Buddhist temple, then they should be able to pay their taxes to the guardian familial French. Subsequently, Bardez and his two assistants were twice attacked, the second time costing him his life. In retrospect, it would seem as if this French administrator could not have played his hand any more poorly. He not only insulted the Khmer concept of family and threatened its well being and future livelihood by insisting that taxes be paid,<sup>18)</sup> but he also badly misjudged the colonial state’s importance in Khmer eyes by criticizing the villagers for putting their efforts into constructing a temple rather than “patriotically” supporting the French administration of their country. It would also seem as if Bardez was totally ignorant of how important supporting the *sangha* is to the ideology of merit-making as well.<sup>19)</sup>

18) As in Laos, the French were notorious in Cambodia for giving very little in return for the taxes they exacted, especially in the countryside.

19) A further example of French colonial arrogance has been noted by Chandler (2008, 207). He describes the efforts of the French *resident*, Georges Gautier, in 1943 who announced “his intention to replace Cambodia’s forty-seven-letter alphabet, derived from medieval Indian models, with the Roman one . . . . Gautier and his colleagues viewed the reform as a step toward modernization, which in turn was seen unequivocally as a good thing. In a pamphlet devoted to explaining the reform, Gautier attacked the ‘Cambodian attitude to the world’, as ‘out of date’ and compared the Cambodian language to a ‘badly tailored suit’. The addition of a supposedly more rational French vocabulary to Romanized Khmer, Gautier thought, would somehow improve Cambodian thought processes. Citing the example of Romanization in Turkey, while remaining diplomatically silent about the Romanization of Vietnamese, Gautier seems to have believed that the virtues of the reform were as self-evident as what he thought of as the primitiveness of the Cambodian mind.”

That the family and *sangha* remained the pillar social units of Khmer society is born out in the landmark ethnography composed by May Ebihara, an anthropologist who produced the only thorough academic ethnography of Khmer village life before the maelstrom of events that swept the country into chaos in 1970 and after. Ebihara's work was wide-angled and dedicated to understanding the totality of Khmer village worldviews. She reported (1968, 364) that Khmer villagers, like Sinhalese, Thai and Burmese Buddhists, conceive of their religious culture in terms of what is essentially a single religious system and did not

segregate various elements of village religious beliefs and practices as deriving from one religious tradition or another . . . . Buddha and ghosts, prayers at the temple and invocations of spirits, monks and mediums are all part of the same religious culture and simply different aspects of which are called into play at different, appropriate times.

What she goes on to report, then, is commensurate with what many other later ethnographers of Southeast Asian societies would assert: that the *sangha* and the family not only constitute the two social institutions of greatest significance in Theravada-inclined societies, but that the relationship between the two is also of paramount importance. What we shall see, when analyzing *pchum ben* in detail, is that family and *sangha* are understood as mutually interdependent.

It is worth reviewing some of the salient statements that Ebihara provides regarding the nature and importance of the family in Khmer culture and society, for they help to reinforce the thesis that *pchum ben* is the ritual manner in which the family's sustenance has recovered and is now celebrated. She states (*ibid.*, 111), for instance, that

. . . the nuclear family can be considered the most fundamental social group in Khmer society, bound together by a variety of affective, economic moral and legal ties. The strongest and most enduring relationships are found in the bonds between husband and wife, sibling and sibling, and especially parent and child. Even after a family has split into the various families of procreation of the different offspring, members of the former obtain deep affection for and frequent contact with one another . . . the Nuclear family is often the basic economic unit of production and consumption which cooperates in subsistence activities and shares produce, income and property. It also frequently acts [and is considered by others to be] a single social unit in other endeavors; e.g., in cooperative labor exchanges, the *quid pro quo* is calculated basically in terms of the amount of work owed by one family to another; in contributions to Buddhist and life cycle ceremonies, a gift is often meant to come from the family as a whole; and in community activities each family or household gives a certain amount of money or labor.

Ebihara (*ibid.*) goes on to point out that relations between family members are defined, supported and sanctioned by "Buddhist precepts and teachings, by belief in ancestral spirits (*meba*) who oversee their descendants' conduct . . ." (*ibid.*, 112). This



last point about the *meba* or ancestors is of particular importance to the meaning of *pchum ben*, insofar as it indicates something of the reciprocal relationship that obtains between the living and the ancestral dead. The living need ancestors to function as guardians, markers or symbols of their own moral bases. And so they need to rehabilitate those ancestors about whom they are unsure. The unknown status of one's ancestor(s) is one of the great moments of pathos that is so frequently encountered at *pchum ben* rites in Cambodia today. Penny Edwards (2008b: 221) has underscored how important it is that

[a] moral genealogy links current generations to the standard of ancestral behavior: here, ancestors become moral arbitrators, and represent a mythical standard of morality against which contemporary generations can be judged by current elders.

That is, the bond between the living and the dead is an expression of their moral dependence upon each other. This is particularly true when the dead being venerated are one's parents. In Khmer culture, the bond between parents and offspring is perhaps even deeper and stronger than between husband and wife.<sup>20)</sup> The importance of this relationship likely has been a staple of Khmer society since the days of the great Angkor civilization, at least from what we know of the ritual and cultural expressions of its elites, particularly within the context of the veneration of parents and Saivite Hindu adaptations from the ninth through the thirteenth century, CE.<sup>21)</sup> Kings often built temples to honor their parents and identified them with installed images within of Siva and Parvati (or Uma).

Of those commentators who have written about the subject of the family's importance within Khmer society, Erik Davis' (2008a, 133) reflections are among the most perceptive and comprehensive. He has clearly pointed to how the social experience of the nuclear family becomes paradigmatic for how processes within Khmer society-at-large are envisaged and then negotiated. He writes:

The more intimate one's relationship with another, the more hierarchical that relationship, such as in the case of mother and child. The Cambodian family maps larger Cambodian society more flexibly than does the traditional Western family. Family boundaries appear loose, and various

20) As Ebihara (1968) reported: "In general, the bond between parents and children is perhaps the strongest and most enduring relationships in village life. Even when an individual marries and establishes a family of procreation that comes to take precedence over the family of orientation, deep-rooted sentiments and feelings of obligation persist toward parents and are manifest in mutual visiting, aid in times of need, and abiding concern (*ibid.*, 119) . . . Affection and loyalty among siblings are encouraged, and serious discord among family members both siblings and parents and children is thought to be punished by ancestral spirits" (*ibid.*, 120).

21) For studies of ancient Khmer society, political structures and religious culture, see Hermann Kulke (1978), Ian Mabbett (1978), and Alexis Sanderson (2003–04).

types of adoption, god-parenting, and other forms of “fictive kinship” have been documented. One’s created family, in addition to one’s birth family, produces the known and civilized world that we inhabit. This network of family members defines and delimits the boundaries of the social world, the land in which one may safely travel, the person one may trust and upon, on whom one may rely, and the networks of intimacies that compose our emotional geographies, those spaces where we recognize the emotional landmarks, and where we can navigate with more experience and confidence than with strangers. People say that this is true of family members all the way, potentially, to the “seventh generation” . . . .

While the penultimate sentence in the quote from Davis constitutes a powerful assessment of how the family functions for the epistemology of Khmer social psychology,<sup>22)</sup> the final comment about seven generations of ancestors is also particularly relevant specifically with regard to *pchum ben*. It was commonly believed in medieval China (Teiser 1996, 220–221) that ancestors continued to receive support from their descendants for seven generations before they were reincarnated as members of the family once again. This popular Chinese tradition may have had some influence on the reification of the Khmer conception, for the same belief about the possibility of supporting ancestors for seven generations remains in play during *pchum ben*. Family ancestors of the past seven generations can be assisted and supported by means of karma transfers that occur during *banguskol*, a merit-generating ritual of chanting Pali *suttas* that is performed by Buddhist monks at the behest of family descendants during the final day of the *pchum ben* season.

These views from various scholars writing about the centrality of the nuclear family unit in Khmer society and culture underscore why the revolution orchestrated by Khmer Rouge was so socially and psychologically traumatic, especially for those who managed to survive when the rest of their family members did not. Francois Bizot, a French scholar of Khmer Buddhism whose own intimate experiences with the Khmer Rouge, owing to his own extended incarceration in one of their detention centers, is revealed dramatically in his dialogues with the convicted murderer who was in charge of the notorious S-21 (Tuol Sleng) interrogation center. In this classic confrontation recorded between perhaps the most knowledgeable western student of Khmer culture and society on the one hand, and one of Pol Pot’s chief lieutenants on the other, Bizot has managed to illustrate how the ideology of the Khmer Rouge was completely antithetical to the social and moral norms of traditional Khmer Buddhist society and culture. Because of

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22) Zucker (2008, 202–203) succinctly reiterates what Davis has stated more elaborately: “The language of social thought was limited and did not travel far beyond the use of family relationships as metaphors for broader political and social occurrences.” This language is seen expressly in the manner that King Sihanouk referred to his subjects as “his children” and himself as a “father” in relation to them (Chandler and Kent 2008, 6).

Bizot's deep knowledge of Khmer language and religious culture,<sup>23)</sup> and because of his extensive rich and remarkable years of life experience in Cambodia, I emphasize his perspectives on the Khmer Rouge in what follows, especially as he analyzed what was at stake for the Khmer family and the Buddhist *sangha*.

To begin, this is how Bizot describes in general the ethic of the Khmer Rouge revolutionary cadre: "Denunciation is the first duty of the revolutionary. They quoted the example of some young men who so loved the revolution that they were unafraid to denounce their fathers or their brothers" (Bizot 2003, 54). In place of the traditionally strong kinship bonds of the family, the Khmer Rouge demanded absolute loyalty and, as an organization (*angkar*), jealously guarded its position of authority and brooked no competition from other social forms or groups whatsoever. Chandler's depiction (2008, 258) of the young people between 15 and 25 years of age who formed the core of Khmer Rouge cadre is not dissimilar to Bizot's:

Owing everything to the revolutionary organization, which they referred to as their mother and father, and nothing to the past, it was thought that these young people would lead the way in transforming Cambodia into a socialist state and in moving the people toward independence, mastery, and self-reliance. To the alarm and the confusion of many older people, these often violent Cambodians became the revolution's cutting edge.

It is not altogether surprising that the ethic of these young Khmer Rouge cadres was antithetical to the cardinal values of traditional Khmer society, for "[i]n every way their behavior validated the arguments of those who had already suggested that the Khmer Rouge had drawn its forces from the most marginal of Cambodia's population. These were men and women, and perhaps above all children, who had dwelt on the outskirts of society, for whom the cities and those who had lived in them were centers of corrupt behavior inhabited by their oppressors" (Osborne 2008, 143). Indeed, according to Bizot, most of the Khmer Rouge cadres were not drawn from the agricultural countryside, which was definitely the case with the cadres constituting the Pathet Lao in Laos, wherein the powerful linkages between Theravada Buddhism and the agricultural way of life, between religion and rice, had been wedded and nurtured for centuries. Rather, these were youth, ironically, who were largely drawn from the city. In putting together a profile of their quixotic yet iconoclastic character, Bizot (2003, 62–63) writes just how far the Khmer Rouge would go to debase the

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23) Bizot was arguably the most knowledgeable western student of Khmer Buddhist culture and society of his generation. His studies concentrated not only on inscriptions, textual interpretations, and sculpture of the Khmer elite, but also on the ritual, mythic and symbolic expressions of popular Khmer religion. See Harris (2005, 311–312) for a representative list of his long bibliography of contributions to the study of Khmer culture.

traditional system of values. To place letters of Buddhist doctrine in contact with the regions of the body considered “impure” was an absolute sacrilege, one no peasant would risk committing. Only town-dwellers would be capable of such iconoclastic radicalism. The majority [of Khmer Rouge cadres] were poorly integrated Sino-Khmers, the sons of shopkeepers or frustrated employees. Having replaced the traditional village structures with fraternal solidarity, motivated by a sincere idealism, and appalled by the gap between the rich and poor, they shared an existence outside of the rural world, which they knew nothing about. None of them had ever tended rice fields. The way they roamed around the countryside proved they had no respect for crops, gardens, trees or pathways. Nor did they show any deference to sacred images or to anything Buddhism held dear, regarding it all as peasant superstition, cultivated from Angkor by every monarch, to subdue the people. Paradoxically, these city folk, who loathed the plough, the soil, the palm groves and domestic animals, who disliked the open rustic life of the villagers, had an idealized concept of the Khmer peasant as agent of the perpetual revolution, a model of simplicity, endurance and patriotism, the standard against which the new man would be measured, liberated from religious taboos. In this contradictory scenario, Buddhism was replaced by objectives dear to the Angkar, in order to ensure the triumph of equality and justice. The Khmer theorists had substituted Angkar for Dhamma, [as] the personification of Teaching . . . .

Not only did the Khmer Rouge insist on a loyalty that transcended the bonds of family and village relations, but they seemed, at least from Bizot’s considered perspective, to function, as he implies towards the end of the statement above, as a kind of surrogate for the Khmer Buddhist monastic *sangha*.<sup>24)</sup> In a truly remarkable passage, and as it turns out a very historically significant one<sup>25)</sup> (the second of the two long quotes that I promised above), Bizot writes of his dramatic confrontation with his interrogator, Comrade Douch, while he was being held captive at a remote prison site in the early 1970s. In this long passage at the heart of his personal memoir, he asserts analytically how the Khmer Rouge, with their zealous loyalty to the foundations of *angkar*, had managed to develop a programmatic ideology that was analogous both to the *dhamma*

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24) As Bizot has asserted that the Khmer Rouge constituted a kind of quasi-religion of their own, Keyes (1994, 57) discusses how it is that they viewed their own Communist Party members as engaged in more perfect behavior than monks. Quoting Yang Sam, another scholar with intimate knowledge of the situation in Cambodia during Khmer Rouge hegemony, the ideal party member was described in this way: “He/she persevered in improving his/her personality by loving and respecting people, being honest, protecting people’s interests, confessing his/her misdeeds, using modest and polite words, and avoiding adultery and polygamy, avoiding drinking, avoiding gambling, avoiding thievery.” Keyes goes on to add himself: “Although many rural people appear to have been impressed by the similarity between the disciplined moral authority of the Khmer Rouge cadre and that of members of the *sangha*, the Khmer Rouge sought to create a world that was the moral inversion of that of Buddhism.”

25) Douch was convicted by a United Nations sponsored war crimes court in the summer of 2010 for his direct role in the deaths of some 17,000 people who passed through the S-21 interrogation center that came under his administrative purview.

and *sangha* of the Theravada tradition, a view that is scoffed at by Douch in the end. Yet, Douch's comments also belie *angkar*'s suspicion of the family. Bizot's insights are powerful and provocative, and well worth a thorough consideration in determining how the family and the Buddhist *sangha* were the primary social victims of the Khmer Rouge purge. In turn, it is both the family and the *sangha* that are the social entities revived and celebrated within the ritual contexts of *pchum ben*.

"Comrade!" I began, "You speak about Angkar the way that monks speak about Dhamma. So I want to ask you this: is there some ideologist among you, constructing a revolutionary theory based upon the myths and rules of the Buddhist religion?"

Douch was taken back.

"Because, after all," I went on, "are you not defending a new religion? I've followed your educational lessons. They're not unlike courses in Buddhist doctrine: renouncing material possessions, *giving up family ties, which weaken us and prevent us from devoting ourselves entirely to Angkar; leaving our parents and our children in order to serve the revolution*. Submitting to discipline and confessing faults—"

"That has nothing to do with it!" Douch cut in.

"There are ten 'moral commandments' that you call *sila*," I persisted, "that have the same name as the ten Buddhist 'abstentions' [*sila*]. The revolutionary must accept the rules of a *vinaya*, exactly as the monk observes a religious 'discipline' [*vinaya*]. At the start of his instruction, a young soldier is given a pack containing six articles (trousers, shirt, cap, *krama*, sandals, bag), just as the novice monk receives a regulation kit of seven items—"

"These are intellectual ravings!" he broke in.

"That's not all! Wait, comrade," I said, raising my hand. "Look at the facts. In everything you tell me, and in what I have heard myself, one finds religious themes from the past: taking on a new name, for example; enduring hardships, rather like ritual mortification; even the soothing, enticing words of Radio Peking announcing the advent of a regenerated people, born of the revolution. In a word, the Communist leaders to whom you are accountable want to impose an initiatory death on the nation."

My speech was answered by a stubborn silence.

"Comrade Douch!" I continued, raising my voice before he could start speaking again. "The resoluteness of the teachers who speak in the name of the Angkar is unconditional. Sometimes it is even devoid of hatred and purely objective, as if the human aspect of the question did not come into consideration, as if it were an intellectual concept. They mechanically carry out the impersonal, absolute directives of the Angkar, even going to extreme lengths. As to the peasants who come under your control, they are subjected, purely and simply, to a sort of purification rite: new 'teaching', (*rien sur*) new mythology and an amended vocabulary that no-one initially understands. *Then the Angkar is adopted as family, while true kin are rejected*. And after the population is divided into 'initiates' and 'novices'. The first constitute the true people, that is to say, those who have been won over; others are those who have not completed the period of preparation and training; only after that can they be admitted into the former group and acquire the superior status of an accomplished citizen. Need I go on?"

"That has nothing to do with it!" Douch repeated. "Buddhism benumbs the peasants, whereas the Angkar seeks to glorify them and build prosperity of the beloved homeland on them! You

attribute scholarly ravings to bogus ideologues when they belong only to yourself. Buddhism is the opium of the people. And I don't see why we should draw our inspiration from a capitalist past, which is the very thing that we want to abolish! When we have rid our country of the vermin that infect people's minds," he went on, "when we have liberated it from this army of cowards and traitors who debase the people, then we will rebuild a Cambodia of solidarity, united by genuine bonds of fraternity and equality. First we must construct our democracy on healthy foundations that have nothing to do with Buddhism. Corruption has seeped in everywhere, *even among families. How can you trust your brother when he accepts the imperialists' wages and employs their arms against you?* Believe me, Comrade Bizot, our people need to rediscover moral values that correspond to their deeper aspirations. The revolution wishes nothing for them besides simple happiness: that of the peasant who feeds himself from the fruits of his labours, with no need for the Western products that have made him a dependent consumer. We can manage and organize ourselves on our own to bring radiant happiness to our beloved country." (Bizot 2003, 110–112; italics mine)

What Bizot has managed to indicate so adroitly in this incredible passage is not only how the Buddha's *dhamma* and *sangha* could be demonstrably eclipsed and replaced functionally in favor of the *angkar* and its own substantially similar code of moral discipline, but how the family was regarded by the Khmer Rouge as an impediment to the realization of its utopian aims for Cambodian society. From the Khmer Rouge perspective, the primary social institution of the Khmer family was linked to the evils of private property ownership and capitalistic production, in the same way that Buddhism was understood as an opiate of the people repressing a true vision of egalitarian society. Both family and religion (especially Buddhism), therefore, had to be eliminated in the march forward into a true socialist society. The social and intellectual functions of the family and Buddhism could be aptly replaced, and necessarily so, by *angkar*.<sup>26)</sup>

Douch's concluding rant against Bizot was no idle threat. What happened to Buddhist monks and Buddhist institutions when the Khmer Rouge seized control in 1975 is a terrible tale, yet it must be told so that it can never be forgotten. The broadside attack on Buddhism was but a part of a larger process taking place in which the Khmer Rouge

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26) Harris (2005, 182–189) has an especially poignant section in his book that is focused on the "internalization of Buddhist symbolism and language" into the mindset of the Khmer Rouge. He writes that "there can be little doubt that internalization of aspects of an older religiously inspired thought universe was pervasive during the period" (*ibid.*, 184). Specifically, he examines the similarity between *sila* and the 10 basic "moral rules" that the Khmer Rouge inculcated, the penchant for and practice of self-sacrifice and the life of self-examination exhorted in the *Vinaya*, how the term *paticcasamuppada* ('dependent or conditioned origination') was employed to translate "dialectical materialism," etc. In the same vein, Chandler and Kent (2008, 7) describe how "[t]he concealed leaders of the party, or *Angkar* [the 'Organization'], envisioned themselves as the new, moral substitute for the *sangha*. Alternate, pre-revolutionary sources of domestic or community-based power—the *sangha*, older family members, and local spirits—were discredited. The moral order was now rendered as the imposed, historically inevitable egalitarianism of the impoverished population, supposedly liberated from the shackles of the past and from a wide range of dominations."

sought to dismantle virtually any previously established bases of personal, familial or religious identity.<sup>27)</sup> Skidmore (1996, 6) has described this process as an attempt to “restructure personality”:

The major focus of Khmer Rouge personality restructuring was . . . manifested as an attempt to strip Cambodians of their sense of personal individuality and collective identity. In destroying Buddhism in all its forms [disrobing of monks, smashing of effigies, etc.], in uprooting them from their homes, ancestors and guardian spirits; in forcing them to live silently in communal huts; and in removing all personal effects and sentimental items, conformity was enforced, and individualism shattered. The place of a person within a particular cosmological, societal, and familial world was abolished as effectively as the Khmer Rouge could manage. (brackets are Skidmore's)

Others have described what happened during the time of Khmer Rouge hegemony as a consequence of misplaced, zealous revolutionary fervour. Chandler, for instance, in describing the program inculcated by the clandestine leaders of “the revolutionary organization” (*angkar*), says this:

They sought to transform Cambodia by replacing what they saw as impediments to national autonomy and social justice with revolutionary energy and incentives. They believed that family, individualism, and an ingrained fondness for what they called feudal institutions, as well as the institutions themselves, stood in the way of the revolution. Cambodia's poor, they said, had always been exploited and enslaved. Liberated by the revolution and empowered by military victory, these men and women would now become the masters of their lives and, collectively, the masters of their country. (Chandler 2008, 256)

Writing in a somewhat different and more abstract vein, but describing in detail the precise means by which the Khmer Rouge went about systematically attacking the foundations of social memory, Hinton (2008, 62) argues:

[In] their radical experiment in social engineering, the Khmer Rouge launched an assault on the past, seeking to obliterate everything that smacked of capitalism, “privatism,” and class oppression. This attack ranged far and wide. The Khmer Rouge targeted Buddhism, the family, village structure, economic activity, and public education—key socio-cultural institutions through which memory was ritually, formally and informally transmitted. More specifically, they assaulted social memory by burning books and destroying libraries, banning popular music, movies, media, and styles, destroying temples, truncating communication, terminating traditional holidays and ritual events, separating family members, homogenizing clothing, and eliminating private property, including photos, memorabilia and other mementos.

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27) Skidmore put matter rather succinctly when she wrote (1996, 5): “The destruction of ‘traditional’ social structure and the inculcation of a sense of collectivity as opposed to individuality took a myriad of forms. The concept of family was abolished, and people lived in large shelters on the collective farms.”

Ian Harris has focused comments about the impact of the Khmer Rouge more specifically on the Buddhist *sangha*, but he has also pointed out how even the less institutionalized dimensions of Khmer religious culture suffered atrophy because of the manner in which the population was uprooted. Virtually all city folk were forced into the countryside, but most villagers were also forced to move to new locations where make-shift communes had been hastily established. Basic living conditions in these new contexts were extremely harsh, as villagers were not allowed to bring hardly any personal accoutrements with them. So while “[i]nformants [say] . . . that they surreptitiously maintained spirit shrines during the Democratic Kampuchea period . . . , the frequent movements of the population after 1975 severed the links between villagers and their ancestors. In consequence, belief in the whole panoply of autochthonous mythological beings, including the tutelary spirits, or *neak ta*, began to disintegrate” (Harris 2005, 176). My point in emphasizing this citation from Harris at this juncture is to underscore how *pchum ben* would eventually become the ritual means by which links with the ancestors would be restored.

While the nuclear family, including links to ancestors, disintegrated under Khmer Rouge policies, institutional Buddhism was practically destroyed. Buddhist monastic leaders of the *sangha* should not have been caught so off guard when the Khmer Rouge finally seized power in April, 1975. “Even before the outbreak of the civil war that would end the short-lived Khmer Republic [1970–75], the CPK [Communist Party of Kampuchea] was pointing to the economic burden that so many unproductive monks place on the country. Not only were they leeches upon society, but they also taught the doctrine of karma, which underpinned the belief in ‘natural inequality’ and encouraged the laity to passively accept the status quo”<sup>28</sup>) (*ibid.*, 163; brackets mine). At the conclusion of the civil war, the attacks ceased to be simply ideological in nature and became institutional and physical instead. The Khmer Rouge leadership may not have been exactly sure about its practical plans for the Buddhist *sangha* in the years immediately leading up to the collapse of the Lon Nol government in April, 1975. But a ruthlessly clear policy of eradication of all urban monks became evident from the very first day of their control. Most senior monks in Phnom Penh were killed immediately (Ledgerwood 2008b, 204). Harris (2005, 175) describes in painful detail what happened to the *sangharaja*, the chief monk (or *sanghareach*) of the dominant Mahanikay fraternity, and therefore the leading

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28) This is the classic Marxist critique of karma, one that ignores the fact that it is not only an explanation for how and why events and situations of the present unfold, but it is a forward looking and empowering concept owing to the fact that it emphasizes the present: the quality of one’s inward dispositions gives rise to behavioral actions that become part of the conditioning process thereby determining what will become later.



Buddhist cleric in the country during the first day immediately following the fall of Phnom Penh to the Khmer Rouge:

After the communists had taken the Information Ministry on April 17, 1975, Ven. Huot That, the Mahinikay *sanghareach*, made a radio broadcast that appealed for a cease-fire and called on commanders to meet with the ousted military High Command, using the words “Now we have peace, put down your guns” [Cited in Kiernan 2002, 36–37]. Huot That then returned to Wat Unnalom, where he was falsely accused of having a wife and children in Paris. Evidence brought before the Vietnamese-backed trial of Pol Pot in 1979 affirmed that Huot That was executed at Wat Prang in the old capital of Udong the following day. It is widely believed that he was crushed by a bulldozer. (brackets mine)

The leading monks of the *sangha* were easy targets. Yet, initially, there seems to have been some inconsistency in how the urban monks of Phnom Penh and how the monks of countryside *wats* would be treated, especially in those areas of the countryside that previously had been nominally under Khmer Rouge control.

In the waning months of the Lon Nol government in the spring of 1975, the ranks of the *sangha* in the capital city had swelled as many frightened young Khmer men had sought to avoid conscription from either side of the civil war and had managed to find their ways to Phnom Penh to seek refuge in the city’s major *wats* as *samaneras*, novice monks. Harris (2005, 177–178) describes how these monks were treated in comparison to established rural monks:

The Khmer Rouge called these monks “imperialists,” “April 17 monks” or “new monks” in comparison to many rural monks who the Khmer Rouge referred to as “base monks.” With the fall of Phnom Penh, “new monks” were rapidly laicized, and virtually none remained in robes by the beginning of the 1975 rainy season. In any case, they had no means of support, for the laity were no longer allowed to support the *sangha* . . . . A few monks managed to escape to neighboring countries. Most were sent to work, and if they resisted, they were executed just like everyone else . . . . The so-called “base monks” had a different fate and seem to have been initially tolerated, since many of them had been supportive of the Khmer Rouge in the civil war. After the end of the 1975 *vassa* [September/October], we find isolated examples of an “inverted” *kathen* [*kathina*] ceremony . . . when selected monks were presented with revolutionary garb—black trousers, black shirt, and a traditional Khmer scarf [*krama*—by communist officials, after which they were “invited”<sup>29)</sup> to leave the monastic order. Doubtless, few refused. (brackets mine)

29) The use of the term “invited” here is doubly significant insofar as it also refers to the meaning of the *pavarana* monastic rite usually held in Cambodia during the night before the celebration of *kathina*. In the context of *pavarana* (which literally means “invitation”) all monks are *invited* to critically examine the behavior of their fellow monks, an invitation that, in turn, leads to a confession of shortcomings that have occurred during the *vassa* rain-retreat season. At the conclusion of the rite, the *sangha*’s collective *parisuddhi*, or “complete purity” is declared. This status is what renders the *sangha* especially worthy receivers of gifts, particularly robes, from the laity during the *kathina* rite on the following day.

There is no doubt that ultimately the leadership of the Khmer Rouge decidedly adamantly and thoroughly directed its cadres to the effect that the *sangha* should be totally decimated. Many temples were converted into interrogation centers and storage facilities. In temple spaces normally associated with the purity of moral behavior, as sanctuaries from the troubles of the routine world, indescribable atrocities occurred as thousands were tortured during the interrogation process. This fact graphically illustrates why Bizot understood the conduct of the Khmer Rouge as a “moral inversion.” By the time the Khmer Rouge finished with institutional Buddhism, “it was estimated that five out of every eight monks were executed during Pol Pot’s regime . . . Images of the Buddha were often decapitated or desecrated in other ways; copies of the Buddhist scriptures were burned or thrown into rivers” (Keyes 1994, 56).<sup>30</sup> During the advent of Khmer Rouge hegemony, the *sangha* had already become a weakened, tottering institution during the civil war between 1970 and 1975. In those five years alone, about one-third of the *sangha*’s temples had been destroyed. Thus, the *sangha* was already a crippled and distorted social institution by the time the Khmer Rouge seized power and completely finished it off. In summing up, Charles Keyes has provided perhaps the most apt depiction of the impact of the Khmer Rouge on Theravada Buddhist religious culture in Cambodia during the malignant years of Democratic Kampuchea.

Without the *sangha*, the Buddhist ritual life of the population had been almost totally eradicated; in its stead, the people were supposed to dedicate themselves to work. In no other Communist society, including even Tibet, was a materialist ideology so radically imposed at the expense of a spiritual tradition. The attack on Cambodian Buddhism went well beyond the Marxist notion that religion serves to disguise class relations. The Khmer Rouge sought, by eliminating the institution that had for so long served as the basic source of Khmer identity, to create a new order with few roots in the past. (*ibid.*, 58)

## Ritual and Socio-moral Regeneration

After the Vietnamese armies entered Cambodia and wrested control of the country away from the Khmer Rouge, they gradually relaxed restrictions on the public practice of Buddhism, though it cannot be said that they actually encouraged its practice. Initially, the Vietnamese promulgated a prohibition on the ordination of monks who were under the age of 50 years old, and established a quota for the total number of men who could be in robes at one time. Monks from the Khmer-dominant region of the Mekong delta

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30) Ledgerwood (2008b: 204) has noted that “the devastation was so effective that an estimated ninety per cent of Cambodia’s Buddhist literary heritage was lost in that span of less than four years.”

in Vietnam were brought to Phnom Penh to reconstitute the ordination process, but the reformed-minded and disciplinary-conscious Thammayut order, “because of its connections to Thai royalty,” was not allowed to return. “It was not until after they [the Vietnamese] left and [the Khmer] royalty was re-established in Thailand that the Thommayut was again re-introduced” (Osborne 2008, 185; brackets mine).

Descriptions of life in Cambodia in 1979 and 1980 paint a very grim picture. There are many lurid descriptions composed during the past 30 years about the almost complete devastation of Khmer society, but those offered by Osborne (*ibid.*) and Chandler (2008) are among the most informative and vivid. Osborne wrote:

We now know that upwards of two million people had died while the Khmer rouge ruled Cambodia. The country was shattered physically and the number of those who remained alive and who possessed the skills required to make the country work had been drastically reduced. Only a tenth of the doctors who had been in the country in 1975 were still alive in 1979. There were even fewer teachers, proportionately, who had survived. Malnutrition was endemic among children, and within six months of the Vietnamese invasion the whole country was on the brink of starvation. (2008, 180)

Osborne (*ibid.*, 182) also says that no more than 15 per cent of the entire Khmer middle class survived, including the country’s civil servants, its technically qualified people and the business or commercial class. This meant that restarting the economy, the government and the educational system was almost a matter of complete reinvention that would require perhaps a generation of training. The situation was further complicated by the fact that as the post-Khmer Rouge years wore on, the Vietnamese were increasingly hard-pressed to devote the resources necessary to revive the beleaguered economy and battered social structures, owing in part to the decreasing amounts of assistance that they, in turn, were receiving from the Soviet Union, itself on a course of decline that would lead to its implosion in 1989.<sup>31)</sup> Assistance from Western countries was not forthcoming during the years of Vietnamese occupation in the 1980s owing to the fact that the United States, under the administration of Ronald Reagan, together with its allies, actually supported continuing Khmer Rouge claims in the United Nations to be the legitimate legal representative of the Cambodian people. This resulted in both government and private assistance from the West to Cambodia being largely precluded, though the sorry

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31) Osborne says (2008, 189) that during the Vietnamese occupation life in Phnom Penh was mostly a matter of survival tactics, very difficult indeed. Usually one partner of the marriage engaged in some form of petty commerce. “Supplies of all kinds were limited, with aid from the socialist bloc, and in particular the Soviet Union, insufficient to overcome the constant shortages that hindered a full economic recovery. Rubber plantations were only slowly being brought back into production, and in Phnom Penh those factories that were operating had to contend with frequent power outages” with most factories only being able to operate three days a week owing to electricity shortages.

events of what had transpired in Cambodia in the 1970s, originally precipitated by the American military campaign, became increasingly known throughout the world in the early 1980s. Moreover, models for the government and economy that were initially launched by the Vietnamese and their Khmer collaborationists were models that were eventually jettisoned in the early 1990s. Suffice it to say that life in the 1980s was exceedingly grim, though without the immediate threats of terror, forced labor, torture and violence that were the hallmarks of the Khmer Rouge.

Chandler's description complements the statistics provided by Osborne by giving us a more intimate view of the conditions of social process that were then in play. I have selected Chandler's description because he emphasizes the broken condition of the nuclear family in the aftermath of Khmer Rouge rule and the context in which the celebration of the *pchum ben* ritual season was restarted after a hiatus of about five years.

Throughout 1979, and for most of 1980, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians crisscrossed the country looking for relatives returning to their homes . . . As the PRK struggled to its feet, many prerevolutionary institutions, including markets, Buddhism and family farming, came back to life. Buddhists *wats* and schools opened soon afterward . . . Villages had been abandoned or torn down, tools, seed, and fertilizer were nonexistent; hundreds of thousands of people had emigrated or been killed; and in most areas the survivors suffered from malaria, shock, or malnutrition. So many men died or disappeared in DK that in some districts more than 60 per cent of the families were headed by widows. Thousands of widows raised their families alone and with difficulty. (2008, 278–279)

As families were reunited and the violence of life under the Khmer Rouge became a painful memory of recent history, the extent of which only became more clear with the passage of time, many traditional ritual practices of Khmer Buddhist religious culture began to resurface, including weddings, funerals and other annual rites in addition to *pchum ben*. Hayashi (2002, 208) notes that “[t]he repairing of temples preceded all other activities in restoring Buddhism around Phnom Penh . . . [because] . . . [T]emples were urgently required as the ‘stages’ to hold annual collective rites, e.g. *pachum bon*, the biggest and longest [15 days] merit transference ritual for the dead among the Khmer.” Hayashi also reports (*ibid.*, 214) that it was the fall of 1980 before *pchum ben*, which he refers to as “the most important . . . among the annual rites,” was performed again.

It is extraordinarily difficult, well nigh impossible, to measure the degree of human suffering of a mental, physical or social nature experienced by the Cambodian people for nearly 20 years, from 1970 until 1990. Indeed, the legacy of those 20 years is still being played out by the both older and younger generations today. Back in 1990, while problems of restarting the economy and the government were problematic, the problem of reinventing the family was even more acute.

*Pchum ben* is a ritual process that regenerates family cohesion among the living

through pilgrimage, and family reunion through compassion and thus merit-transfer for the dead. In establishing ritual links to the dead, a kind of moral order is re-established unconsciously. While moral order may be in part re-established through a linking or re-union with the dead, the possible cases of dealing with immorality on the part of some ancestors can also be confronted within this ritual context as well. This is an especially difficult issue for those families with members who were active members of the Khmer Rouge or who publicly collaborated with them extensively. Zucker (2008) insightfully reflects on this issue:

The loss of elders creates an obstacle to the restoration of moral order by impeding the transmission of traditional knowledge and practice and therefore creating a disjunction with the past and the ancestors. This limits the resources that may be excavated from the past to create society anew and curtails access to the ancestors' generative power . . . [A]lthough villagers are restoring order by turning either towards tradition or towards what they consider "modern" ideologies and practices,<sup>32)</sup> there is [also] the problem of the perceived immorality of the actions of elders and ancestors in the past. I suggest that this perception contributes to the sense of disorder and obstructs the remaking of order because these immoral elders and ancestors then present the negation of the narrative of the moral past, and they undermine people's vision of the original moral order as a whole. (*ibid.*, 197)

Yet, it is precisely because the moral condition of so many ancestors from the recent violent past is simply unknown that surviving kin feel compelled to undertake ritual actions specifically on their behalf. The fact that the dead are envisaged as *pretas* by those who attend the *pchum ben* rites means that the ritual is being undertaken by some as a kind of insurance policy against the possible deleterious fate of their kin. Zucker (*ibid.*, 196) seems to understand this clearly herself. She states: "Order, then, is restored by honoring ancestors and then maintained through the predictable transmission of stories, rituals and customs that are drawn from the ancestral past." That is, moral order is affirmed by the family, re-established within the context of ancestor veneration. Troubled ancestors may be rehabilitated by the righteous actions of their living kin. This reassertion of a moral order through the rehabilitation of ancestors makes it possible for living kin to abide in a lineage whose past symbolizes the ideals of moral order. In the semiotics of ritual theory that was articulated so clearly by Mircea Eliade in his many works, ances-

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32) Chandler and Kent (2008, 2) are stressing the same point: "the regeneration of the ritual life of a community may also offer a way for people to formulate and relate to their collective stories through a symbolism that recalls a shared cultural origins . . . [and that] it is therefore important to explore the processes by which a community like Cambodia is attempting to recover moral order after violent conflict both in relation to indigenous values and experience, as embedded in social relations and history."

tors ideally represent the qualities of *in illo tempore*, a past or origins that was ideal or normative before the problematic nature of the present existence was introduced.<sup>33)</sup> In this vein, ancestors are regarded as paradigmatic forces of the primordial past who establish fundamental patterns of being to be emulated by the living in the present. Venerating what ancestors stand for, or what they symbolize, is a way of simultaneously recovering the qualities of that past, of transcending a problematic present, and overcoming the condition of alienation by re-establishing the link between past and present. As we shall see, the engine driving this process of recovery is karma and its transfer.

It is within this purview that we can field Skidmore's (1996) comments about the power of ritual. In focusing her study on the *dhammayietra*, an annual public pilgrimage articulating a progressive agenda of social engagement led by the activist monk Mahaghosananda,<sup>34)</sup> she emphasizes

the potential healing abilities of the performance of ritual and its possible function as a resistance strategy to terror and violence. The total field of Khmer religion includes belief in ancestor spirits, pagan demons, and the spirits that inhabit the heavens and hells of Buddhist cosmology, as well as the Buddha Himself. This worldview also allows Cambodians access to different levels of reality such as the world of dreams, the world of ancestors, and the world of spirits. Cambodians draw upon this worldview to both comprehend violence and to provide an idiom for their experience of a culture of terror and the space of death. Psychiatrists have documented Cambodian attempts to express distress and rework their life-world epistemologies from within this cultural frame. Some respondents reported having dreamed of relatives, some alive, some dead, only to have the relatives step out of the dream and appear to the dreamer in waking life. Other refugees suffering from extreme emotional distress reported being visited by ancestors' disembodied female skulls with entrails dangling behind, sorcerers, and vengeful spirits. (*ibid.*, 11–12)

Indeed, dreams have been an important venue for the communication of the dead with the living within Buddhist religious culture since the early centuries of Buddhist tradition in ancient India. The stories comprising the Pali *Tipitaka*'s *Petavatthu* almost always include an episode wherein the dead appear to speak with the living within a dream to inform the living of their current condition of suffering. Many of the people I interviewed at *pchum ben* rites in Cambodia in 2010 reported communications with their dead ancestors within the context of dreams. Ritual, then, becomes a means of acting upon the sense of imperative that derives from a dream of this kind.

33) See especially Eliade's *Myth of the Eternal Return* (1954).

34) Mahaghosananda founded more than 30 *wats* for Cambodians in Canada and the United States in the 1980s and has been a major force, along with ex-Jesuits and Japanese Nichiren monks, as well as Christian and ecumenical NGOs, in holding annual *dhammayietra* peace marches designed to "wash away" memories of the Khmer Rouge. (Harris 2005, 208). Mahaghosananda was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Peace in both 1994 and 1996.

While the place of dreams is an important detail, the larger issue here is how the ritual process helps to reconstitute and re-enchant the family. The reconstitution of the family, within the context of Khmer culture, is necessarily the predicate for the reconstitution of society. Wounds may never completely heal, as memories may never be completely erased. But the reinstatement of ritual culture in the immediate aftermath of social devastation, a process that was allowed to accelerate after the exodus of Marxist-inclined Vietnamese ideologues, has abetted the ability to at least cope, and just as importantly, to at least hope. The hope that is expressed within *pchum ben* rites is an especially precious quality insofar as Osborne (2008, 200) notes, there is a very "... high rate of mental illness among those who were adults when Pol Pot was in power."<sup>35</sup> Not only is hope a quality cultivated within *pchum ben*, but extensive interviews among hundreds of refugees in camps on the Thai side of the border with Cambodia in 1992, 13 years after the transition to Vietnamese rule, indicated not only high levels of post traumatic stress disorder, but also that "Cambodian survivors wish they would have given deceased family members more of their own food, or speak of feeling badly about taking the clothing of a deceased relative. Many describe guilt feelings for not having been able to perform a proper funeral ceremony for their loved ones" (Savin and Robinson 1997). Concern for a proper funeral is among the basic material and psychological matters addressed within *pchum ben*.

### Celebrating *Pchum Ben*

In early October, 2010, the *Cambodia Daily* ran a series of articles on how spending during *pchum ben* seemed to be down that year. Its reporters had interviewed traders in the

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35) In Dan Savin and Shalom Robinson, "Holocaust Survivors and Survivors of the Cambodian Tragedy: Similarities and Differences." *Echoes of the Holocaust* 5 (1997), the results of hundreds of interviews with Khmer survivors have been published as a way of understanding, comparatively, the continuing, long term psychological impact of having witnessed mass murder. Their findings are summarized as follows: "The stories of the interviewees presented here illustrate the terrible suffering of millions of Cambodians during the Khmer Rouge regime, as well as the psychological late effects caused by this suffering . . . . The first author has found posttraumatic stress symptoms in hundreds of Cambodians whom he examined during his two-and-a-half-year stay in Cambodia. In a group of 100 Cambodian child survivors interviewed in a refugee camp near the Thai border 13 years after the end of the Pol Pot regime, 46 per cent met full DSMIII-R criteria for PTSD [post traumatic stress disorder], and an additional 40 per cent met the lesser criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD not otherwise specified (NOS). In another group of Cambodian child survivors who made it to the United States and were interviewed around the same time, 28 per cent met full criteria for PTSD, and an additional 20 per cent for PTSD NOS . . . . By talking with Cambodian survivors in more detail, however, it becomes clear that guilt is a major issue for them as for Holocaust survivors."

central market and monks from Wat Langka. But there was a sudden burst of spending in the final days of the season as many Phnom Penh people prepared for their pilgrimages back to home villages and *wats*. The monks at Wat Langka said that perhaps the next phase of building and remodeling would have been put on hold unless donations had recovered, which they did. *Pchum ben* is clearly a major economic moment during the year, not only for the donations made to the temples, but also in the feasts prepared and in the gifts to parents that children provide. It is likely about as important to the fledgling Cambodian economy as Christmas is to the American. Certainly, the transportation industry receives its biggest boost of the year as hundreds of thousands leave Phnom Penh for the provinces, a pilgrimage home to honor parents and ancestors. Thus, *pchum ben* is not only a festival season aimed at establishing the well being of the dead, it is a marker of the well-being of the living as well.

I will rely upon Davis (2009) to introduce the salient cultural and religious issues in play within the rites constitutive of *pchum ben*. His descriptive statements provide for an insightful introductory summary of *pchum ben*'s general religious and socio-economic significance in contemporary Khmer society:

Once a year during the fifteen-day festival of Bhjum Pinda [*pchum ben*], the king of hell, Yamaraja, allows the *preta* to travel back to the villages where they previously lived as humans. During this "dark fortnight" of the waning moon, the *preta* search for gifts of food that their living relatives and descendants are suppose to leave them at Buddhist temples. They are supposed to search in at least seven temples during this period; if they find food, they will give their blessings. If on the other hand, they find nothing and return to hell as hungry when they left, they may choose to curse their descendants, so that they will share in the ghost's hunger and desperation. If they cannot eat together, the ghosts will ensure that they at least starve together . . . (*ibid.*, 175). [While] [p]reta embark on epic journeys during the festival period, from hell to the villages of their relatives . . . , they are not the only ones going on pilgrimages. Khmer assert that they too should return to the villages of their birth for Bhjum Pinda, or at least for the final day of Bhjum, the day of gathering. Since Bhjum should be celebrated in one's home village, the holiday involves massive evacuations of cities to agricultural birth villages. Although the vast majority of Cambodia's monetized wealth is concentrated in the cities, over eighty per cent of the population remains in the countryside. Families from the city make great efforts to give to the limits of their ability when they journey back to the villages. They don't come empty-handed: they bring food, treats, bread and rice. If they are indeed wealthy, they will often arrange for the temple ceremonies, and will hire a tent for a catered meal for themselves and a few of their country relatives on the temple grounds after the ceremony. In return, they occupy the major roles in communally performed rituals, sit in the best places, receive more attention from the high ranking monks, and eat delicious food in catered tents, around which children and hungry adults wait for left overs. These human pilgrimages back and forth between city and village are undertaken in a spirit of generosity, in order to serve one's poor dead relatives and one's home village, but the economic and social distinctions between the city and the villagers are also points of contention. The generous gifts to the countryside's dead from the city are highly symbolic. They return the countryside's wealth without

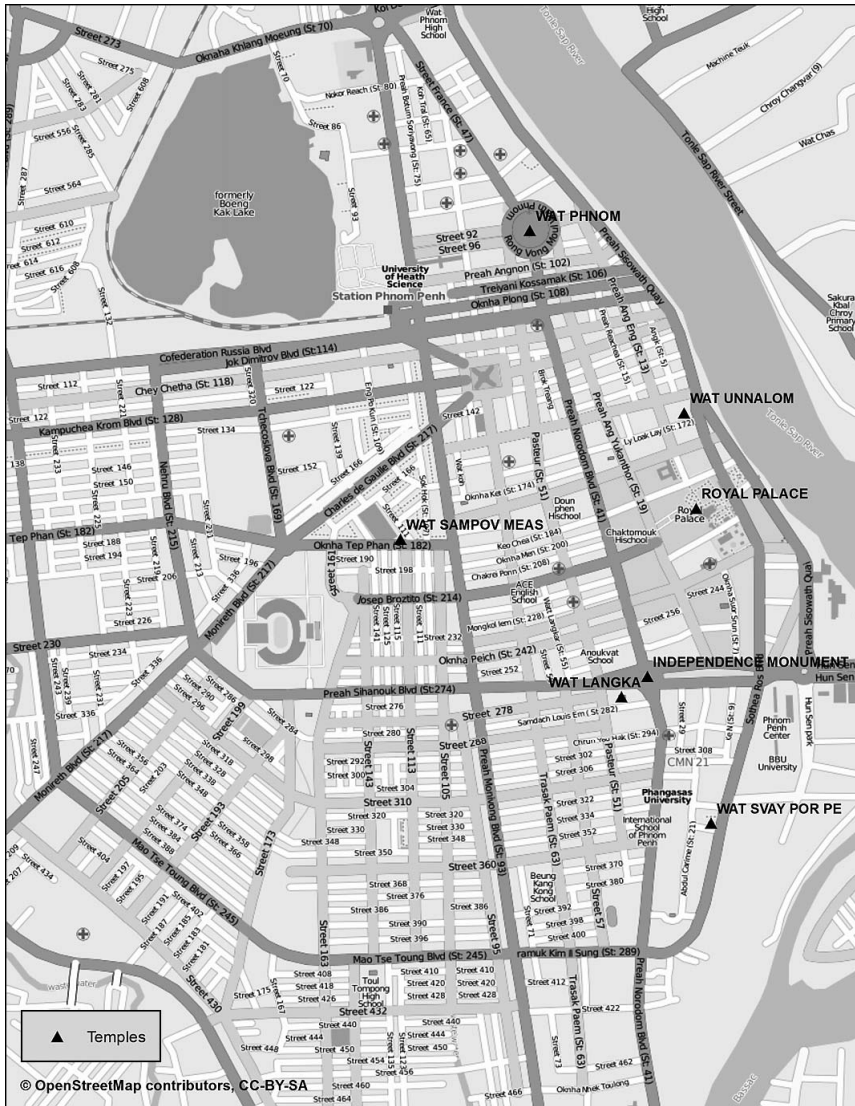




Map 1 Map of Cambodia

acknowledging it (*ibid.*, 188) . . . Their food and gifts do go a long way to help create a sense of solidarity, familial love, and trust, which might otherwise be strained by the tyranny of distance, the length of absence and the gulf in lifestyles. During the two weeks of Bhjum Pinda, the direction of wealth is reversed. (*ibid.*, 189)

In September/October of 2010, I attended as many ritual occasions during the 15 day season of *pchum ben* as I possibly could. I selected five Buddhist *wats* located within



Map 2 Map of Phnom Penh

the city of Phnom Penh according to profiles of clientele which they served: Wat Langka, Wat Unnalom, Wat Sampov Meas, Wat Svay Por Pe, and Wat Phnom. The first three *wats* belong to the traditional and still dominant Mahanikay order and are arguably the largest and most well known of all of Phnom Penh's many Buddhist temples. Wat Unnalom (see Photo 1) is the home temple of the *sangharaja* (or *sanghareach*) of the Mahanikay order and is located in close proximity to the royal palace. It is here that the



Photo 1 Wat Unnalom



Photo 2 Independence Monument

Buddhist *sangha* was first regenerated following the dispersal of the Khmer Rouge. It remains an unofficial headquarters of the *sangha* in Cambodia. Wat Langka is probably the second most important *wat* institutionally in Phnom Penh. It has been described by Davis (*ibid.*, 18) in this way: “catholic in its acceptance and performance of rites considered by modernist or reformist monks as brahmanist—such as *poh paya pinda* (the early morning *pinda* offerings during *pchum ben*)—and had a largely middle and upper class congregation on its normal morality day (*thnai sila*) celebrations.” Indeed, it is a very well endowed temple located just opposite Phnom Penh’s Independence Monument (see Photo 2) and the Prime Minister’s official residence. Wat Sampov Meas is a very large *wat* located in more of a working class and traditional business section of Phnom Penh and is also home to some of the most socially and politically progressive monks in Cambodia, including the activist Mahaghosananda who was nominated for a Nobel Prize for Peace in 1994 and 1996. Wat Svay Po Pe is a smaller and rather non-descript *Thammayut* temple located across from the sprawling Russian embassy in a middle class section of town. It enjoys a reputation for having monks of a more intellectual bent who are connected to some of the Buddhist universities in Phnom Penh. Wat Phnom, of course, has become iconic for the city. It is the legendary site of the city’s origins. Despite the fact that it has an elaborate image hall and an adjacent royally endowed *stupa*, there are no monks who live at Wat Phnom, so it doesn’t have a regular congregation, nor does it observe the regular liturgy of Buddhist rites on monthly *sila* days, *pchum ben*, etc. In addition, there are popular Chinese and Vietnamese deity shrines located to one side of the Buddha image hall, and an active cultic site for “Madam Penh” or “Grandma

Penh” on the other.<sup>36</sup>) It is, therefore, not a “normal” Buddhist temple. In repeated visits, the only Buddhist cultic activity I observed were prostrations to the central Buddha image. I also observed a ritual gathering of the royal family sending off their ancestral spirits on the eve of the final day of *pchum ben* at an auspicious ford located along the Tonle Sap River just opposite the royal palace in Phnom Penh. Since *pchum ben* is so robustly celebrated in the countryside, I observed *bay ben* rites at two very important rural *wats*, each located about 40 kilometers outside of Phnom Penh, and I made sure that I was at a rural venue for the final day of *pchum ben*, the day that serves quintessentially as a time for family reunion. The first rural venue, located to the southwest, was Wat Kokoh, a temple that had been turned into an interrogation center and prison by the Khmer Rouge for the duration of their time in power. My visit there was an especially grim reminder of the crimes committed in the late 1970s. The second, Wat Traleaeng Kaeng in Kompong Chhnang, is northwest of Phnom Penh near the old capital of Udong. This particular *wat* is famous for its four-faced Buddha image that in popular lore is believed to be the image of the four-faced king mother, who is also thought to be the reincarnated mother of the Buddha.<sup>37</sup>) It is also the site of a temple dedicated to Preah

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36) The purported beginnings of Phnom Penh as a center for the Khmer are now a matter of mythic articulation and connected directly to Wat Phnom. Osborne (2008, 21–22) retells the story: “As for the city’s more familiar name, there is a romantic legend accounting for its existence. Sometime in the fourteenth century, the legend recounts, and not long before the Cambodian court left the great city of Angkor with its magnificent temples, a woman named Penh lived beside a small hillock close to the river bank and a little above the point where the Mekong and its tributary came together. One day, when the rivers were in flood, she saw a huge *koki* tree—a type traditionally planted only by royalty or Buddhist monks—floating in the current. When she pulled it to the shore, hoping to use it for firewood, she found to her amazement that wedged in the tree’s branches were four statues of the Buddha and one of the Hindu god Vishnu. Penh recognized this as a sign that the gods had decided to leave the holy city of Angkor and to give their blessing to a new Cambodian capital. Like women in contemporary Cambodia, Penh was energetic and determined. Calling on the people who lived nearby to carry the images to her home, she then organized them to pile earth on the hillock close to her home, so transforming it into a feature that could legitimately be called a hill, a *phnom* in Cambodian. When this was done, she built a temple on the top of the hill to house the images of the Buddha and a stupa for other holy relics, while the statue of Vishnu was placed in a separate chapel. In memory of these events, the city took the name as Phnom Penh, the “Hill of lady Penh.” Osborne continues: “. . . charming though the story is, the record is clear that the settlement did not acquire its modern name until after the Cambodian court, led by King Ponhea Yat, left Angkor to settle briefly at the site of modern Phnom Penh. Despite some assertions to the contrary, we do not know exactly when this profoundly important event took place, although it occurred sometime after 1431, possibly in the same decade. It was a final act in a long drawn out drama of the decline of the Angkorian empire’s power in the face of a century of attacks by the emerging Siamese [Thai] principalities on Cambodia’s western frontier.”

37) Though the king mother is currently living in hell, it is believed that she comes to this *wat* to respond to those who call upon her for help.

Ko Preah Keo, whose well-known myth reflects late medieval tensions with the invading Thai in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Now I will simply indicate that the spirits of these two mythic figures, who represent important aspects of Khmer culture, are thought to reside in this *wat*. Wat Traleaeng Kaeng, therefore, is a site of considerable nationalistic sentiments.

In my observations at these venues, I was ably assisted and supported by two outstanding Khmer graduate students, one male and one female, both of whom are Buddhist by background and fully fluent in English and Khmer. They readily handled all translation issues that arose and interviewed many individuals on each occasion at my behest. My notes indicate that collectively, we interviewed scores of people from all age brackets and both genders. In addition, we participated and observed for the duration of ritual activities as these were held at these locations on each of several early mornings.<sup>38)</sup> As such, we were able to assemble, by means of comparison, a somewhat typical liturgy by noting which elements appeared as constants and which elements proved to be idiosyncratic or variables.

What follows is an analytical account that is based upon our efforts to understand what occurred at each *wat*. The knowledge we gained about *pchum ben* was cumulative, and that is how I shall proceed with my discussion. That is, the discussion will be guided by the sequence of our observations. My descriptions and analysis will begin with the first venue we visited, Wat Langka, and proceed serially through to the last occasion on *pchum ben* day itself at Wat Traleaeng Kaeng in Kompong Chnang. The discussions occurring in relation to each *wat* will become progressively focused as we continue. We learned more that was new to us, of course, at the first sites. The information we gained as we proceeded day to day from *wat* to *wat* became increasingly redundant, although it often confirmed and sometimes contradicted what we had learned earlier. In any case, I discuss the many issues in what follows as they surfaced. Progressively, the picture that is painted is completed.

### **The *Kan Ben* Liturgy at Wat Langka**

The first 14 days of the *pchum ben* season are known as *kan ben*. *Kan* in Khmer means “to hold or to adhere” while *ben* is Khmer for Pali and Sanskrit *pinda*, referring to the ball of sticky rice offered ritually to ancestors to appease their hungry conditions. Deter-

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38) Given the fact that our usual meeting time ranged between 2:30 and 3:30 a.m. in the mornings, we developed something of a healthy, albeit ascetic *esprit de corps*.



Photo 3 Spirit Flag

mining the symbolic significance of *pinda* figures heavily in ascertaining the cardinal religious meaning of this entire ritual season. *Pchum* means “collection” and so *pchum ben* is the “gathering or collecting/making of *pinda*.” During *kan ben*, the ritual of *bay ben*, or “tossing” the *pinda*, is performed every morning between 4 and 6 a.m., depending on the ritual schedule of each of the *wats*.

At 3:45 a.m. on the first day of the *pchum ben* season, laity began to arrive at Wat Langka with trays filled with *pindas*, incense, candy, water, and small white spirit flags known in Khmer as *tung proleung* (literally “spirit flag”; see Photo 3).<sup>39</sup> These flags, of course, are symbols of their deceased kin, their ancestors to whom the laity will be offering their trays of food. Some of the trays that have been sold by hawkers on site just beyond the gates of the temple compound contain *pindas* that have been shaped into the form of a cone by means of a banana leaf wrap (see Photo 5). This form is the traditional way of offering *pindas* to one’s ancestors. That rice is the primary offering to the ancestors, as it is the primary offering to the Buddhist monks when they go on their morning alms rounds (*pindapata* in Pali), reflects the vital centrality of this food as the byproduct of agricultural labor, the predominant form of “value-producing activity” (Davis 2009, 31)

39) These simple paper “cut outs” seem to be inspired by the elaborate hand sewn cloth hangings one finds decorating some village temples during the *pchum ben* season, the making of which is regarded as highly meritorious. See Photos 4a–4c from Wat Traleaeng Kaeng.



a



b



c

Photo 4 Temple Hangings



Photo 5 Banana Leaf Wrap

in Khmer culture and society. That is, “Cambodian society, so thoroughly agricultural, finds its dominant image of value and value-creation, in the production, distribution and consumption of food” (*ibid.*, 110). The giving of rice, therefore, is symbolic of the giving of life, its nurturance, its sustenance. Rice is life’s vital principle and so the giving of rice to ancestors, which is precisely what occurs during the *bay ben* of *kan ben*, is not only symbolic of regenerating the life of the lineage or family, but it also a fundamental mark

of respect.<sup>40)</sup> With regard to previous discussions about the creation of moral order as a byproduct of ancestor veneration, what should be stressed, then, is that the gift of rice to one's ancestors seems to generate a sentiment of reverence for life in the disposition of the donor. Thus, the gift is emblematic of sacrifice to what has been deemed worthy. It is a ritual act of worship indicating the "worthship" of the enduring family. It is also an act of thanksgiving and, to be more clearly seen in the pages that follow, an act of compassion. Finally, I would add that the generation of a sentiment that gives rise to acts of compassion, acts that reflect an ethical intention, signal the manner in which ritual is often the context in which ethical consciousness is forged.

When the central image hall at Wat Langka finally opened, approximately 500 laity entered first,<sup>41)</sup> before about 100 monks entered in stately, composed fashion to sit quietly and observantly in neat rows of about 10 each behind the chief monk and his most senior fellow monks.<sup>42)</sup> A rather distinguished family of high rank, as it turns out the family of an air force officer who serves as the chief bodyguard of the current prime minister, were designated as the primary lay patrons of the occasion.<sup>43)</sup> The ritual then began with the family patrons offering lit incense and making prostrations before the main Buddha image in the sermon hall. Following the prostrations, the chief monk led all monks in chanting the *Namassaka* in Pali, followed by a Khmer translation of the same. The text is simply an homage, a praise of the virtues of the *triratna*: Buddha, the *dhamma* and *sangha*. During this monastic chanting, laity, in turn, lit their incense and candles and some poured a little water on to their trays. Following the invocation, the chief monk told everyone to concentrate on the next *dhamma* which consisted of the recitation of the *pancasila*,

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40) On this point Davis has quoted Maria Heim: "When the recipient is someone whom one can esteem, the feelings of *sraddha*, respect, and joy, naturally arise. These are among the most noble feelings one can have, and thus it is perfectly appropriate to value these gifts above others" (Heim 2004, 81–82).

41) The majority of people coming to the early morning ritual were women. They were mothers and daughters, grandmothers and granddaughters, nieces, wives, and teenagers. Perhaps a third of those in attendance were males. In terms of age, virtually all age groups were equally represented, but the preponderance seemed youthful. At Wat Langka, a decidedly upper middle class clientele predominated.

42) The opening scene of parading monks, at the time, made me recall the description of *pchum ben* offered 100 years ago by Adhemard Leclerc (1916, 116).

43) As in the countryside, each night of *kan ben* requires a different chief sponsor or lay patron for the ritual whose responsibility is to pay for all expenses incurred, including not only the cost of providing breakfast to all of the monks, but also the payment of musicians (*pin peat*) and any other costs associated with the ritual performance. The cost, by local standards, can be very considerable. At major *wats* in Phnom Penh, only the very well-to-do may be able to afford playing this role. At most rural *wats*, families take turns meeting the responsibility and earning the merit that accrues. Often, the chief patron is a person of some means who has returned from the city.



the five basic moral precepts of not to kill, not to steal, not to engage in sexual misconduct, not to lie, and not to take intoxicants. This taking and avowal established the conditions of moral purity, or at least the moral intentions driving the performance of the rite. The chanting of the five precepts was followed by the head temple *achar* (lay ritual specialist) leading the chanting in Pali of the *Namotassa*, again basically a respectful invocation of the Buddha's name.

To this point in the ritual, the elements of the liturgy had been generic and not unique to the *pchum ben* season or to *kan ben*. But after the *Namotassa*, the chief monk chanted the *Tirokudda Sutta*, an ancient Pali text found in the *Petavatthu* that actually forms a song or chant originally attributed to the Buddha within the mythic story he tells that establishes the basis for the rite of *bay ben*, the giving of *pindas* to ancestors. Davis (2009, 167) has aptly translated the short text of the *Tirokudda Sutta* as follows:

They stand at crossroads and outside the walls  
Returning to their old homes, they wait at thresholds  
Because of karma, no one remembers them  
When an abundant feast of food and water is served.

Those who feel pity, therefore, at the right time  
Give truly pure food and drink to their relatives, rejoicing  
"This is for you; may our relatives be happy."

Spectral relations gather and assemble.  
Thoroughly pleased with the food and water, they reply  
"May our relatives who provide for us have long lives.  
We are honored; giving is not without benefits."

There is no plowing in that place, and cow-herding is unknown;  
No trading, no buying, no selling with gold;  
Dead preta survive there on what is given from here.

Just as water poured on a hill  
flows down and around it, sustaining the land all around,  
so a gift from here benefits ghosts in precisely the same way.

"He gave to me, he worked for me,  
he was my friend, relative and companion."  
Give properly to the ghosts, remembering past deeds.

The weeping, mourning, and laments of relatives are useless  
To those who remain in such a way.  
But proper gifts dedicated to the sangha become useful to them  
Immediately and for a long time.

The duties toward relatives have thus been shown:  
 Veneration for the ghosts,  
 Strength for the monks  
 And no small merit for you.

The *Tirokudda Sutta* is recited on virtually every *kan ben* occasion during the 15 day *pchum ben* season. Along with the *Parabhava Sutta* (see below), it is one of the two primary texts consistently invoked or recited within *pchum ben* ritual liturgies that I observed wherever I went. They are texts that are unique to the observance of *pchum ben*. According to Gombrich (1971b, 218), the *Tirokudda Sutta* forms one of the most ancient strands of the *Petavatthu*, a Pali text itself that is likely to be at least more than 2,000 years old.<sup>44)</sup> Within this text, we find the beginnings of a rationalization for the practice of merit transfer, especially in the third to the last verse that emphasizes what departed kin have provided on behalf of the living. In fact, this *sutta* is none other than a notice of the Buddhist observance of *dharma* in relation to honoring ancestors. Though regarded as *Buddhavacana* (words of the Buddha), it signals how the early Buddhist community initially understood and transformed the ancient Indian *brahmanical* practice of venerating the familial dead.<sup>45)</sup> In *brahmanical* traditions, paying one's debt to one's family ancestors, including one's parents, is one dimension of the triple debt that all devout people owe; the other two being one's teachers and the gods.

In the *Petavatthu* story entitled "The Petas Outside the Wall,"<sup>46)</sup> the Buddha recites the *Tirokudda Sutta* verses to explain to King Bimbisara why the duty of honoring one's familial dead is an act that is morally incumbent upon all. Since this particular story is also very often referred to in sermons preached by Khmer monks on *bay ben* occasions, and since it is therefore known by most Khmer laity as the authorized beginnings of *pchum ben* traditions, I will summarize it here.

Ninety-two cycles ago, a king by the name of Jayasena ruled over Kasipura (Benares). His queen, Sirima, gave birth to a prince who became a Buddha. The king resolved to keep the Buddha, *dhamma* and *sangha* only for his sole edification and gave no one else the opportunity to take refuge. The Buddha's three younger brothers, born to a different mother, knew that *buddhas* are awakened for the benefit of the whole world, and not for

44) Winternitz (1927, vol. 2, 99) assigned the *Petavatthu* to the latest strata of literature assembled in the *Tipitaka*. In the fifth century CE *Mahavamsa*'s account (*ibid.*, XIV, 58, 96–96) of the transmission of Buddhism to Sri Lanka in the third century BCE, it is referred to as the second text preached by Asoka's monastic missionary son, Mahinda, who establishes the *sangha* and then converts the court and Lankan king who is then re-coronated as Devanampiya Tissa.

45) I have traced the roots of the early Buddhist transformation of ancestor veneration in my article "Assisting the Dead by Venerating the Living" (Holt 1981).

46) *Petavatthu*: pp. 7–11.

the selfish ambitions of society's elite. As a strategy, they created a disturbance in one of the kingdom's borderlands and were sent by the king to quell the problem. When they returned, the king offered them a boon to which they replied that they wished to venerate the Buddha. The king denied them. The brothers then approached the Buddha directly and the Buddha agreed to spend the rain retreat season with his brothers in his attendance offering them the chance to make great merit. During the rain retreat season, the local provincial ruler and the royal treasurer also took refuge in the *triratna*, along with the three brothers. The provincial ruler and treasurer then made magnificent gifts to the Buddha and *sangha*, but other people in the province became jealous of their charity, consumed their gifts of food and set fire to the refectory of the monastery that they had built for the Buddha and his *sangha*. In time, all the major players in this episode died and were reborn: the brothers, the provincial ruler and the treasurer were reborn in splendid heavens while those who had been jealous and had burnt the monastery were reborn in hell. After 92 cycles of rebirths in heavens and hells, during the time of the Buddha Kassapa, those reborn in hell were finally reborn as *petas* who noticed how some surviving kin folk provided gifts on behalf of their deceased relations to help assuage their suffering conditions. They asked Kassapa when this might happen for them. Kassapa told them that they had to await the appearance of the future Buddha, Gotama, and the rebirth of the provincial ruler as King Bimbisara. Bimbisara would provide relief through dedicating the merit of his benevolence to Gotama to them. Eventually, Gotama was born, set the *dhamma* wheel rolling, converted thousands and made his way to Rajagaha where he established King Bimbisara on the path of *dhamma*. The *petas* waited, but Bimbisara did not assign credit for his gifts to the Buddha and his *sangha* to them. One night, now without hope, the *petas* howled dreadful cries heard throughout the palace. In the morning, an alarmed Bimbisara expressed his fears to the Buddha that something sinister might happen to him soon. Then the Buddha told him the story and how the *petas*, his ancestral kinsmen, were waiting for a transfer of merit. Bimbisara then prepared a generous bounty while the *petas* waited outside the walls. When the merit for Bimbisara's generosity was transferred to them, they found themselves newly ensconced in lotus ponds, their thirsts slaked with sweet nectars, eating delicious soft food, wearing beautiful divine clothes, living in grand mansions, sleeping on comfortable couches, being adorned with jewel-studded ornaments, etc. All of this remarkable scene was made manifest by the Buddha for a delighted Bimbisara to see the benefits of his merit transference. In conclusion, the Buddha then recited the verses of the *Tirokudda Sutta*.

After the chanting of the *Tirokudda Sutta*, the *achar* in Wat Langka recited a Pali *gatha* or verse indicating *anumodana*, the moment when all beings, alive and dead, are invited to share in the joy of what is now to be given. Both Gombrich (1971b, 206–207)

and Malalasekera (1967, 85–86) argue that it is precisely this ability to rejoice in the action of another's good actions, or the quality of "empathy in joy" that signals how the change in disposition in the *petas* is what allows them to benefit from the transferred merit. Their *cetana*, or intentions, have been transformed. I was genuinely surprised that this somewhat sophisticated aspect of Buddhist philosophy was known to several of the older laity that we interviewed during *pchum ben*. *Cetana* is actually how the Buddha defined *karma* within the early Buddhist Pali texts. In other words, the *karma* of the *petas* had been changed, as evidenced by the fact that they could now rejoice in the good works of others. They now enjoyed an awareness of what constitutes morally wholesome action. As such, they could share in the merit generated.

Following the *anumodana* invitation, everyone inside the temple responded with "Sadhu Sadhu Sadhu." Then the temple bell rang three times signaling that the moment had come for everyone to go outside into the dark and to begin circumambulating the image hall clockwise three times, in the process distributing *pinda* to their deceased kin, their departed ancestors. Solemnly, all the laity joined in this procession and began to quietly distribute the contents of their "*pinda* plates" into metal pails or buckets that had been placed at intervals around the temple. Younger monks were stationed at various intervals to supervise outside the sermon hall.

In popular Khmer lore about *pretas*, it is important that each lay person recite the name of his or her deceased relation while making their donations. As Davis noted in the introductory comments to this section, it is believed that the deceased will frequent up to seven temples searching for donations made by their descendants on their behalf. At the same time, it is believed that seven generations of ancestors can benefit from the donations provided by their descendants. What is interesting about the *Petavatthu* story of the *petas* "outside the walls" is that not only do they benefit from the *karma* of merit transfer, but that they physically receive the benefits from material offerings. That is why, for many Khmer traditional laity, it is important to actually make physical gifts and why the gift of rice itself is so significant. Moreover, in the *Petavatthu* stories, the types of punishments suffered by *petas* are physically reflective of the nature of the moral offence that they committed as human beings. For instance, liars are born with worms in their mouths. Bullies are reborn with severe bruises or broken limbs. The greedy are continuously hungry.

Yet, the physical act of giving *pindas* has recently become a popular controversy in Cambodia. Buth Savong, a famous Khmer Buddhist *dhamma* preacher has mounted a vigorous campaign against the practice of *bay ben* by arguing that "*pinda* throwing" is not sanctioned in the *Tipitaka* and not prescribed by the Buddha. Other monks have complained about how the practice of *bay ben* dirties the temple environment and attracts

stray animals and vermin. Consequently, some temples have abandoned the practice of *bay ben*. In temples where *bay ben* is observed, I did hear sermons by monks to the laity regarding the importance of keeping the temple neat, along with warnings, especially to the youth, not to throw *pindas* indiscriminately. Other temples, like Wat Langka, try to contain the practice of throwing *pindas* by placing pails or canisters around the temple as receptacles and posting monastic “guards” intermittently to make sure that the fun does not get out of hand.

In any case, one of the questions my assistants and I asked of the laity we met was how one knows for sure whether or not their offerings during *bay ben* made any difference to their ancestors. Several times, we were told that ancestors would appear in dreams, and from those appearances in dreams, it would be clear that they were wearing nice clothes, were no longer hungry or suffering from thirst, etc., and had, therefore, received merit. This is a very curious explanation, because in most of the stories of the *Petavatthu*, the manner through which the dead communicate with the living is through dreams. Consistently in our interviews with Buddhist laity during *bay ben*, we were told about how the dead appeared to their surviving kin in dreams. Later, I will argue that dreaming is one of the conditions of liminality that is so characteristic of *pchum ben*.

During the ritual circumambulation of the temple and the ritual distribution of *pinda*, the second ritual text of primary importance to the *pchum ben* proceedings, the Pali *Parabhava Sutta*, was then intoned by the chief monk over the loudspeaker system. The *sutta* can be translated as follows:

Thus have I heard:

On one occasion the Blessed One was living near Savatthi, at Jetavana, at Anathapindika’s monastery. Now when the night was far advanced, a certain deity, whose surpassing radiance illuminated the whole of Jetavana, came to the presence of the Blessed One, respectfully saluted him, and stood beside him. Standing thus he addressed the Blessed One in verse:

[The Deity:]

About the causes of the fall of men we ask, Gotama, O Blessed One: What is the cause of his fall?

[The Buddha:]

It is easy to know the ascending one, and easy to know the falling one. The lover of the *dhmma* ascends. The despiser of the *dhmma* wanes.

We understand this as the first cause of his decline. Tell us the second, O Blessed One. What is the cause of decline?<sup>47)</sup>

The ruthless are kin to him. He despises the worthy; he approves of the teachings of the bad tempered.

The declining include the man who is fond of sleep and the slothful, who is lazy and easy to anger. Whoever is well-to-do and does not support his parents who are old, and past their prime.

47) This verse is repeated after each stanza. Though it adds to the cadence of the chanted during the ritual, I have omitted it here for the sake of brevity.

Whoever deceives a Brahmin or recluse.

Whoever is wealthy, who has much gold, and who has an abundance of food, but enjoys it all by himself.

Whoever is proud of his lineage, of his wealth, and yet despises his relations.

Whoever is addicted to women, alcohol, gambling, and loses his wages because of these vices.

Whoever is not satisfied with only his own wife and seeks others.

Whoever becomes old and yet takes as his wife a girl in her teens.

Whoever delegates authority to a woman given to drink and squandering, or a man of the same sort.

Whoever has few possessions but colossal greed, is born of the *ksatrya* [warrior] lineage birth and aspires selfishly to royalty.

Fully realizing these (twelve) causes of decline in the world, the wise, with *aryan* [worthy or noble] insight, realizes the security of *nibbana*.<sup>48)</sup>

The *Parabhava Sutta* is obviously an explanation of how *pretas* become *pretas*. It is a ritual chant that is shorthand for the content of *karma* stories of the *Petavatthu* that illustrate how immoral actions result in a suffering rebirth and how the fruit of meritorious actions, or moral actions, can benefit those who have made mistakes in the past. It is clearly an attempt explain why it is necessary to rehabilitate one's ancestors, to return them to a moral status that symbolizes the continued healthy well being of the family. We asked many laity how they knew whether or not their ancestors had become *pretas* owing to their past actions. Again, some indicated that they knew this through dreams while others said they knew because their relatives were known to have done bad things during the Khmer Rouge period. Others said they simply did not know. The latter were performing *bay ben* just in case their familial ancestors needed them. In this instance, *pchum ben* functions as insurance.

When the *Parabhava Sutta* was concluded, *tumnouy prêt*, or "the moan of the *preta*," was heard dramatically over the microphone in Khmer. It was a heart rendering moaning cry for help and added significantly to the rather the somber ambience of the occasion.

Following the rite, we asked people why they came for *bay ben* at Wat Langka. It was clear that people prioritize some pagodas because of where the relics of their deceased relatives have been deposited or where they were cremated. Some will go to the temple nearest the site where their departed one died, especially if the death was accidental or violent. Others prefer to go where their departed kin preferred to go while they were still living. Living relatives might remember also which sect, Mahanikay or Thammayut, that the deceased preferred when he or she was alive. This sense of honoring the preferences of the dead sometimes carried over to what was included on the "*pinda* plate." Often favorite sweets and fruits were added to the *pinda*.

As we were preparing to leave, one elderly woman reminded us that Cambodian

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48) My translation.

people not only bring food to the pagoda for their deceased relatives, but they also bring food, money, or clothes to their living parents or relatives at home. They are well aware that much of the money they give to parents will be used to prepare food for the monks at the pagoda during this season. Food for the monks translates into merit for the family. Therefore, *pchum ben* should be seen as a cycle of family caring: from the children to their living parents and relatives and then to their deceased grandparents and other deceased relatives. These transactions signal a three-fold type of relationality: the living venerate the dead in return for their blessing through support of the *sangha*. In this way, the living, the dead and the *sangha* are entwined. Elsewhere (Holt 1981, 20–21), I have argued that in the transformation of ancient *brahmanical* ancestor rites, it is the Buddhist *sangha* that replaced the ancestors and the *brahmanical* family as the primary social entity of importance in connection with actions performed on behalf of the dead. That is, the *pindas* of *brahmanical* funeral rites, or balls of rice constituting symbolic bodies made for transitions of the dead from this world to the worlds beyond,<sup>49)</sup> became the food given to Buddhist monks. The monks, in turn, on their rounds of *pindapata* every morning, came to represent the new morally virtuous presence that was “dead to the world,” a presence worthy of entering into a mutually beneficial or reciprocal relation.<sup>50)</sup>

### Consoling the *Pretas* at Wat Sampov Meas

On the third morning of *pchum ben* amidst a drizzle following several hours of thunderous downpour, laity began to arrive at Wat Sampov Meas around 4 a.m., although the *bay ben* rite did not commence until 4:30. Wat Sampov Meas is hardly upscale in comparison to Wat Langka or Wat Unnalom. The smell of rot came from garbage overflowing garbage cans lining one of the lanes leading to the main entrance of the temple. While some of the monks here are quite progressively socially, the temple grounds are much more pedestrian. The ritual service was also decidedly much more informal. There was no

49) For a study of these rites historically, as well as their contemporary observance, see David Knipe (1977).

50) On the efficacy of gifts to the ancestors during *pchum ben* and the intermediary role that is performed by the monks which creates this tri-partite set of relations, Davis (2009, 168–169) notes: “These gifts, furthermore, must be given via a specific ritual of transfer. Merely mourning their loss, mere remembrance—will not help the dead. Nor will giving gifts directly to the dead assist them properly . . . . Instead, the dead must be given their gifts by offering them to Buddhist monks ‘at the right time’. And these gifts have the result—the fruit—of benefiting every member of the three-way transaction which creates this gift economy: the monks receive strength from the food they receive and eat, the ghosts receive new bodies and an alleviation of their suffering, and the donors receive blessings from their pleased ancestors and merit from their gifts to the monks.”

grand entry by 100 monks, no traditional orchestra, and no appointed lay patrons for the rite. Indeed, when the laity were summoned to begin the rite, we all assembled in a courtyard opposite the sermon hall while a single monk took up a microphone on the steps to the hall and began to chant first the *Namassakar* and then the *Parabhava Sutta*. This was the one venue where we did not hear the *Tirokudda Sutta* recited. Following the chant, the monk launched into what seemed to be an impromptu sermon, the first part of which was about the proper and improper ways in which to toss the *pinda*. He stressed that *pindas* should not be thrown at someone else's head, or fired around in fun. It was improper to throw *pindas* on to the cement walkways and courtyards as well. Instead, *pindas* should be gently deposited where there is dirt or ground in which bushes grow. In that way, *pretas* can get to them. By not following this method, people could find themselves reborn as *pretas*! This drew some muffled laughter from some of those in attendance.

The monk then proceeded to tell a story. Once a monk in Sri Lanka was traveling to his temple when he heard the sound of two *preta* children calling him. He asked of their identity and they replied that they were *preta* children and that their mother had gone to the temple in search of food but had not returned. They pleaded with the monk to tell their mother to please return quickly. The monk responded by saying that he could not do this because he did not have the ability to see *pretas*. The *preta* children gave him a black magic root. When he reached the temple, he saw several *pretas* and one of them was the children's mother. He approached her and told her how her children were in her need. Surprised, the mother *preta* wanted to know how she could be seen by the monk. When told, she grabbed the black magic root from the monk and disappeared. Henceforth, *pretas* cannot be seen by human beings. Ironically, just as the monk finished his story, a power cut occurred and the premises were pitched into darkness. A few flashlights eventually broke the darkness and the monk announced that it was now time for *bay ben*.

An elaborate display of the Buddha meditating peacefully above a row 10 *pretas* dominated the courtyard where the monk had chanted and preached. Below the depictions of each suffering *preta*, a summary of their actions that led to their sorry rebirths was written in Khmer (see Photos 6a and 6b). I was able to identify about half of these portrayals with stories in the *Petavatthu*. Not seen in the photo, but present during the early morning festivities, were canisters set up to receive monetary donations.

As we circumambulated the sermon hall three times in the dark, most of the people followed the advice of the monk by depositing their *pindas* gently in the bushes and not on the cement walkways.

It was at Wat Sampov Meas that we were able to chat with many laity with the great-





a



b

Photo 6 *Pretas*

est ease. We met some people who said that they came to Wat Sampov Meas because here *bay ben* was celebrated without a lot of restrictions. One young man said he came because his *wat* did not allow the practice. Here, we also met a 63 year old woman intent on performing *bay ben* at as many *wats* as possible during *kan ben* because it made her happy to know that she could be of help to her deceased kin in this modest way. We met an especially candid 72 year old woman who admitted that she couldn't be sure that her merit transfers would actually benefit her deceased relatives. She said, it all depended upon whether they had developed morally wholesome dispositions, which is the doctrinally correct position, as we have seen, articulated by scholars Gombrich and Malasekera. She mentioned that she had celebrated *pchum ben* religiously after she encountered many ghosts while hiking in the mountains following the Pol Pot era. She had also dreamed about some of her dead relations who had appeared to her with swollen bodies. She says that they have not reappeared since she dedicated merit to them. She said she lost a lot of relatives during the Pol Pot regime. She didn't tell us how or why, but she mentioned that her two children were also dead. She had a lot of motivation for assisting the dead. We also met a middle-aged man who broke down and sobbed uncontrollably when we asked why he came to perform *bay ben*. He stammered that his father had fallen out of a palm tree during the Pol Pot years and had died as a result of his fall. We gathered that he had witnessed this unfortunate event. He said that he had a lot of relatives, including brothers and sisters, who had died during the time of Pol Pot as well. While he is a person of not many resources, during every *pchum ben* season, he performs *bay ben* and merit transfer for the deceased members of his nuclear family. He says he feels closer

to them during this time, although he knows that his life will never be the same without them.

We left Wat Sampov Meas somewhat sobered by our encounters with people who clearly were emotionally affected during the *bay ben* rite. It was clear to us that one of the functions of this rite, at least for many Buddhist laity, is that it provides emotional compensation for the experiences of great family losses that they have endured.

### ***Boran and Samay at Wat Unnalom***

On the sixth morning of *kan ben*, we attended the *bay ben* rite at Wat Unnalom which, as I mentioned earlier, is regarded as the leading *wat* or headquarters of the Mahanikay sect. Just opposite the front entrance of the *wat*, in a small garden plot of its own, stands a sculpture of Yama, king of the dead (see Photo 7). In many years of visiting Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka and throughout Southeast Asia, I had never before seen a sculpture of Yama, and certainly not one that was alive in cultic terms. I had to remind myself that *pchum ben* is perhaps the most important ritual time of the year religiously in Cambodia and that Wat Unnalom is arguably one of the most sanctified spaces in the country. Given the important role played by Yama in the mythology of *pchum ben*, and the specter of death that has haunted Cambodia during its recent history, it is not so surprising that we should find Yama's likeness prominently displayed. Sometimes it seems that Buddhism has made a pact with death to insure its popularity. Davis (2009, 132) puts the matter this way:

In the historic spread of Buddhism, it has been in the care of the dead that Buddhism most successfully established itself, and death continues to be a major part of the *sangha's* economic and social reproduction, via temple's income generating funeral rituals, and the donations they receive on behalf of the dead.<sup>51)</sup>

The laity at the crowded image hall at Wat Unnalom were an extremely interesting

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51) On the further significance of death for the function of Buddhism among the laity, Davis argues (2009, 114) "... we can see a Buddhist insistence on the control of death as the ongoing reproduction of morally authorized power and value for the living. It is the ancestors who, properly controlled and approached (both, via the agency or technique of Buddhist monks), are the source of worldly blessings, such as 'health and happiness, wealth, and status'. . . . [D]uring the largest communal celebration for the dead, Bhjum Pinda [*pchum ben*], gifts are given to the dead twice—once directly by the family, and without monks as mediators, and again via the monks. Although monks insist that the former offerings are not efficient . . . , direct offerings are at least as popular during this period as indirect offerings, and laypeople seem to have no doubts about their efficacy."



Photo 7 Yama

mix. As at Wat Langka, many monks were ceremoniously present, the liturgy was long and full (including all the texts that had been chanted at Wat Langka), *pin peat* complemented the chanting, and the general decorum inspired a palpable ambience of “high church” symbol and rite. Yet, though many of the laity were well heeled indeed, many were clearly drawn from the commercial and entertainment districts of Phnom Penh located just to the north of the temple. I recognized a couple of “tuk tuk” drivers who had harassed me for rides on a daily basis during my stay, as well as some waitresses from the neighborhood restaurants. And it was clear from the skimpy outfits that drew stares from many others present, that some of the young women in attendance had just finished their night shifts as hostesses in some of the local nightclubs. These denizens of the Phnom Penh’s business and tourist culture mixed in with families of obvious upper class backgrounds and reminded us that participation in *pchum ben* canvasses from all classes of people in Cambodia. In a few days, most of these people would temporarily shed their “urbanity” when they return to their native villages and *wats*.

From talking to many of the laity present, it was clear that Wat Unnalom attracted a lot of people who could not otherwise make it to their home temples. In that sense, it was both everyone’s and yet no one’s “home temple.” One young man said he had come to Wat Unnalom because people in his family take turns going to the temples so that every night at least one family member transfers merit at a temple on behalf of the family ancestors. When asked why he came to this temple rather than others, his answer was that some temples were *boran* (traditional) and others *samay* (modern), so the former would provide *bay ben* while the latter might not.

In fact, this middle-aged layman had identified a critically important marker delineating different emphases within monastic Buddhism and lay practice in Cambodia during the twentieth century. The Japanese anthropologist Satoru Kobayashi spent a year and a half conducting field work focusing upon two rural temples in Kompong Say district

located east of Tonle Sap Lake noting how these two temples were sites of “conflicts and compromises in local people’s lives” (2005, 493). More specifically, Kobayashi was concerned with understanding Buddhist practices as these were interpreted as either *samay* (modern) or *boran* (traditional—from the Sanskrit *purana* meaning “of old”). One of the best illustrations of the tension between *boran* and *samay* centers on the question of whether or not to provide one’s deceased kin with rice directly (*ibid.*, 499–502). With reference to *bay ben*, Kobayashi quotes one of the local *achars* as saying:

If one wants to transfer merit to the dead, rice should be offered to a monk as a source of merit. In the Buddha’s sacred words in the *Tripitaka*, we could not find any explanations about *bah baybin*. Such practice is really meaningless, because merit must be transferred through Buddhist monks. Dogs eating rice on the field can’t help anything. (*ibid.*, 501)

Kobayashi goes on to describe other minor differences and ends this section of his article by noting how *samay* and *boran* become differences in attitudes, chiefly between those who stress an understanding of the absolute consequences of *karma* from a more rational perspective. His article concludes by showing how the periods of the civil war, the Khmer Rouge regime and the Vietnamese intervention all disrupted the ways in which younger monks came to understand the practice of the monastic vocation insofar as the more *boran* oriented practices had become somewhat *otiose*. As a result, the previous legacy of these *boran* practices learned through observation had been interrupted in favor of a more doctrinally oriented religion. I think that in this Kobayashi is largely correct, insofar as reconstruction was abetted by conceptions of religion that ultimately informed modern nation state understandings that, in turn, were derived somewhat from westernized understandings of religion.<sup>52)</sup> Both Penny Edwards (2007) and especially Anne

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52) In the introduction to their volume on crises of authority in East and Southeast Asia, Keyes, Kendall and Hardacre (Hardacre *et al.* 1994: 4–5) have detailed the matter this way: “In pursuit of ‘progress’ free from primordial attachments (which is what most experts believed was inhibiting the modernization of Asian nation-states), the rulers of the modern states in East and Southeast Asia all have instituted policies toward religious institutions. These policies have been predicated on the adoption of official definitions of ‘religion’, definitions that again have tended to be derived from the West. Indeed, in most Asian cultures prior to the modern period, there was no indigenous terminology corresponding to ideas of ‘religion’ held by Christians or Jews [and I would add Islam]. Complex dispositions about the nature of religion—the primacy of texts; creeds pledging exclusive allegiance to a single deity, all originating in the theologically unadorned varieties of Protestantism—were brought to Asia by missionaries in the nineteenth century. When these predispositions came to inform official discourse on religion, they were often used to devalue other aspects of religious life such as festival, ritual and communal observances—precisely those aspects that were at the heart of popular religious life in East and Southeast Asia. And as Western notions about religion were incorporated into law and custom, they also came to exercise a great influence on popular religious life in Asia as well . . .” The introduction of modernization, albeit at different times for different Asian states, always accompanied an attack on traditional rites as superstitious.



**Photo 8** Chuon Nath

Hansen (2007) have thoroughly sketched out how French conceptions of religion and the reform of Buddhism in the first half of the twentieth century were characterized by an emphasis on rationalism and criticisms of superstition.

Harris (2005, 221–224) provides an effective overview of *boran*-oriented monks and their re-established presence in the 1990s. He notes moments of conflict with *samay* oriented monks over the practice of *parivasa*—the *boran* performing various types of ascetic practices aimed at generating magical power, rather than simply practicing the rite as a form of penitence for wrong doings. More specifically, he telescopes the discussion of *boran* and *samay* rightly on the figure who was perhaps the leading reform-minded monk of the twentieth century, Ven. Chuon Nath (see Photo 8) who

[i]n 1944, . . . became chief monk of Wat Unnalom . . . [I]t is clear that Chuon Nath's views held sway for some time before his official elevation [to *sanghareach* or *sangharaja*] was confirmed. Controversy had, for example, blown up over the use of the *Tirokudda Sutta* as a protective chant [*paritta*] during the ceremony of merit making for dead ancestors [*pchum ben*] in September—modernizers were attempting to rewrite the text to eliminate its non-Buddhist elements. The suppression of the traditional New Year festivities by a royal decree of July 17, 1944, also appears to be related to the dispute over the presence of extraneous and superstitious features in popular ritual. (*ibid.*, 121; brackets mine)

What *boran* and *samay* mean, therefore, in relation to *pchum ben* is a matter of emphasis. The more *boran* oriented disposition focuses upon efficacy of *bay ben* and the provisions of *pinda* for the ancestors while the more *samay*-oriented disposition focuses efficacy on the merit made by providing gifts for the monks and the consequent merit that can be transferred to the dead. Keeping in mind the deep *brahmanical* roots of the *pinda* as symbolic of the corporeal form of the departed in the time of their transition from this world to the next, the *boran* disposition is definitely *brahmanist* in orientation. Its relative popularity in the post-Khmer Rouge period also signals the attempt on the

part of many Khmer to reconnect to the traditions of the past.

Kobayashi's comment about the *samay* orientation of most monks since the 1990s period of re-establishing the *sangha* is accurate and very significant, at least corresponding to my own limited experiences. I interviewed several monks outside the context of *pchum ben* rites and every one of them could have been categorized comfortably as *samay* in disposition and orientation. While this should not be so surprising, given the fact that all of these interviews took place in Phnom Penh or its suburbs with monks who were comparatively young (in their 20s or early 30s), it did drive home a position that has become increasingly popular within the *sangha* as well: that *pchum ben* is more of a Khmer national custom reflecting Khmer identity than it is a Buddhist ritual. I heard this point of view articulated in a few of the sermons as well. It struck me as quite odd that monks would take this position when they continued to ritually envelope *bay ben* rites with unabashedly Buddhist substance, i.e., chanting the moral precepts, the invocations to the *tri-ratna*, the *Tirokudda Sutta*, the *Parabhava Sutta*, etc. It may be that it has now become quite well known that *pchum ben* is a rite that is unique to Cambodia within the Theravada Buddhist world, so its "Khmerness" must be understood as its *raison d'être* rather than the Buddhistic teachings embodied within the ancient *Petavatthu* source. It also occurred to me that this assertion was simply inconceivable in pre-independence or perhaps pre-colonial Cambodia insofar as the separation between religion and ethnic identity was impossible to conceptualize then. The traditional, or *boran* worldview was simply more integrated. There was no distinction, as it were, between the sacred and secular, between religion and custom. To be Khmer *was* to be Buddhist in an integrated socio-cosmos. With the introduction of modern conceptions of the "nation" and "religion," sacred and secular, especially as these had been demarcated by the colonial French and imbibed by the educated elite, such a division was now possible. On the other hand, the consistent description of *pchum ben* as a national custom adds a dimension of discourse about the rite that transcends the focus on the family per se, one that embraces the nation as a whole. Consistently, older people informed us about how the popularity of *pchum ben* had soared since its re-institution following the Khmer Rouge. It may well be that while its rising popularity is primarily about the recovery of the family, it also includes the sense of a nation reasserting itself too.

### Ang Duang and Nationalist Sentiments of *Pchum Ben*

On several occasions, at least three of them during monastic sermons (one of these being at Wat Unnalom), but also in newspaper and magazine articles, I heard how King Ang

Duang (r. 1848–60) was responsible for the establishment of *pchum ben*, that his own practice of the rite had become paradigmatic for Khmer Buddhists today.<sup>53</sup> It is said that he condensed the period of venerating ancestors, which previously had been coextensive with the three month rain-retreat season for monks to just 15 days, in effect intensifying the practice. Ang Duang does provide a good fit for explaining the origins of *pchum ben*, especially its identification as a national Khmer custom, for he is widely regarded as a symbol of the regeneration of Khmer national culture. It is worth providing a brief resume of his significance, drawn from a variety of scholarly commentators, in order to see how this figure's association with *pchum ben* aggrandizes the rite in the eyes of many Khmer people, both traditional and modern.

Ang Duang's reign lasted for only 12 years, from 1848–60. He had been groomed in Bangkok by the Thai court for the Khmer throne. In the face of a growing Thai military threat in 1847, the Vietnamese had tactfully returned the Khmer royal regalia that they had hijacked earlier in the century and then released several members of the Khmer royal family before withdrawing their forces from Cambodia. Harris (2005, 46) describes the political and historical context on the advent of Ang Duang's ascension to the throne in this way:

From the Thai perspective, Vietnamese political control of Cambodia meant that Buddhism was without a royal sponsor. But the crowning of a new king was problematic because the royal regalia had been taken off to Saigon in 1812 and was not returned until the end of 1847. Ang Duang's coronation finally took place in Udong on April 8, 1848. When Duang returned to Udong from Bangkok, he found a culture on the brink of extinction. As a contemporary chronicler, Ta Mas, noted "[The novices] and priests suffered because the *viharas* had been plundered. The gold and silver buddhas had been taken from them and the soldiers had set fire to many *viharas*. In many places the *wats* that remained often did not have roofs. The roofs had sunken down and broken apart and the rain came down on the monks. Those who remained in robes were largely ignorant of the Buddha's teachings, and very few sacred writings remained intact." Ta Mas could easily have been describing the situation immediately after the Pol Pot period. Duang refurbished the royal funerary monuments and reinvigorated surrounding monasteries. By recasting Buddha images, encouraging the people to pay respect to the monks once again, and ordering a census of monks and *wats*.

The amelioration of these conditions made Ang Duang something of a national savior, at least in the manner in which history has been remembered in Cambodia. His association with *pchum ben* makes the revival of the ritual also, part and parcel, a piece of national cultural regeneration, especially when Ang Duang is identified with other Buddhist kings

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53) Davis (2009, 169) says: "King Ang Duong . . . is supposed to have refounded the festival, by shortening the period of its celebration."

of a paradigmatic nature who are remembered historically as being responsible for moral regeneration:

[the] chronicles tell us that Duang indefatigably encouraged the Buddhist virtues. He forbade his ministers to consume alcohol; toured the country, discouraging drinking and opium smoking; condemned hunting and the ill treatment of animals; and laid down guidelines on the proper size for fishing nets. He personally prepared food for monks, taught them liturgical chanting, and urged them to provide accommodations for the homeless. Acting on a model already established by Asoka and Jayavarman VII, Duang had rest houses built along the principal roads of the kingdom. (Harris 2005, 47)

Complementing this perspective, Chandler (2008, 162–164) adds to the more general social and political significance of Duang’s royal profile in this way:

... Duang reenacted the restoration of Thai-sponsored kingship that had been eclipsed for so many years. It would be a mistake to mistake these ceremonial actions as mere protocol because Duang, like most Southeast Asian rulers at the time, did not disentangle what we would call the religious and political strands of his thinking, duties and behavior. Kingly behavior ... was thought to have political results, and political actions were thought to enhance or diminish a monarch’s fund of merit. Many of these ceremonies had to do with restoration of Theravada Buddhism ... The chronicles of his reign emphasize its restorative aspects. A wide range of institutions and relationships was involved. The chronicle points to linguistic reforms, public works, sumptuary laws and new sets of royal titles ... Chroniclers of the 1880s and 1930s, looking back to those few years of Cambodian independence prior to French control, seem to have considered Duang’s reign to be a kind of golden age.

More than half of the chronicle passages dealing with Ang Duang describe the ritual dimension of his reign. Chandler argues that he set into motion a kind of “narrative performance.” Ledgerwood (2008b, 198) specifies the content of this “narrative performance”:

We can see Ang Duang desperately trying to orchestrate a set of relationships with Hindu deities, local spirits, the Buddhist *sangha* and, of course, ancestors. In other words, he was trying to reset the order of the cosmos. This is seen not only in the ritual procedures that he enacted, but in his attempts to recast linguistic etiquette and to rename the titles of people and places.

While it is clear that Ang Duang is now seen in retrospect as a powerful king fulfilling the traditional model of Buddhist kingship, it also needs to be pointed out that “he also acted as a patron of the Thommayut sect ...” (Osborne 2008, 52). His years in Bangkok with the prince who eventually became Thailand’s “Westernizing” and “modernizing” symbol, the king (Mongkut) who established the reform-minded, disciplinary-conscious, doctrinally-focused, and academically competent *Thammayut Nikaya*,



made him more than simply a “past-conscious” king. In Ang Duang we can see the intriguing figure of a culture hero who was simultaneously also regarded as modernizer. A perfect example of this combination is illustrated by the fact that he imported a coin-minting machine from Birmingham, England, and proceeded to mint coins with the stylized façade of Angkor Wat (*ibid.*). He therefore appealed to Buddhists, lay and monastic, of both the *boran* and *samay* dispositions. He was, and *is*, the perfect historical figure of the Khmer past to associate with the championing of *pchum ben*.

### The Thammayut Disposition at Wat Svay Por Pe

Having observed the rites of *bay ben* at three of Phnom Pehn’s largest and well-known pagodas, all of them belonging to the Mahanikay order, we arrived at the closed gates of Wat Svay Por Pe, a Thammayut Nikay pagoda, at a very dark and quiet 3:45 a.m. in the early morning hours of the eighth night of *pchum ben*. Since its founding by King Mongkut in Bangkok in the mid-nineteenth century, the Thammayut nikay has embodied what is now meant by *samay*: it claims to represent the reformed, enlightened, rational, modern, educated, disciplinary conscious, and doctrinally oriented sect of Theravada monasticism. While this self-image is generally accurate, it should not be forgotten that most of the monks of the Mahanikay, as Kobayashi indicated earlier, also could be categorized as *samay*. Historically, however, it has been the Thammayut who have been identified as such. The Thammayut has also been associated, of course, with Thai Buddhism and Thai national interests owing to the origins of its impetus within mid-nineteenth century Thai royalty. For this reason, at various times in the twentieth century, beginning in the 1920s and 1930s with the French colonialists and continuing with the Cambodian and Lao communists of the 1960s through 1980s, those politicians who have worried about the power of Bangkok becoming an encroachment in Cambodia and Laos have cast an especially jaundiced eye on the Thammayut, primarily out of concern that these monks could be used by the Thai to extend their spheres of political influence. Following the departure of the Vietnamese and the holding of U.N. sponsored elections in the early 1990s, the Thammayut had been allowed to return to Cambodia. Indeed, in many quarters, they were encouraged.

I wouldn’t say that I was delighted that early morning to discover that the temple was shut up tight with no signs of life, especially given the effort required to be prepared for field work at 2:30 in the morning, but I was not surprised and actually a little delighted to find that this pagoda did not observe *bay ben*. We found our way to a 24 hour coffee shop located in a nearby hotel and wiled away the time until twilight when we returned

to the temple and found some stirrings afoot. The first lay people that we came across told us that this pagoda does not allow its people to perform *bah baay ben* because it is Thammayut, an answer that we expected precisely. When we subsequently put this matter to the *achar* who had shown up for the regular early morning chanting of *suttas*, he became a little defensive and asserted that it was really not the decision of the pagoda to do the ritual or not. Rather, he argued that it depended on whether or not the laity wanted to hold the ritual. Betraying his *samay* disposition, he asserted that Wat Svay Por Pe's laity simply found no need to perform this rite. I suspected that the *achar* was being a bit disingenuous. My suspicions were deemed correct when, after a rather unsuccessful attempt to interview an elderly woman who was preoccupied with cooking the monks' breakfasts in the refectory, we encountered a well-spoken layman who was an ex-monk at this *wat*. He told us that when he was in the monkhood that he and the other monks of the *wat* had agreed to hold *bah baay ben* and provided for the ritual from 1998 until 2002 when they stopped. The reason they had decided to "allow" *bay ben* back then was that they wanted the people to have a ritual in which to express their "solidarity" at the pagoda. Unfortunately, he said, not many people showed up for the ritual because everybody knew that this is a Thammayut pagoda and they simply did not expect *bay ben* to be held there. He went on to add that one of the other reasons that this pagoda no longer allows people to perform *baay ben* is that some youths used this ritual as a time and place where they could be involved in some "love related" activities.

The ex-monk now turned layman seemed to have a lot of opinions about different types of *pretas* and which types could really be helped by *bay ben*. He insisted that *pretas* could receive merit only from living relatives via monks. He said that *bay ben* could physically benefit only those beings who had been reborn as animals. He did not seem to be aware of the philosophically more nuanced view that it is actually only the *vinnaṇa* (consciousness) on whose behalf merit can be transferred. In writing specifically about this very point, Davis (2009, 141–142) says that

[m]erit is never made on behalf of the *bralin* or *khmoc*, but only on behalf of the Buddhist *vinnaṇa*, that which travels through death and takes rebirth. The Abhidhammic perspective that prevails during the funeral rites emphasizes that all conditioned and compounded things . . . must decay and break up again. The *vinnaṇa* will take rebirth as a result of its karma, which can be positively affected by the making of merit. But the *vinnaṇa* is not the whole of the self. The amoral vital spirits must also be channeled and dealt with. Indeed, while death provides an opportunity for merit-making and an improved rebirth in the figure of the *vinnaṇa*, it represents a danger in the release of other vital spirits.

This metaphysical discussion begins to indicate why it is the case that the *pretas* are regarded ambivalently, as figures in need of compassion and generosity on the one hand,

but also figures to be feared for their potential threats on the other if their calls for help are not heeded. Merit transfer is thus not only an attempt to turn *pretas* into proper ancestors and exemplary moral standards, it is also a way to control the potential negative fall out of the disintegration of the dead, that is, when the *vinnana* separates from the rest of the psycho-physical compounded being.

Fortunately, enough laity came to the pagoda that early morning as a matter of course that we were able to garner other opinions about why the non-performance of *bay ben* was not problematic. According to a lay woman, who was about 45 years old and had come to Phnom Penh from Prey Veng province, she had bought some clothes and given some money to her parents at the beginning of *kan ben*. She had gone home in order to make these gifts to her parents and to meet her relatives, but she had not gone to the pagoda in her village. She said that as long as her parents are still alive, they will go to pagoda, make merit and assist the dead family relations; she just offers them some money now to help them make merit but does not feel obligated to go to the pagoda herself. Asked if she was afraid of being cursed by deceased relatives, *pretas* who might be expecting her to transfer merit at the pagoda, she replied that her parents had taken care of the matter by dedicating merit to them already; so her deceased relations would not curse her. When her parents died, then she would assume responsibility. Her comments were very interesting in that they underscored how the making of merit for deceased relations is primarily a family affair. In the same way that some families attempt to send a family member every night during *kan ben* to perform *bay ben*, other families delegate the responsibility to perhaps only the parents. In either case, the process of assisting dead kin remains a collective effort. This woman also reflected a view that we often heard: a confession of agnosticism in relation to whether or not *bay ben* or merit transfer actually directly affects their deceased kin. This agnosticism, however, does not lead to a decision not to perform the rites. The rites are performed anyway. For they foster a degree of moral consciousness.

Finally, we interviewed an elderly woman, one of the assistant cooks in the refectory who added another important perspective. She said that she felt that the question of whether or not that merit reached deceased relatives depends on the moral conditions of the monks at the *wat*. She said that she strongly believed in the moral goodness of the monks at Wat Svay Por Pe and she felt confident that she could transfer merit to her deceased relatives because the monks are so well disciplined. That is, she believed that these monks were most worthy objects of good intentions. What was so significant about her remark was that though the monks of the Thammayut nikay are generally not enthusiastic about rites such as *pchum ben*, their moral integrity, owing to their commitment to the monastic discipline of the *Vinaya*, establishes them as very efficacious objects of

support. They are, ironically, the best catalysts for the power of merit transfer, despite the fact that many are skeptical of the practice and don't necessarily encourage it among their supporters.

### Memorializing the Dead at Wat Kokos

Forty kilometers southwest of Phnom Penh, Wat Kokos was an interrogation center and prison where the bones of approximately 8,000 Cambodians were discovered after the Khmer Rouge had been dislodged. We arrived a little after 3 a.m. on the eleventh day of *pchum ben* to a completely empty and darkened temple, except for a solitary man standing in front of what is normally the refectory for the 14 monks of residence. He told us that he would be the patron for the morning rite and that villagers would begin to arrive around 4 a.m. Our arrival had awakened his wife and two old women who were sleeping under mosquito netted tents on the floor. One of the old women came to peer at us out of curiosity. We gradually found a verandah away from the others who had been sleeping and the old woman joined us and the chief lay patron for a chat. She told us that she had come to Wat Kokos for seven nights and so it seemed that the practice of visiting pagodas seven times has been concentrated here at this one place. We soon learned why: her husband and one of her sons were murdered here, her husband, she said, for simply complaining that he was hungry, interpreted as a sign of resistance to the *angkar*. The merit she earns each year for her annual pilgrimage to Wat Kokos she hopes will alleviate the suffering of her husband and son in the other world, though she is not sure about their rebirth destinies. Soon she was interrupted by the boisterous *achar* who seemed to crave attention, and yet at the same time offered us only evasive answers to our questions except one: he agreed that the social disaster inflicted by the Pol Pot regime has definitely had an effect on the rising popularity of *pchum ben*.

At 5 a.m., rather than 4 a.m., some villagers arrived, perhaps 40 to 50, who joined the other 20 or so others who had been sleeping and who were now moving about. Incense was lit and about 75–80 people moved over to the *vihara* and began to circumambulate the building in proper clockwise *pradaksina* fashion. This group of laity was a younger set than usual, and, of course, entirely rural. During their circumambulation, they stopped at the spirit shrines located at the four points (NE, SE, SW, and NW) on the platform where they briefly sat in quiet meditation, remembering the names of those to whom they offered *pindas* (see Photo 9). Their *pinda* plates were almost entirely rice balls, though some had wrapped candy. None had the white paper spirit effigies we had come to see at each *wat* in Phnom Penh. Moreover, there were no receptacles that had



Photo 9 To Spirits



Photo 10 Wat Kokos Votive Stupas

been put into place to receive the *pinda*. Instead, they were gently placed at either the base of the six spirit shrines lining the platform, or tossed over the three feet high decorative railing surrounding the *vihara*'s platform. Following the three circumambulations, the liturgical service began inside the sermon hall, a service that lasted roughly half an hour and included the chanting of the *Namassaka*, the *Namotassa*, the *pancasila* (five moral precepts), the *Parabhava Sutta*, the *Tirokudda Sutta* and the *anumodana*. What was done differently at this temple was that the *bay ben pradakshina* was performed first, and the liturgical chanting followed.

Following the monks' liturgical chanting, we met with one of the *wat*'s lay patrons who was instrumental in re-establishing the *wat* back in 1981, about a year and a half after the Vietnamese had chased the Khmer Rouge to the northwest. He told us that over the years, many people had come to the *wat* knowing that their relatives had been taken here and that this was the last place in which they had breathed. He spoke of the practice of grabbing a handful of dirt from the temple grounds to become a surrogate for their relations' ash to be interred into a family *stupa*. Indeed, an inordinate number of votive *stupas* seem to have built on the temple's premises, many, we learned, by Khmer-American refugees returning to memorialize their dead (see Photo 10). This pattern was rather spectacularly illustrated by a *stupa* erected by a surviving wife who had built a shrine containing hundreds of skulls placed within a glass enclosed room (see Photo 11). The room measured about five meters by five meters and the pile of skulls was about four to five feet in height, the legacy of 3 years, 8 months and 20 days.

We learned that the temple would be thronged on the final day of *pchum ben* as hundreds would make their ways from Phnom Penh to this shrine in order to express their care and affection for the dead. We also learned about the cultic activities of a Sino-Khmer lay woman whose father had been killed at this center. She also built a *stupa* filled with bones of those exhumed for commemoration. She not only transferred merit during *pchum ben*, but she also performed the *cheng meng* Chinese rite as well.



Photo 11 Skulls

### Chinese Influence on *Pchum Ben*?

There are some *samay* oriented intellectuals in Phnom Penh who argue that the practice of *pchum ben* owes its origins to Chinese influence and that this explains why the rite is not found in any other Theravada country. It is worth exploring briefly this possibility if, for nothing else, we can arrive at a comparative understanding of ancestor rites on the one hand, and concomitantly an understanding about what is unique about Khmer ritual practice. In what follows, it is undeniable that, in general, the medieval Chinese ghost festival functioned somewhat analogously to *pchum ben*. It was likely the most important festival for Chinese Buddhists during the liturgical year. Moreover, it was through proving its relevance to the family that Buddhism was able to gain a foothold in China. This was not altogether easily done, since the story of the Gotama Buddha's quest for enlightenment included his renunciation of family and society. Another Buddhistic logic had to be invented or introduced in the Chinese context, and it is this logic that bears a fundamental similarity to the logic of *pchum ben*.

The Chinese ghost festival was held on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month in medieval China (Teiser 1996, xii). Teiser begins his masterful study of the medieval ghost festival in China by introducing the Buddhist religious logic of this rite in this way:

Offerings to monks were especially efficacious on the full moon of the seventh month, since this was the day when the Sangha ended its three-month summer retreat. During this period monks abstained from contact with lay society and pursued an intensified regimen of meditation completed with monastic ritual [that] Ennin refers to as "releasing themselves," confession and repentance of their transgressions in front of other monks. Having accumulated ascetic energy in retreat, monks released it in communion with householders. Moreover, the festival was held just at the time of the autumn harvest. Thus, the ghost festival not only marked the symbolic passage of monks and ancestors to new forms of existence, it also ushered in the completion of a cycle of plant

life. Coming at the juncture of the full moon, the new season, the fall harvest, the peak of monastic asceticism, the rebirth of ancestors, and the assembly of the local community, the ghost festival was celebrated on a broad scale by all classes of people throughout medieval Chinese society. (*ibid.*, 4)

While the timing of *pchum ben* in Cambodia is not literally at the same time as the performance of the “ghost festival” in medieval China, it does come within 15 days of the end of *vassa*, the rain retreat season celebrated by Theravada monks. The power of the *sangha*, or better, the purity of the *sangha* reaches its apogee at the conclusion of the rain-retreat. That is precisely why the monks are regarded as such efficient conduits for merit transfer during *pchum ben*: their conditions of purity render the charitable acts of which they function as objects all the more efficacious.<sup>54</sup> If, for a moment, we shift this discussion from time to space, we gain insights into how the pagoda has become an intensified pure space during the *vassa* rain retreat season, owing to the monks’ ascetic religious pursuits and, as such, becoming the most auspicious venue for interactions between the living and the dead.<sup>55</sup> The monastery is precisely the place where the dead, who in the form of *pretas*, represent a suffering yet potentially dangerous presence for the living, may be safely encountered. The *pretas*, condemned as they are to suffering in the abode of *pretaloka*, or in hell as a result of their immoral behavior while among the living, are here offered a chance for rehabilitation in the space that has been morally sanctified/purified. They must come to temples to gain some relief from their conditions of suffering. They can search for help in seven different temples, but it is only within temple space that any transformations in their plights may occur. Moreover, the sanctified space of the temple provides the laity with a safe space to interact with the potentially dangerous dead.

Like the medieval ghost festival in China, *pchum ben* occurs temporally amidst a liminality of various conditions, in times of transition. *Bay ben* must be performed in the

54) Teiser points out that in the *Yu-lan-p'en Sutra*, “[t]he Buddha instructs Mu-lien and all other devoted sons to make offerings to the assembly of monks as they emerge from their summer retreat. Rather than sending gifts directly to their ancestors, people should henceforth use the Sangha as a medium: benefits will pass through monks to the inhabitants of the other world. In fact, monks possess the distinctive ability to multiply the blessings that reach the ancestors in hell. Having renounced the bonds of kinship, Buddhist ascetics generated a store of power made even greater over the course of the summer meditation retreat. For the price of a small offering during the ghost festival families may tap that power, directing its benefits to their less fortunate members.”

55) In explaining how the power of monks reached its zenith after the *pavarana* and *kathina* rites, Teiser (1996, 205) explains: “Themes of renewal and regeneration are evident in this culminating ritual . . . .” Monks “released themselves: in several ways: they loosened the rules of discipline, they unleashed ascetic energies built up during the retreat, they submitted to criticism from other monks, and through their repentance they let loose the positive forces of purification and renewal.”

early morning hours just before or during the breaking of the day in twilight. *Pchum ben* season is celebrated during the end of the raining season, at the end of *vassa*, just before a new season of planting occurs. *Pretas* almost always make their presence known to their surviving kin, as in the *Petavatthu* stories, in dreams, a condition of consciousness that is neither fully awake nor fully unconscious. *Pretas* are, themselves, constitutive of a form of “betweenness,” waiting and aspiring to be reborn as humans or as *devatas* in the heavens.

What Teiser has described in the Chinese context is also ever so the case among the Khmer in terms of the presence of liminality and how the merit transfer rites of *pchum ben* are thought to affect the dead. He points out that the rituals of the medieval Chinese ghost festival helped

... to effect the passage of the dead from the status of a recently deceased threatening ghost to that of a stable, pure and venerated ancestor. Although it is observed on a yearly schedule not synchronized with the death of a single person, the ghost festival marks an important transition in the life of the family, which is composed of members both living and dead. Like mortuary rites performed in many other cultures, the festival subsumes the potentially shattering consequences of the death of individuals under the perpetually regenerating forces of the community and the cosmos. (Teiser 1996, 13–14)

This seems to be precisely the function of *pchum ben* among the Khmer.

Returning to these themes in the conclusion of his study, Teiser further unpacks the significance of liminality as a condition that the recently deceased must negotiate and argues that this liminality serves as the primary reason for why dispositions toward the dead among the living are necessarily ambivalent. What he writes about the medieval Chinese context resonates again vibrantly with the Khmer in this instance as well: how ancestors of the past seven generations can be positively affected by these rites.

The celebration of the seventh moon marks the passage of the dead from the liminal stage, where they are troublesome, threatening, and feared as ghosts, to the stage of incorporation, in which they assume a place of honor within the family. In this liminal phase the dead lack clothes, they have subhuman bodies, they have difficulty eating, they are constantly in motion. Ghosts are a species in transition . . . . Ghost festival offerings are frequently dedicated to this dangerously shifting “all sinners in the six paths of rebirth.” But offerings are also made to the dead in the phase of incorporation, after they have joined the group of ancestors stretching back seven generations. As ancestors they have successfully completed the journey from life, through death, to rebirth. They are welcomed back into the family as its immortal progenitors, creators and maintainers of the values necessary to sustain the life of the kinship group.

Far from indicating a confusion of categories or an accident of history, the coupling of apprehension about ghosts with the propitiation of kin represents a necessary ambivalence about the dead. The ghost festival articulates the fear that the dead have not been resettled and might con-



tinue to haunt the community as strangers, at the same time that it expresses the hope that the dead be reincorporated at the head of the family line. (*ibid.*, 220–221)

Finally, what Teiser has to say about the centrality of the ghost festival to the ethos of family religion, and how the centrality of the Buddhist monks' role in the ghost festival made them indispensable to the family-oriented religion of the Chinese, also resounds loudly within the Khmer Buddhist social and religious world too.

While it did mark an important event in the yearly cycle of life for monks, [the ghost festival] was even more firmly anchored in the dominant social institution of China, the family. Its rituals became part of the system of observances that united living and ancestral members of the family, reinforcing their reciprocal obligations and harmonizing the rhythms of family and monastic life with agricultural schedule . . . (*ibid.*, 17)

While the ghost festival articulated the heart of family religion, it also became the means by which Buddhism secured its place within Chinese society.

The spread of the ghost festival in medieval China signals the movement of the Buddhist monkhood into the very heart of family religion, monks were not simply accessories to the continued health of the kinship group; their role was nothing less than essential for the well-being of the family. [How] Buddhism was domesticated in China [is] particularly clear in the ghost festival—through the inclusion of monks as an essential party in the cycle of exchange linking ancestors and descendants. (*ibid.*, 196–197; brackets mine)

It is quite clear from Teiser's considerations that the general social function of the ghost festival and *pchum ben* is that both rites unite the family and the *sangha* as the principal players of these respective (Chinese and Khmer) religious cultures. That is precisely why this particular ritual has become so functionally important in the post-Khmer Rouge era in Cambodia during a time of recovery and rehabilitation. *Pchum ben* functions as a primary means of effecting the recovery and prosperity of the family. It also emphasizes how the *sangha* has become a necessity for a family-dominated Khmer religious culture.

Having been impressed by striking parallels in the respective functions of the Chinese ghost festival and *pchum ben*, it is more than simply interesting to note that during Ang Duang's reign, the very time when *pchum ben* was purportedly established in Khmer culture by this ritually-minded Buddhist king, that "[a]t a rough estimate, it seems we should envisage Phnom Penh's population in the late 1860s as being upwards of half composed of Chinese, with Cambodians at most a quarter of the total and the remainder made up of . . . diverse ethnic groups" (Osborne 2008, 57). This demographic fact would seem to constitute circumstantial evidence supporting the thesis that *pchum ben* owes its recent existence among the Khmer to the influence of Chinese culture.

While this discussion about the Chinese ghost festival yields fundamental insights into the parallel function of these rites for the well-being and maintenance of the family in China as well as in Cambodia, it is another question to attribute the sole existence of *pchum ben* in Cambodia to a matter of Chinese influence, demographics notwithstanding. Davis has noted the great functional similarities that exist between the Chinese ghost festival and *pchum ben*, yet he stakes out a position in juxtaposition to the thesis that *pchum ben* derives from Chinese influence. He refers (2009, 160) to *pchum ben* as

... the most important ritual within the Buddhist calendar. It is uncommon in the Theravada Buddhist world: while Chinese Buddhists perform a well known similar ritual on behalf of hungry ghost ancestors, the rituals appear to possess divergent textual warrants and histories.

Davis' point is correct insofar as the Buddhist textual warrants for *pchum ben* are clearly Pali sources, especially the *Petavatthu*. But this does not dislodge the similar chartering importance of the Buddhist *sangha* in the ritual transactions concerned with advancing the dead to ancestor status in both contexts. What may be at some variance, however, is the relative historical importance of rites for the ancestral dead in establishing a legitimate presence for the *sangha* in both societies. One of the great strengths of Teiser's study is that it brilliantly supports the thesis that the way Buddhism became assimilated and anchored in Chinese culture was through its adaptation to the centrality of Chinese familial religion. While Theravada Buddhism's presence in Khmer culture was no doubt assisted by its relevance to the overriding importance attached to the family, there may have been other compelling reasons for its grassroots adoption in fourteenth and fifteenth century Cambodia.

It is well known how the legacy of Angkor's high cultural achievements lived on for centuries among the Thai.<sup>56</sup> It was not just the legacy of Angkor that inspired royalty within the river civilizations of mainland Southeast Asia. It was also the Theravada ideology of kingship found within the Pali *Tipitaka* centering on the figures of the *cakkavattin* and the paradigmatic figure of Asoka, as these had been embodied in Sinhala forms of kingship, especially during the reigns of the Polonnaruva kings, Parakramabahu I being the best example. Forest (2008, 18) has suggested that "Thai princes found in reformed Theravada a powerful means of making the societies over which they gained control cohere around their own person." He goes on to suggest that, in addition, perhaps a good measure of dynamism existed in the relations between monastic communities in neighboring *mandalas* (Lanna, Sukhotai, Ayutthaya and Lang Xang) and that perhaps

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56) See, for example, the fact that into the late nineteenth century Pali texts in central Thai monasteries were still being written in the *khom* (Khmer) script.

Cambodia, owing to the fact that Jayavarman VII's son was one of those monks who travelled to Polonnaruva in the thirteenth century to receive ordination in the newly reformed *sangha*, might indicate intimate monastic relations between Theravada Khmer and Thai monk communities. He further notes that the involvement of Khmer monks in the fifteenth century *sangha* delegation who went to Lanka to be re-ordained before returning to Chiang Mai to take up residence. In any case, he speculates (*ibid.*, 19) that "[s]uccessive defeats by the Siamese together with enormous demographic losses suffered by the Angkorean empire prompted the last Angkorean kings to adopt the religious system that seemed to have provided so much power to the Thai princes." While such an argument leaves room for identifying other reasons for Theravada's wholesale adoption at the level of Khmer villages and Khmer families, it does underscore the intimate relations that obtained between kingship and political rule that solidified Theravada's position as the ideological umbrella providing legitimation of power within Khmer religious culture in the post-Angkor era.

Beyond this concern, there remains the fact that there is some archeological evidence to suggest that *pchum ben* existed far earlier than either Ang Duang's nineteenth century reign or during the time of Theravada's introduction to grassroots Khmer village culture in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The earliest reference we possess to Bjhum Pinda [*pchum ben*] is an inscription on the East Bray, the enormous, now dry reservoir to the east of the ancient city now called Angkor Dham, in which the East Mebon temple was later constructed. King Yasovarman built the East Baray around 900 CE, and inscribed the wall with references to Bjhum Pinda. The ritual described differs from the contemporary celebration as it was oriented to dead soldiers rather than familial ancestors . . . (Davis 2009, 162)

If this inscriptional evidence from material culture is taken into account, then it would seem to be the case the origins of the *pchum ben* are to be found in Angkor, or even possibly among the more ancient strands of Mon culture, and that it transcended the family in its object of concern.

In a conversation about the possibility of Chinese influence on *pchum ben*, Ang Choulean stressed the major differences, in his view, that separate the Chinese practice of venerating ancestors from the Khmer and therefore render it unlikely that a Chinese source is responsible for *pchum ben*. He notes that Chinese do not seek to keep their ancestors at bay for 50 out of 52 weeks a year.<sup>57)</sup> Moreover, their festival is clearly to transform and liberate for the purpose of ancestors ultimately gaining nirvana, as in the famous story of Mu-lien traversing the hells in search of rescuing his suffering mother.

57) Personal communication, October 13, 2010, Reyum Institute, Phnom Penh.

That story, which became so central to the ethos of Chinese Buddhism, clearly reflects the Mahayana *bodhisattva* ethic.

We may never resolve this issue entirely. What complicates it is that both the Chinese and Khmer traditions of familial religion have been impacted by Buddhist thought and practice. It may be this shared history of Buddhism, especially as it relates to how the *sangha* functioned in both social contexts, is what accounts for such remarkable parallels. That the traditions were inflected by different textual sources is obvious, and no doubt further inflected by antecedent cultural histories that include Taoist and Confucian trajectories on the Chinese side, and the legacy of Mon culture for the Khmer.

### ***Pchum Ben* Proper and *Bangsukol* at Wat Tralaeng Kaeng**

On the final *Pchum Ben* day proper, Phnom Penh, except for its colorful pagodas brimming with people dressed in their best finery, carrying their sumptuous festival foods to be offered to the monks for breakfast or lunch on behalf of their departed kin, is, indeed, something of a genuine ghost town. The evening before on the 14<sup>th</sup> night, the royal family has briefly processed from their palace grounds across Sisowath Quay to the Tonle Sap River bank accompanying a festooned, *naga*-shaped boat with its *wat*-shaped canopy for the protection of its passengers, seven generations of royal ancestors. The boat is laden with food—ripening bananas, rice-cakes in banana leaves, fruits, and vegetables—to ease their ancestors' return to the abode of the dead. The boat is carried by 12 ceremonial clad *brahmans*, preceded by a flute-playing orchestra of four and protected by an honor guard of eight. About 30 relatives of the royal family clad in white finery, while mostly men, comprise the procession that follows, a procession led by four pairs of pre-pubescent girls and boys. The boat is lowered from a canopied platform on to a bamboo raft that is waiting in the river, and then towed to a rented yacht, "Paris One." Some of the family members board the rented yacht and accompany their ancestors down river into the night. While this marks the official close of interaction with the ancestors, the rite of sending the ancestors home is carried out in the afternoon or evening at pagodas throughout Phnom Penh and in the rural provinces on the final *pchum ben* day in the afternoon. It is one of two primary rites observed on the final festive day and officially marks the conclusion of the *pchum ben* season (see Photo 12). The ancestors and *pretas* are sent back to their proper abodes.

At the same time that Phnom Penh is a shell of its normal bustling self, the countryside has come alive with family reunions, the hallmark of which is a family visit to the family pagoda on *pchum ben* day. I wanted to make sure that I spent *pchum ben* day at a



Photo 12 Temple Boat



Photo 13 Monks Feast

village pagoda, so we decided to spend the morning at Wat Tralaeng Kaeng in Kompong Chhnang just north of the old capital of Udong.

The centrifugal force of *pchum ben* in calling the family home was also a matter of methodological concern for me, owing to the fact that my research assistants were often telephoned during that morning by their family members who were asking why they were not where they needed to be. We had decided on Wat Tralaeng Kaeng for several reasons, one of which was its proximity to the native home of one of my research assistants. Trying to do fieldwork on *pchum ben* day was a bit like trying to work on Thanksgiving or Christmas in the United States. The compelling call of the family needed to be heeded, so our work involved only an early to mid-morning stint. But it proved well worth the effort.

In addition to sending one's ancestors back to their proper places and feasting the monks at their two morning meals (see Photo 13), the other important rite to observe on the final day of *pchum ben* is *bangsukol*.<sup>58</sup> *Bangsukol* is a simple rite of merit transfer normally solicited by an extended family for its departed kin. It is probably the most important Buddhist ritual for the laity regularly performed during the year, with the exception of a funeral or a monastic ordination of a family member. Special gifts for monastic comfort and care are presented to monks who then chant Pali *gathas* on behalf of the family dead of the past seven generations, and also for the benefit of surviving parents as well. *Bangsukol*, in effect, is a ritual that is designed to promote the health and longevity of the lineage. The rite is often held in front of a votive *stupa* containing the ashes of the family dead.

58) *Bangsukol* is the Khmer rendering of Sanskrit and Pali *pamsakula* which has two primary meanings within the Buddhist context: 1) it refers to the robes made out of rags worn by the ascetic *dhutanga* wandering monks; and 2) at least in Sri Lanka, it refers to the Buddhist funeral ceremony in which the body is cremated and turned to ashes. In both instances, there is a clear association with what is "dead to the world."

Since the construction of votive *stupas* is a costly affair well beyond the means of most villagers or even many in the middle class, some of the *stupas* in the *wat* are accessible to any Buddhist family for their use in making merit transfer offerings. Reciting the specific names of the dead for meritorious benefit of the departed is a *sine qua non*. There seems to be some variation with regard to which Pali *suttas* are chanted for the family by the monks. The monk who chanted at Wat Tralaeng Kaeng and another monk from a suburban Phnom Penh *wat* both mentioned portions of the *Dhammapada* as essential. What was also essential, the Wat Tralaeng Kaeng *achar* insisted, was that the texts articulate the fact of *anicca*, the transitoriness of existence. From the *achar*, we also learned that the *Vessantara Jataka* used to be chanted at this *wat* each day during the 15 day observance before the time of the Khmer Rouge. Now, the monks no longer do this because they do not have the knowledge of the text, according to the *achar*. The interruption of this tradition seemed another example of what Kobayashi had pointed out: that the civil war, the Khmer Rouge era, and the Vietnamese occupation had resulted in the elimination of many so-called *boran* or traditional practices. In any case, the fact that the *Vessantara* used to be chanted in conjunction with *pchum ben* reflects the fact that, like *bun phravet* in Lao religious culture, *pchum ben* is the primary merit-making rite of the year.

## Conclusion

Observing *kan ben* and *pchum ben* in the rural areas of Cambodia provides something of a contrast with the manner in which it is observed in Phnom Penh's Buddhist *wats*. The social religious experience in the countryside is far more intimate in nature for most of the participants, owing to the fact that it is shared primarily with family members. It is a family homecoming affair as members of the family, both the living and the dead, are reconnected through solemn observance within a village context. One might say that villages also reassemble in a unified revivification. At the large and major temples of Phnom Penh, the experience is considerably more anonymous in nature, given the large throngs in attendance and despite the attempts of monastic and temple officials to foster a type of congregational social experience. While those who attend in Phnom Penh certainly retain a motivation to assist the familial dead, they come from a broad cross-section of socio-economic backgrounds and are united only by a common ritual purpose, and not the shared intimacy of village life and history. Not surprisingly, overt ties to the interests of the state were clearly in evidence in Phnom Penh, especially at Wat Langka and Wat Unnalom. In these instances, a sense of celebrating the nation certainly did not eclipse the importance of the familial orientation, but its presence could not be denied either.

It remains, in conclusion, to specify the Buddhist logic of *pchum ben*, to underscore its religious significance in addition to its profound associations with familial ancestor veneration and family solidarity. That is, while there is an intrinsic religious conceptuality to ancestor veneration, there is also an accompanying spirit of Buddhist rationality to *pchum ben*. What makes the ritual performances of *bay ben* and *bangsukol* specifically Buddhist in the religious sense is that they both foster the fundamental act of taking refuge in the Buddha, the *dhamma* and the *sangha*. Or, to put the matter in even more specific terms, these rites stress the importance of recognizing the Buddha's *dhamma* as preserved by the *sangha*, a recognition clearly articulated in the ancient chartering stories of the rite found within the *Petavatthu*. Merit produced is merit produced not because it is simply a mechanical transference of karmic power from one family member to another. Merit is merit because it is morally generated, and therefore has the power to morally regenerate in turn. Merit is morally generated because it comes from essentially *self-less* actions, actions generated by intentions that are not self-centered. Gifts made by the refuge-seeking laity to virtuous monks are basically sacrifices with "no strings attached." That is, gifts are not given to generate merit for oneself. They are given for the benefit of others, be it the monks who need gifts practically or the ancestors who may need the consequent merit because of their previous absence of moral consciousness. Thus, it is this ability to give, and the ability to rejoice (*anumodana*) in the intrinsic moral goodness of these ritual acts, that constitutes the Buddhist religious quality of *pchum ben*. Far from being simply a mechanistic ritual of maintenance, *pchum ben* rites foster a moral awareness that transcends concern for the self, a moral awareness that seems to be the realization of *anatta*. It is precisely this realization in the mode of merit transfer that was parlayed in Mahayana schools where it became the means by which *bodhisattvas* such as *Ksitigarbha* (Japanese: *Jizo*) and Amitabha were thought to rescue suffering sentient beings from the rounds of *samsara*. In the Theravada contexts, merit transfer remains the chief means of articulating an individual altruism that finds its object in the care and compassion one feels for the familial dead. In Cambodia, it has become the ritual venue for restoring the vitality of family and nation.

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# State Recognition or State Appropriation? Land Rights and Land Disputes among the Bugkalot/Ilongot of Northern Luzon, Philippines

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The Bugkalot/Ilongot were awarded the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) issued by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples in a joyful celebration on February 24, 2006. The CADT is a contemporary assertion of indigenous peoples' ability to negotiate claims to land, livelihood, and autonomy within the nation-state. So far, however, the acquisition of the Bugkalot/Ilongot CADT has not made any substantial difference in the everyday lives of the people of Gingin, a settlement located at the heartland of the Bugkalot area. Not only does the trend of in-migration of lowland settlers and other indigenous groups continue, there are heightening social tensions caused by growing numbers of land-grabbing incidents among the Bugkalot themselves. This issue is examined in the context of state-promoted settlement projects, the advance of capitalism, and the process of commodification, which have given rise to a new notion of exclusive landownership. State provision of land rights and capitalist market forces have combined to shape land relations in new and often surprising ways. By exposing some of the diverse and changing forms of dispossession, as well as the failure of *barangay* officials and government agencies in mediating and resolving land disputes, this article questions whether the seemingly novel avenues that the Philippine state has taken to "legitimate" indigenous peoples' rights, in practice, actually extend state control.

**Keywords:** Bugkalot/Ilongot, ancestral domain, land titling, land dispute, capitalism, dispossession

Several scholars have pointed out that the Philippines shows a positively progressive attitude toward indigenous peoples. It is one of the leading countries when it comes to legislations regarding indigenous peoples (Eder and McKenna 2004; Persoon *et al.* 2004). In 1987 the Philippine Constitution recognized indigenous peoples' rights to their ancestral territories and their rights to live in accordance with their own traditions, religions, and customs. How these rights are legally defined, and the procedures whereby indigenous communities can secure a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) as

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evidence of communal ownership of ancestral lands, are detailed in the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA or Republic Act 8371) of 1997 (Malayang 2001; Hirtz 2003; Eder and McKenna 2004). Hailed as a landmark piece of legislation (Rovillos and Morales 2002, 11), the IPRA is a rejection of the long-standing assimilationist policy of the Philippine state as part of its colonial legacy (Bennagen 2007, 182).

In 1998, less than a year after the passage of the IPRA, a petition before the Philippine Supreme Court was filed challenging the constitutionality of the IPRA and its ancestral domain ownership provisions as a violation of the Regalian Doctrine embodied in the Philippine Constitution. The Regalian Doctrine, a concept dating back to the days of the Spanish monarchy that still underpins the Philippines' legal system of landownership, declares that the state owns all public lands and natural resources.<sup>1)</sup> From the point of view of the Regalian Doctrine, most indigenous occupants are squatters on public lands, since any land not covered by official documentation is considered part of the public domain and owned by the state (Prill-Brett 1994; Lynch and Talbott 1995). The proposition that the IPRA and the Regalian Doctrine are incompatible was dismissed by the Supreme Court on December 6, 2000.<sup>2)</sup> The court upheld the constitutionality of the IPRA and explicitly recognized indigenous peoples' ownership of their ancestral lands (Bennagen and Royo 2000, 37; Crisologo-Mendoza and Prill-Brett 2009, 44).

Although the IPRA is praised as "a comprehensive law on indigenous peoples' rights unprecedented in the modern legal history of Southeast Asia" (Wenk 2007, 138), its constraints and limitations have become evident more than a decade after it came into effect. Critical assessments of the IPRA and the Philippine state's approach to "restorative justice" (Padilla 2008, 451) have revealed four main problems connected with the mapping and titling of ancestral domains. First, the IPRA is anthropologically naïve (Gatmaytan 2007, 21). It is based on simplistic, even romantic, assumptions about indigenous peoples. Indigenous communities are presented as economically self-sufficient and thus free of debt relations that force them to use land as collateral. They are thought to have a collective interest in preserving their cultures and traditions, as though they are not fascinated by mainstream lifestyles and willing to sell their land to purchase goods such as karaoke machines and refrigerators. The law also assumes bounded, homogenous communities on likewise bounded territories. This is an error that has been addressed in the anthropological literature (McDermott 2000; 2001; Van den Top and

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1) Article 12, Section 2 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution says: "All lands of the public domain, water, mineral, coal, petroleum and other mineral oils, all forces of potential energy, fisheries, forests or timber, wildlife, flora and fauna, and other natural resources are owned by the state" (Crisologo-Mendoza and Prill-Brett 2009, 43).

2) The 14 justices were evenly split.

Persoon 2000; Duhaylungsod 2001; Gatmaytan 2005; McKay 2005a; Gray 2009; Wenk forthcoming) but which still pervades policy-making in the Philippines.

Second, although the IPRA is also known as the Ancestral Domain Law, which recognizes the communal rights of indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands in a way that goes beyond all prior efforts, there are competing claims and conflicting state mandates to land and natural resources. Section 56 of the IPRA subjects the indigenous peoples' property rights to other existing rights. Moreover, the category "ancestral domain" is glaringly absent on the list of official land-use categories because these categories were determined long before the enactment of the IPRA, and no amendment has yet been made to rectify this omission (Wenk forthcoming). As a consequence, the state retains its prerogative to use and exploit ancestral domains for mining or logging.

Third, the implementation of the IPRA has been slow and ineffective (Eder and McKenna 2004; Gatmaytan 2007; Padilla 2008). The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the implementing agency stipulated in the law, has meager resources at its disposition. The constitutional insecurity of the IPRA mentioned above has been further exacerbated by the curtailing of the NCIP's budget to such a degree that the commission is rendered toothless, deprived of the means to exercise its mandate (Hirtz 2003, 902). Despite the NCIP's being under the Office of the President, lack of government funding hampers the implementation of the NCIP's programs, particularly the ancestral domain titling line. Also, the NCIP has acquired a reputation as a dumping ground for politicians' *protégés* who cash in on their patrons' political debts by seeking government positions. Thus, the impression at the indigenous grassroots is that NCIP officers continue the government tradition of doing nothing while waiting for their salaries and allowances (Padilla 2008, 468).

Finally, the mapping and titling of ancestral domains can serve as a vehicle for intensifying state control and territorial administrations over upland communities. As Li (2002, 274) points out, delineation produces the requisite lists, maps, census data, and agreements for pinning indigenous peoples in place and enmeshing them more firmly as state clients. The legal homogenization or standardization of the notion of, and rights to, ancestral lands also facilitates the exercise of state power (Gatmaytan 2005). Thus, the IPRA has an essential ambiguity or paradox: it can be read as an instrument for asserting indigenous self-determination or for the extension of state control and sovereignty over natural and human resources (Bennagen 2007).

To understand the relevance of the IPRA to indigenous peoples today and whether it has made any substantial difference in their lives, it is necessary to grasp the complexity and dynamics that attend the day-to-day practice of social life in local settings

(Gatmaytan 2007, 24). This article is a response to the IPRA's foremost critic, Augusto Gatmaytan, and his call for the importance of shifting away from a perspective dominated by the state, with its hegemonic categories and rules on land and resources, to looking into how specific actors in specific settings exercise their agency in pursuit of their respective rights or interests. The Bugkalot, or Ilongot as they are known in the previous anthropological literature, will provide the ethnographic context for discussion.

## The State and Indigeneity on the Frontier

The Bugkalot live at the headwaters of the Cagayan River in Northern Luzon, the area where the Sierra Madre mountain range meets the Caraballo Sur. Since the sixteenth century, the name Ilongot has been used in the colonial and ethnographic literatures to designate this Austronesian-speaking people (Fernandez and de Juan 1969, 84–85). The group has also been known by various other names: “Italon” by the Gaddang, “Ibilao” by the Isinai, and “Abaca” derived from the mountain river system where they were encountered (R. Rosaldo 2003 [1978]; Worcester 1906).<sup>3</sup> These names all entered documentary records, and only at the beginning of US colonial rule was the official classification of Ilongot instituted. However, the group call themselves and their language Bugkalot.

The endonym Bugkalot did not enter the ethnographic literature before the time of Michelle Rosaldo and Renato Rosaldo's fieldwork.<sup>4</sup> This reflects the historical fact that this group was never subjugated by the Spaniards or, for the majority of the group, the Americans. The Bugkalot have fiercely resisted incorporation into colonial states for several centuries. The agents of colonization have been various and diverse: ranging from the first military expeditions to the days of the mission outposts, from the American Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes to the present government of the Philippines. Until a few decades ago, the upland the Bugkalot occupied was a typical non-state space in Scott's definition: the population was sparsely settled, practiced slash-and-burn or shifting cultivation, maintained a mixed economy (including, for example, a reliance on forest products), and was highly mobile, thereby severely limiting the possibilities for reliable state appropriation (Scott 1995, 24–25; 1998, 186–187; 2009, 13). The sociocultural

3) Keesing (1962, 70) considered “Italon” and “Ibilao” also local names derived from the mountain river system in which the Ilongot were encountered.

4) Thus, Renato Rosaldo recorded, “I found that Ilongots called themselves ‘Bugkalot’. Whenever I asked about the name Ilongots looked puzzled and replied that ‘Bugkalot’ meant themselves, all of their group, and had no other significance” (R. Rosaldo 2003 [1978], 107).

characteristics of the Bugkalot, such as headhunting, lack of formal structure, bilateral kinship, and strong egalitarianism (R. Rosaldo and M. Rosaldo 1972; M. Rosaldo 1980; R. Rosaldo 1980), have contributed to the maintenance of the group's political autonomy. Human agency plays a significant role in creating and sustaining non-state spaces (Scott 2009). The Bugkalot have not merely taken advantage of their geographical remoteness and isolation from centers of state power; they have purposefully resisted the projects of nation building and state making.

An important dimension of state making is the homogenization, rationalization, and partitioning of space (Alonso 1994, 382). This involves what Scott (1998) calls state simplification. The process of state simplification refers to the strategy of the state to turn a complex, varying, and diverse social hieroglyph into a legible and administratively more convenient format through categorization and standardization. For the state, the natural world, including the actual social patterns of human interaction with nature, is "bureaucratically indigestible" in its raw form. Simplified approximations of the reality, therefore, are indispensable for the state.

State simplification is evident in the state's ideology and management of the frontier, and its relationship with indigenous peoples or ethnic minorities (Uson 2005). Gathering information about peoples and territories, taxation, registration, and land classification are the very means by which states have traditionally expanded power into areas not yet under politico-administrative control. In the process of internal territorialization, states divide their territories into complex and overlapping political and economic zones, rearranging people and resources within these units, and create regulations delineating how and by whom these areas can be used (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995, 387). An effective strategy for territorializing the frontier is sending settlers out to these regions to assert and consolidate state control (De Koninck 1996; Duncan 2004). The Philippines is no exception. The trend of settlers' large-scale migration into the Bugkalot area began in the late 1950s, and the original impetus for migration was state-organized resettlement projects.

The imperative of the state to bureaucratize space influences the state's approach to the demands of indigenous peoples, and its consequent construction of indigenous tenure (Gatmaytan 2005, 79). The complexity and variance of indigenous peoples' customary tenure and resource management practices are reduced to a fixed construction of communal ownership to facilitate manipulation and administration.<sup>5)</sup> Although the

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5) Such state simplifications, as Scott (1998, 211) puts it, have "the potential of becoming an obstacle to the process of constant visioning and revisioning, production and reproduction of local tenure rights, by which communities adapt to their changing environment."



IPRA is an attempt by the Philippine state to come to terms with indigenous peoples' rights within the framework of the nation-state, it also sets up the procedures for the investigation and documentation of largely unregulated frontier areas that are still, up until today, contested. In order to apply for their CADT, indigenous peoples have to produce the requisite lists, survey plans, maps, census data, agreements, and endorsements in the delineation process. By accepting the state as guarantor of their rights to land, indigenous peoples subscribe to the state's disputed claim of ownership of the lands they inhabit as part of the so-called public domain (Wenk forthcoming).<sup>6)</sup>

The construction of indigeneity as the permanent, collective attachment of a group of people to a fixed area of land in a way that marks them as culturally distinct is often evoked by lawmakers, scholars, and activists seeking to expose and contest the devastating threat to indigenous peoples' livelihoods posed by capitalism. However, the purpose of preventing dispossession may not be served by legislations based on state simplification. Moreover, in some countries the introduction of frameworks that rest on traditionalist assumptions of the centrality of territorial connection have been seen as effectively having a dispossessory effect (Merlan 1998; 2009; Povinelli 2002; Sylvain 2002). Thus, whether the titling of ancestral lands gives the Bugkalot greater land security must be examined in real-life settings.

### **The Bugkalot/Ilongot and Their Ancestral Domain**

Although the name Ilongot is widely used in documentary records and by other groups, many Bugkalot resent the term for its pejorative connotations. The word *Ilongot* is a Tagalog version of *igongot* (from the forest), which some Bugkalot along the Baler coast also use to refer to themselves, and connotes wildness and barbarity. Attempts have been made to change the name used in the official classification of indigenous peoples. Now the NCIP mainly calls this group of people Bugkalot. However, on their Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT), they are referred to as the Bugkalot/Ilongot.

The Bugkalot/Ilongot CADT was approved by the NCIP on July 26, 2003. But due to a lack of administrative efficiency and funding constraints, it was not officially awarded until February 24, 2006 (Figs. 1 and 2). The Bugkalot celebrated the awarding of their CADT with a joyful ceremony that consisted of feasting and dancing in Nagtipunan,

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6) CADT mapping and delineation is an intrinsically political act. Thus some indigenous peoples, such as the Banwa-on of northeastern Mindanao, contest the CADT delineation process and perceive the IPRA as an intrusive imposition of hostile forces (Gatmaytan 2007, 5–8).



**Fig. 1** The CADT Award Ceremony



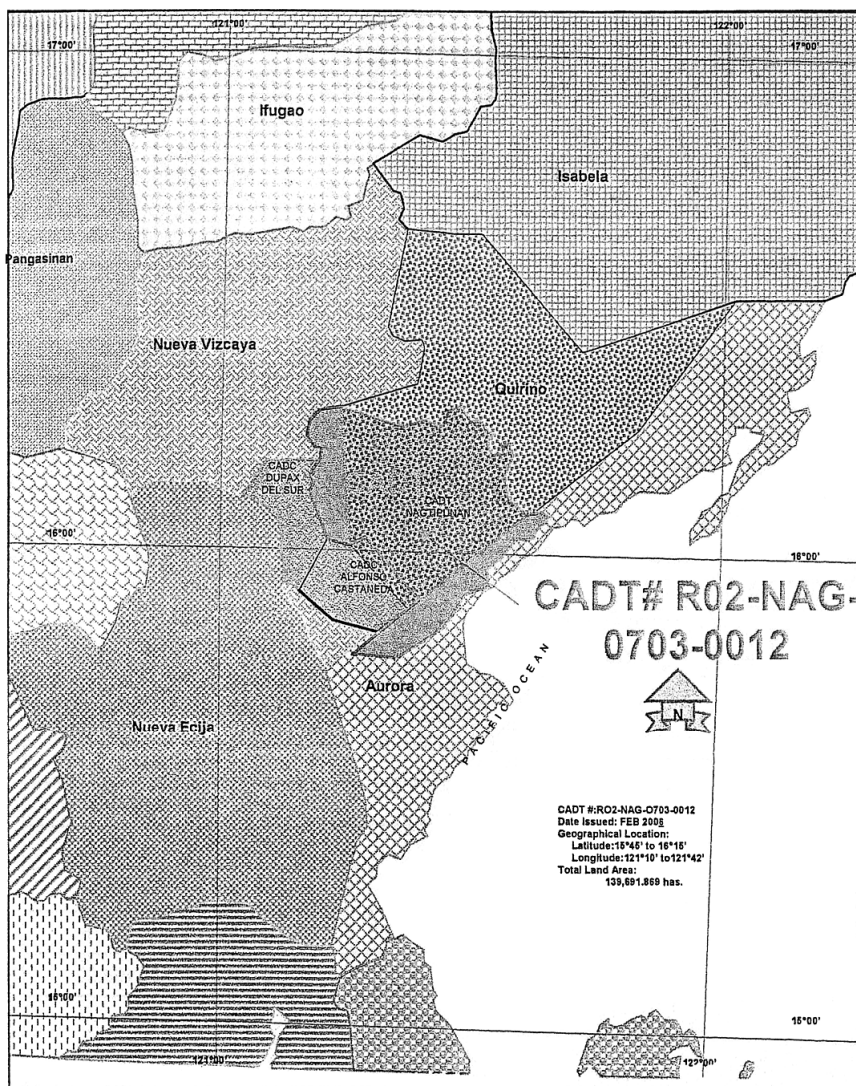
**Fig. 2** A Bugkalot Elder Holding a Copy of the CADT

Quirino Province, where the current Overall Chiefdom of the Bugkalot Confederation, Rosario K. Comma, also served as the mayor of the municipality.<sup>7)</sup> Because of the acquisition of their CADT, the Bugkalot are no longer “squatters in the eyes of the law,” as one Ilocano official in the provincial government of Nueva Vizcaya put it.

The CADT is a contemporary assertion of indigenous peoples’ ability to negotiate claims to land, livelihood, and autonomy within the nation-state. It is the result of the fruition and merging of several social and political agendas since the 1980s, namely, issues of environment, indigenous peoples’ struggle for autonomy, and sustainable development. The notion of ancestral domain is predicated on an assumption that land and people are inseparable, and that each group has a definitive place-based identity. However, this idealized picture of boundedness and rootedness is difficult to sustain when there are so many Igorot, Ifugao, and Ilocano settlers in the ancestral domain of the Bugkalot. In several barangays, settlers have outnumbered the Bugkalot and become the majority. When I discussed this issue with my Bugkalot friend who works for the NCIP’s provincial office in Solano, Nueva Vizcaya, his opinion was that “those Igorot and Ifugao should go back to their place in the Cordillera because they also have their own CADT.”

Despite the Bugkalot’s wishes, the settlers have no intention of leaving. In fact, the approved CADT is much smaller than the Bugkalot had hoped for, because of strong opposition from the settlers during the delineation process. The ancestral domain for the Bugkalot covers an area of about 139,691 hectares, located in five municipalities under the jurisdiction of three provinces (Nagtipunan, Quirino; Dipaculao and Maria Aurora,

7) The Bugkalot Confederation was formed in 1975 under the instruction of the PANAMIN (The Presidential Assistance on National Minorities), and an educated Bugkalot, Salvador Molina, was appointed as the first Overall Chiefdom. The current Overall Chiefdom was elected in 1997.



**Map 1** Location Map of Bugkalot CDT

Source: Bugkalot Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan, NCIP

Aurora; Kasibu and Dupax del Norte, Nueva Vizcaya) (Map 1). This CADT area does not correspond to the indigenous notion of Ka-Bugkalotan (the Bugkalot land). According to the Bugkalot Confederation, two municipalities of Nueva Vizcaya Province, Dupax del Sur and Alfonso Castaneda, should also be included in their ancestral domain. Therefore, they are now in the process of petitioning for the granting of a new CADT for these areas,

which will be incorporated into the existing Bugkalot CADT when it is approved.<sup>8)</sup> The exclusion of these two municipalities in the issued Bugkalot CADT is a result of ongoing political struggle and contestation between the Bugkalot and the settlers.<sup>9)</sup>

It is not surprising that the acquisition of the CADT does not prevent encroachment on Ka-Bugkalotan by new waves of settlers. After all, the intrusion of land-grabbing settlers is a long-standing problem in the area (M. Rosaldo 1980; R. Rosaldo 1980; Salgado 1994; Van den Top and Persoon 2000; Aquino 2003; 2004), and the IPRA largely fails to address this contentious issue. However, land grabbing among the Bugkalot themselves is a fairly recent phenomenon that has never been discussed before. This new phenomenon of “intimate” exclusions from land use involving kin and co-villagers (Hall *et al.* 2011) is more striking when the Bugkalot are assumed—or appear—to be such a homogeneous whole in the CADT. In what follows, I will focus on land disputes among the Bugkalot themselves. I suggest that this issue must be examined in the context of state-promoted settlement projects, the advance of capitalism, and the process of commodification, which give rise to a new notion of exclusive landownership. The ways in which the Bugkalot understand and explain this issue demonstrate the continuing importance of emotional idioms for the Bugkalot, and we can see in their attempt at resolving land disputes the culturally specific form of social change. The failure of barangay officials and government agencies in mediating and resolving land disputes reflects both the dynamism of Bugkalot culture and the inadequacy of the state in the delivery of service, support, and social well-being to the Bugkalot people.

## The Encroachment of Settlers and the Privatization of Land

Traditional Bugkalot subsistence is based on shifting cultivation and hunting, supplemented by some fishing and gathering. Rice is the main crop—and carries important social values—while sweet potato, cassava, manioc, tobacco, bananas, sugar cane, and a variety of vegetables are the major subsidiary crops. The usual sexual division of labor is that men hunt, fish, forage, and clear first-year swiddens, while women do most of the

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8) Previously, Dupax del Sur and Alfonso Castaneda were included in the Bugkalot CADC (Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claims). The completion of the conversion of CADC into CADT in these two municipalities will add approximately 60,000 hectares to the Bugkalot’s ancestral domain (Osingat 2007, 3).

9) Historically, the territory of the Bugkalot was much wider and encompassed the areas bordering the provinces of Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, Nueva Ecija, and Quezon (the province of Aurora was formerly part of Quezon). However, their territory has been reduced due to the Bugkalot’s resistance to colonial regimes and the encroachment of settlers.

routine gardening. Neither irrigation nor domestic animals are used in cultivation. Unlike shifting cultivators in many parts of the Philippines, the Bugkalot have never entered into symbiotic relations or debt bondage with wet-rice farmers in the nearby lowland (R. Rosaldo and M. Rosaldo 1972; R. Rosaldo 1979).

Land traditionally belongs to those who clear it; it is free and public good (R. Rosaldo and M. Rosaldo 1972, 104). The general principle in claiming land rights among the Bugkalot is to be the first to occupy the land by clearing it through the slash-and-burn method. Before the intrusion of settlers into Bugkalot territory, land was in abundant supply, and the Bugkalot did not recognize among themselves exclusive ownership right to land (M. Rosaldo 1980, 4). As with many shifting cultivators in the Philippine uplands, usufruct is more important than ownership of land (Zialcita 2001). During the period of cultivation, the land and its produce were considered private; but once the land was left fallow, it gradually became communal property again, free for other members of the same *begtan*, the largest unit of social organization or category of affiliation among the Bugkalot, to cultivate.<sup>10</sup> As many Bugkalot told me: “In the past it was very easy to get land. If we needed land, we just cut down the forest and made *oma* (swidden field).” Because population density in their territory was low and wild land was always available, the Bugkalot did not bequeath land. There was no inheritance rule such as primogeniture governing the transmission of land, and the Bugkalot have never developed corporate group tenure regimes like the wet-rice cultivating Igorot and Ifugao (Maceda 1974; Prill-Brett 1993; 1994; McKay 2007; Omura 2008).

This pattern of communal land rights began to change with the coming of land-grabbing settlers. The trend of settlers’ large-scale migration to the Bugkalot area began in the late 1950s. The original impetus for migration was state-supported relocation projects for Ibaloi, Kankanai, and Ifugao peoples directly impacted by the construction of the Ambuklao Dam (1956) and the Binga Dam (1960) in the province of Benguet.<sup>11</sup> The well-known bounty of the Sierra Madre and the availability of patches of land in the mountain range were attractive to the people of the Cordillera. Although officially only

10) *Begtan* was a largely territorial descent group which became manifest primarily in the context of feuding. Two different kinds of groups were called *begtan*: the first was localized, co-residential groups that were predominantly endogamous; the second was dispersed and never united as action groups (R. Rosaldo 1975; 1980; *bértan* in his spelling). Under the Philippine government, the second kind of *begtan* is referred to as “clan” and its name is used as a “surname” (for example, the “surname” Pasigian will come up frequently later in the article). The orthography adopted here for the spelling of Bugkalot language is the system the Bugkalot themselves are most familiar with: the system used by the New Tribes Mission to translate the Bugkalot Bible. In this system, /g/ is used to denote a voiced velar fricative. Michelle and Renato Rosaldo used an orthography that predated the New Tribes Mission one.

11) The Bugkalot do not distinguish between Ibaloi and Kankanai, and refer to them as Igorot.

a few were entitled to be resettled with government support, many of the disenfranchised migrated with the others on their own (Aquino 2004, 177). Because of the encroachment of settlers, the Bugkalot started to lay claims to previously cleared areas and to parcel their common land into individual shares as an attempt to resist these settlers more efficiently (M. Rosaldo 1980, 4; 1991, 157; R. Rosaldo 1980, 277). However, this incipient notion of private landownership did not provide an efficient defense mechanism. In fact, it might even have facilitated the loss of land to subsequent settlers. Because the Bugkalot did not value land or have a clear idea of its worth, they readily gave away tracts of land in exchange for radios, guns, dogs, blankets, salt, sugar, cloth, cooking utensils, etc.

At my field site, Ġingin, a settlement located at the center of the Bugkalot area,<sup>12)</sup> Igorot, Ifugao, Ilocano, Bicol, and Visayan settlers started to arrive in the 1970s with the logging boom. By this time, most people of Ġingin had already converted to Christianity after more than a decade of evangelism, and headhunting was in serious decline.<sup>13)</sup> The extraction of timber came from the Nueva Vizcaya side. The logging route originated from the highway town of Bambang, going through Malasin, Dupax, Belancé, Binnuangan, and Giayan before reaching Ġingin. Skilled loggers from as far away as the Bicol region and the Visayas were brought in by the logging companies. Some loggers, road builders, and drivers stayed in Ġingin after their jobs at the logging companies were finished. Several of them courted Bugkalot women, got married, and acquired land from their affines. However, a majority of them, like settlers in other frontier societies in the Philippines (Lopez 1987; Li 2002), tended to regard indigenous land as state land and generally treated it as open access.

The arrival of settlers in Ġingin was soon followed by more state attempts at incorporation. From 1978 to the mid-1980s, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) launched several development projects in Ġingin, including settlement projects, irrigation, and wet-rice cultivation aimed at increasing agricultural productivity in the uplands. These development projects were related to the green revolution in the lowlands, but they were also driven by the government's persistent desire to involve the Bugkalot in

12) I made two pilot visits, five weeks in total, to the Bugkalot land in 2004 and 2005 to survey the area and choose a field site. Extensive fieldwork among the Bugkalot, on which this article is based, consists of 15 months of residence from 2006 to 2008.

13) The first non-Bugkalot to settle in Ġingin was a Tagalog missionary for the New Tribes Mission. He was one of the earliest missionaries to evangelize the Bugkalot. In 1954, he arrived at Taang (now Pelaway) to spread the gospel. In 1959 he married a Bugkalot woman, and they moved to Ġingin at the end of the year. Because of his special status as a missionary and the fact that he gained permission from one of Ġingin's *begangat* (big one, elder), Dangsál Gumíad, to move there, he was not considered a settler by the people of Ġingin.

sedentary agriculture in order to make them more controllable. The settlement project was originally intended for Igorot and Ifugao displaced by the construction of the Ambuklao and Binga Dams in the Cordillera. Ġingin was chosen as a settlement site because the government regarded it as state land, basically treating the Bugkalot as squatters. The indigenous residents of Ġingin found the DAR's project, which aimed at bringing in more settlers, troubling. As one DAR official who lived in Ġingin for eight months at the beginning of the project told me, the Bugkalot were highly suspicious of the settlers, and they were afraid that the settlers would poison the water to kill them all and get their land. Thus, they asked their relatives, who had migrated to Lipuga, Pelaway, and Cawayan during World War II in order to flee from the Japanese soldiers invading the area, to move back to Ġingin as a strategy of defending their territory against the settlers. As Apun Maria succinctly answered when I inquired about the reason for their return: *deġin* (land).<sup>14</sup> Free housing provided by the DAR was not the most important incentive. The Bugkalot decided to move back to Ġingin because the lands here were "fat" (*oabe*, fertile) and beautiful (*okedeng*).

In the mid-1980s the DAR left Ġingin in fear of the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, who burnt the DAR's office in Balancé in 1986 and terrorized the region. Although it was—and is—not uncommon to see the NPA interacting and forming reciprocal relationships with local people in the remote mountainous areas of the Philippines (Kwiatkowski 2008; Shimizu 2011, 6), the Bugkalot had violent encounters with the NPA and even perceived them as the land grabbers' helpers (Yang 2011a). After peace and order were restored in the area, the DAR returned in the early 1990s to start land measuring and titling, which was part of the resettlement project. The legal foundation of land titling is provided by the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law of 1988 (Republic Act No. 6657). Because of financial constraints, the DAR did not have enough staff or resources to measure the whole area of Ġingin, so those who wanted land titles had to take the initiative themselves and apply. Land titles acquired under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law of 1988 are different from other schemes based on communal tenures (Brown 1994); they are private properties, which are alienable. Settlers were very keen on obtaining land titles, which they considered a guarantee of their land security. However, at this time the land market was not really formed, and land was not commoditized in Ġingin. Some Bugkalot applied for land titles, but many did not see the usefulness of a piece of paper that carried an obligation to pay taxes to the government, and as a result they did not apply for land titles.<sup>15</sup>

14) In order to protect the Bugkalot's privacy, most names mentioned in this article are pseudonyms.

15) In fact, those who obtained land titles did not bother to pay taxes either—that is, until they wanted to use land titles as collateral to apply for bank loans. See below.

In the 1980s, the nearest lowland town—Bambang—became the main trading center of commercial vegetable gardening in the Cagayan Valley (Sajor 1999, 107). However, the cultivation of cash crops did not spread to Ġingin until the turn of this century, due to transportation barriers and the lack of capital. The first person to plant cash crops was an Igorot from Baguio, whose sister married a local Bugkalot man. From 1997 to 2002, he borrowed his brother-in-law's land in Ganépa, about one hour's hike from Ġingin proper, to grow string beans, pepper, and tomatoes. At that time, jeepneys did not come to Ġingin—only to Ganépa. Also, the schedule was not regular. Frequently, the man had to use carabao to haul his products to the previous village—Giayan—for transportation to the market. In 1999, a half-Ilocano, half-Igorot man, newly married to a Bugkalot girl, moved to Ġingin and started to plant sweet peas in Manogatóg, a *sitio* (settlement, local cluster) of Ġingin about one hour's hike from the main settlement. In 2003, Ilocano and Igorot settlers started to plant cash crops in gardens near Ġingin proper. In 2005 and 2006, more Bugkalot joined them to produce cash crops for a volatile market.

The cultivation of cash crops is labor intensive and capital intensive. Labor is not a problem, but getting the capital to start commercial vegetable gardening is a highly challenging task for the people of Ġingin. Few of them, mostly barangay officials, were able to get development funds from the DAR or the Department of Agriculture. The purpose of providing low-interest loans to the Bugkalot, as a DAR official told me, is “to bring them closer to the government.” However, the majority of aspiring commercial gardeners were not beneficiaries of these interest-free loans, and they had to improvise and use kinship and other social ties to obtain seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and agricultural tools. Some settlers had relatives in the Cordillera or the lowland working abroad and acquired remittance as their capital.<sup>16</sup> The Bugkalot, however, had to sell their carabao or pawn (*sangla*) their lands or guns to settlers to get a start-up fund. Therefore, the scale of cash crop cultivation was usually small. In their attempts to obtain capital to start commercial vegetable gardening, the people of Ġingin began to use their land titles as collateral to apply for bank loans.

In 2004, an Ilocano settler who married a local Bugkalot woman used one of their land titles to apply successfully for a loan of 30,000 pesos from the Cooperative Bank of Solano. This caused quite a stir in the remote village of Ġingin. Despite the fact that the interest charged by the bank was unreasonably high, many people began asking the man about the process of applying for bank loans. Later in 2004, a young Bugkalot woman who married an Ilocano used her carabao as collateral to get a loan of 10,000 pesos; and

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16) McKay (2003; 2005b) discussed how remittance changed land-use patterns and the local landscape among the Ifugao of Cordillera.



with this capital, she was able to open a small grocery store. In 2005 at least 11 Bugkalot were successful in getting bank loans, and the annual interest rates they paid varied from 16 per cent to 20 per cent. In concurrence with this sudden and sharp increase of cash in Bugkalot's daily lives, land grabbing began to take place among them and caused heightened social tensions in Ġingin.

### Land Grabbing among the Bugkalot Themselves

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the traditional pattern of communal land tenure began to change when lowlanders and other indigenous migrants entered Ġingin. The Bugkalot could not hope to hold uncultivated lands against the increasing numbers of settlers, and began to designate particular plots as "private property" that individual owners could decide what to do with. Among the Bugkalot themselves, however, access to land was still fairly easy and was not a concern that led to social conflict. When about half the population moved from Lipuga and Pelaway back to Ġingin in the late 1970s and early 1980s, they obtained land simply by talking to their relatives and choosing a site where they wanted to open *oma*. Because the returnees had lived in the area before the invasion of Japanese soldiers made them flee in fear, kinship ties and historical connections to the place entitled them to open land (*emmatog nima degin*, *pimmeyan ma degin*) as they saw fit.

Although the Bugkalot started to develop the notion of private ownership of land, land was not yet commoditized. Land borrowing among the Bugkalot was free of charge, and several of the earliest settlers married local women and obtained affinal ties with the Bugkalot. They were obliged to share goods they brought with them from the lowland, as kinship norms dictated, but this was not payment for land. The commoditization of land happened later, at the turn of the century, when the advance of the full-fledged capitalist market economy penetrated Ġingin. As several Igorot who live in the area between Giayan and Ġingin told me, before the late 1990s, new settlers could acquire land through exchange, but now they had to buy land with money. This was also the period during which commercial vegetable gardening spread to the area.

When land became the easiest way to obtain cash, land grabbing among the Bugkalot themselves began to occur. Manogatog, a *sitio* of Ġingin, is a vast area not far from the main road and with dense forest nearby. In the 1970s, no Bugkalot lived there. When Bugkalot moved back to Ġingin from Lipuga and Pelaway, one Pasigian family settled there in 1982 to open their *oma*. The siblings and children got married, built their own houses, and opened more *oma* and later rice paddies; gradually Manogatog grew into a settlement consisting of ten households and its own church. In the mid-1990s, the

government started the construction of the Casecnan Dam in Pelaway, Alfonso Castaneda, and many Bugkalot moved to Pelaway and Lipuga in search of employment. The population of Manogatoğ shrank considerably, dwindling to five households. In 2001, another Pasigian family in Yamu, also a *sitio* of Ġingin, sold some land in Manogatoğ to an Igorot settler for 3,000 pesos. In 2004, they sold more land here to another Igorot family for 5,000 pesos and one gun. These were lands in the early stage of fallowing. The owner of these lands, Uncle Topdek, was very unhappy about this. However, he was originally from Landingan, Quirino Province, and had little status in Ġingin, so he kept his complaints to himself.<sup>17)</sup> In 2005 Topdek's leg was seriously injured in an accident, and he was hospitalized for a long period. In order to pay Topdek's medical expenses and to acquire capital for planting cash crops, his son used his land title to obtain a big loan from the bank. The Yamu people took this opportunity to grab more lands from Topdek and his brothers-in-law, Bernardo and Sigmund. They started to use Topdek's *oma*, sold his rice paddy to the Igorot, occupied his *kamagit* (field hut), and stole his son-in-law's agricultural equipment. In 2006, they essentially took over Manogatoğ and cut down a vast area of forest to make new *oma* there. In fear of them, Topdek and Bernardo's families moved to Ġingin proper, and used their land in Kaantagan to plant rice and cash crops.

It is striking that there were close kinship ties between these two Pasigian families. Not only were there consanguineous connections between them, Topdek's sister-in-law and Bernardo and Sigmund's sister Alita was married to Samuel, one of the Yamu brothers. To have one's land grabbed by close relatives hurt the victim's feelings deeply. As Topdek's daughter Grace said to me: "They said we are relatives, but I don't believe them. If they were true relatives (*anewed katan-agi*), how could they have done this to us?"

Although there are at least eight other cases of land dispute among the Bugkalot themselves, this is the most serious and controversial one because it violates Bugkalot social norms to the fullest extent. Other cases do not depart as far from the traditional pattern of land use. The most common dispute over land concerns the question of precedence, which is difficult to decide in an originally nonliterate society that depends on eyewitness accounts. Exactly whose ancestors opened the land in a certain area first, entitling their descendants to the right to claim it, is often contested. The problem arises because the Bugkalot did not bequeath land. As Lingling said, "Land was not important before, so the old people didn't pass it down to anyone before they died." In these situ-

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17) In 1976 Topdek met his wife, Liya, in Pelaway when he attended the one-year Bible school set up by the New Tribes Mission there. They got married in 1977, and Topdek's family had to pay a huge *lango* (bridewealth) because he had never cut a head. After marriage, he followed Bugkalot traditional uxorilocal custom that required him to live in Lipuga with his wife after marriage. They moved to Ġingin in 1982.

ations, however, the two parties involved can usually talk it over and find a solution or a compromise. Other cases of land dispute evoked bad feelings (*en-oget ma nemnem*, *en-oget ma ginawa*) but did not become a social issue. For example, Apun Maria is over 80 years old, and a few years ago she decided that it was time for her to retire from working in her *oma*. Her son did not use her land and left it to fallow, so the Yamu people took it. Apun Maria is not happy about this, because they did not respect her by asking her for the land first—but since they are relatives, she tolerates the situation. Her son, the barangay *kapitan* (captain) of La Conwap, also keeps quiet because he needs the Yamu people's support at election time.<sup>18)</sup>

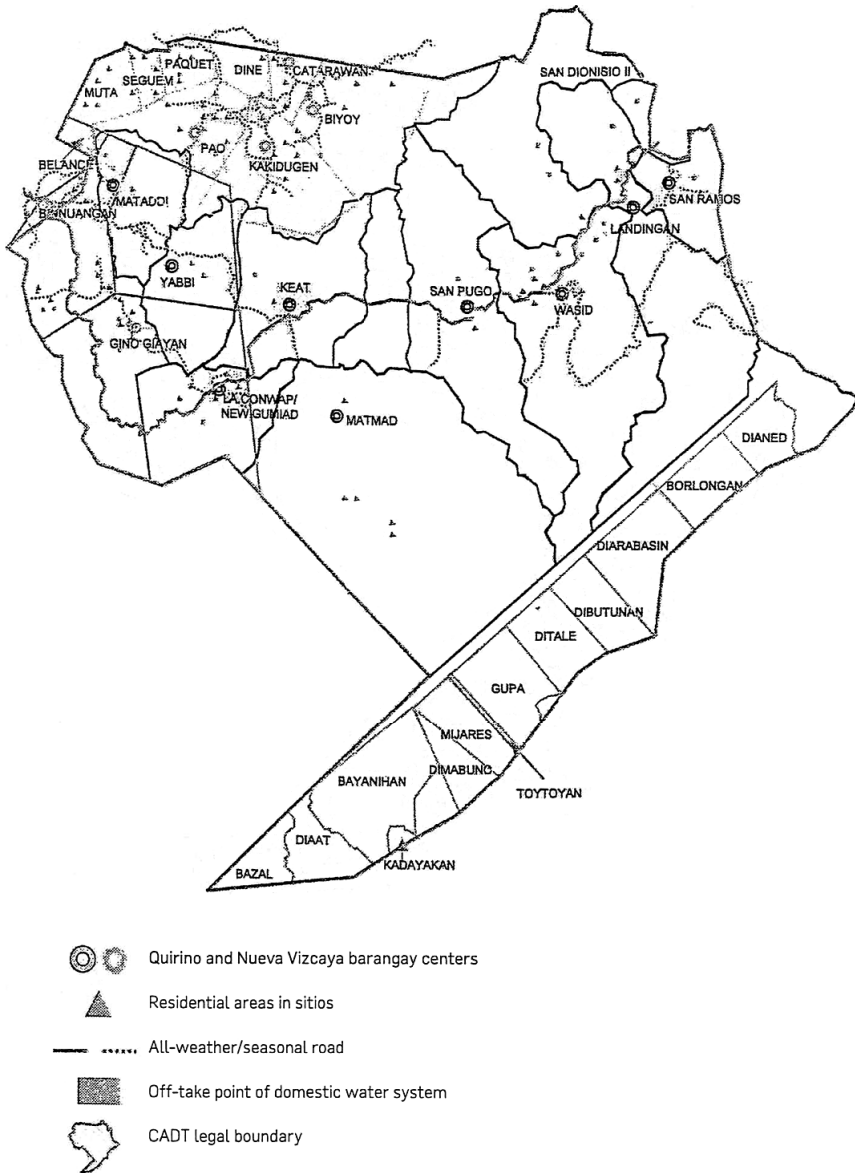
Another case is the conflict between Lisa and Dengpag. After Gading-an died, Lisa started to till one of his parcels of land in Yamu without asking his family. The land was steep and stony and was not considered good land, but Lisa liked it because it was close to Ġingin and would save her a lot of time and effort hiking to the *oma* every morning. She hoped to acquire the land by cultivating it, as the Bugkalot had done before. Nobody objected when she opened her *oma* there. However, after Lisa had a good harvest, Dengpag told her that Gading-an had given the land to him before his death, and he demanded its return. Lisa gave up this land, but she was bitter that Dengpag did not cultivate it and “left it to grow grass.”

What makes the Bugkalot of Ġingin highly concerned about the Yamu people's land grabbing is that they completely disregard the morality of kinship and seem to be driven by greed. They grab other Bugkalot's land in order to sell it to new settlers. To make matters worse, Topdek and Bernardo had already applied for and obtained land titles (*titole*) in Manogatoġ when the DAR came in the early 1990s to survey the land. Their land titles did not provide sufficient protection for their land security. Thus, the general feeling was that nobody could be certain that they would not fall victim to “the number one land grabber in Ġingin.”

Although land grabbing among the Bugkalot must be understood in the context of the expansion of capitalism and the commoditization of land, Bugkalot themselves do not prioritize utilitarian reasons or economic needs in perceiving and explaining land disputes. They consider envy (*apet*, *apig*) the most important motivation for land grabbing. Bugkalot have a strong sense of competition and a desire not to be outdone by others

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18) Ġingin is located in an area of boundary dispute between the provinces of Nueva Vizcaya and Quirino. On the Vizcaya side, it belongs to Dupax del Norte Municipality and is named New Gumiad; while on the Quirino side, it belongs to Nagtipunan Municipality and is named La Conwap (Map 2). Local people often choose which side they “belong to” according to internal political and kinship affiliations. Some people register as voters in both provinces, and members of the same household can belong to different provinces. It is also common to see people switch sides (Yang 2011b).



**Map 2** Barangays within the Bugkalot CADD

Source: Bugkalot Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan, NCIP

Note: Gingin is located at a boundary dispute area between Nueva Vizcaya Province and Quirino Province. On the Vizcaya side it is named New Gumiad, while on the Quirino side it is named La Conwap.

(Jones 1907-09, book 10, 7; M. Rosaldo 1980, 18). Therefore, it is said that when Yamu people see others with things they themselves don't have, such as chainsaws, televisions, and generators, they become envious (*meaapet*, *en-apig*), so they grab other people's land. Similarly, when Yamu people see others getting large loans from the bank with their land titles, while they themselves have no land title, they are envious, so they grab other people's land. We can also see the continuing significance of emotional idioms in the land dispute between Lisa and Dengpag mentioned above. Dengpag did not object when Lisa opened her *oma*. However, after he saw that Lisa was able to reap a bumper harvest, he asked her to return the land. He did not cultivate it or sell it but left it fallow, and he was said to be "just envious of Lisa's good harvest."<sup>19</sup>

Barangay officials have made several attempts to resolve social conflicts over land between the Yamu people and Topdek's family. Besides acting as go-betweens between the two parties, they have also organized three public meetings (*poğong*) attended by the whole community. However, a solution or compromise is yet to be found. In the following section, I will discuss the culturally specific method of dispute resolution among the Bugkalot, and show how different discourses are intertwined in these negotiations. The political implications of the failure of barangay officials and government agencies to resolve land disputes will be addressed as well.

### ***Poğong*: Oratory, Persuasion, and Attempt to Resolve Land Dispute**

In her refined discussions of Ilongot oratory, *poğong* (*purung* in her spelling), Michelle Rosaldo (1973; 1980; 1991) contrasts its public nature with the more fluid, more direct, and personal nature of everyday talk. The word *poğong* describes at once a public meeting in which opposing parties come together to discuss and resolve their differences, and an elaborate style of speech, which is rich in art, wit, and indirection. Rosaldo suggests that this "crooked," curvy, and allusive style of speech is closely linked with indigenous egalitarian norms, and it emerges in a social order based on persuasion rather than compulsion. Traditional oratorical events typically concern either marrying or killing (headhunting), both of which are occasions for "anger" (*liget*, energy/anger/passion). Anger is the product of "envy," and "envy" is created when the ideals of "sameness" and equality are breached (M. Rosaldo 1991, 154). In *poğong*, adult men use their knowledge and verbal skills to negotiate "anger" and to achieve balance in social relationships. In

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19) Emotional idioms such as envy and desire have wider resonances in the processes of the Bugkalot's engagement with capitalism, which is discussed elsewhere (Yang 2012).

this individualistic society where each man is his own master, *poḡong* provides a focused context in which it is appropriate to invoke shared norms and public understanding, and to explain obligations and commitments in terms of social ideals.<sup>20)</sup>

At the time of her fieldwork (1967–69, 1974), Michelle Rosaldo also observed the emergence of a new style of speech among the Ilongot. Modern oratory, represented by the speech of recently Christianized Ilongot, substituted an ideal of simplicity and directness for the complex, evasive style of traditional oratorical speech. Rosaldo argued that the public use of “straight speech” was linked with externally imposed authoritarian relationships, such as the government, the law, and God. The emergence of a modern oratorical style has caused the genre of *poḡong* to lose its appeal among a people who once enjoyed it.

Before the first *poḡong* for a land dispute took place, I had the opportunity to observe another *poḡong*. This *poḡong* was called by the barangay captain of New Gumiad and was held in the barangay hall. The matter for discussion was a fight between two young men, Roland and Rodney. The previous afternoon, a group of young men had been playing basketball. Roland was drunk, got too competitive in the game, and started a fight with Rodney. Rodney was punched in the face and sustained an obvious injury. This was not a serious matter, but the meeting was surprisingly long—about 3.5 hours. Almost every man present wanted to give a speech and advise the young men. They invoked kinship idioms and social norms to “cool down” the youthful heated heads. Even though my ability to understand the Bugkalot language was quite limited at the time, I could tell that the elder men’s speeches were repetitive. Later I discussed this *poḡong* with some young people, and they, like the young men of Rosaldo’s time, showed a similar reaction to *poḡong*. They rejected the speeches of elder Bugkalot men as confusing and foolish: “Old men talk in a funny way. They never express their opinions directly and clearly. So it’s difficult to know exactly what they mean”; “Old men talk slowly, and they like to repeat and repeat. That’s why I am not interested in *poḡong*. It’s a waste of time.”

Uncle Siklab’s style of speech was singled out and mocked by the young generation. In the *poḡong*, Uncle Siklab asked whether Rodney wanted to—as per Bugkalot custom—demand a pig as *beyaw* (compensation). However, he did not say so directly. Rather, he said that since Rodney had been injured in the face and the wound was painful, did he want Roland to put some oil on his wound to soothe it. However, barangay captain Bobby interrupted him, saying that it was a simple matter and so he did not want to see any

20) Bugkalot society is characterized by an apparent lack of formal rules or structure. The Bugkalot do not see their situation as one in which individuals must conform to an enduring social order. Activity in their social world is understood as an actualization of emotional states, an enactment of the heart’s directives (M. Rosaldo 1980, 177–178). Thus, they are described by anthropologists as individualistic.

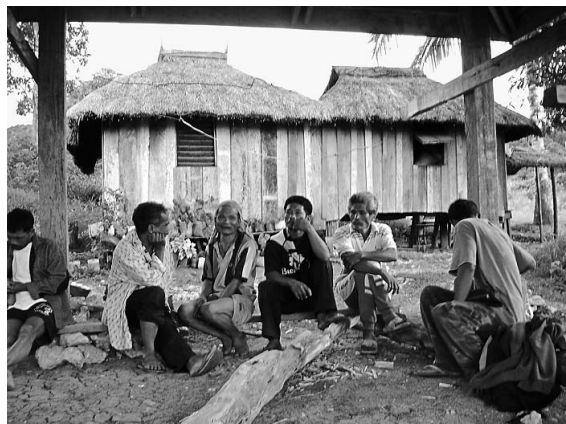


Fig. 3 Bugkalot Men Waiting for the First *Pogong* to Start

animal butchered. The meeting was concluded with a handshake between Roland and Rodney, and no animal blood was shed. It seems that the simplicity of modern ways is favored over burdensome traditions, and the barangay captain is able to derive power from his position.

However, when it came to finding a resolution for the land dispute between the Yamu people and Topdek's family, the efforts of both barangay captains were to no avail. Ramon, the barangay captain of La Conwap, was closely related to the Pasigian family of Yamu, so he acted as the main go-between. It took him many visits over the course of more than a year to finally persuade the Pasigian family to have a *pogong* with Topdek's family. The first *pogong* took place at Yamu on June 18, 2006 (Fig. 3). It was attended by more than 40 people, most of them men. Barangay captain Ramon, who was also the leading elder in the church, opened the *pogong* with a prayer. However, the land dispute negotiation did not proceed in the Christian spirit. The Pasigians of Yamu adamantly stated their claim that Manogatog was their place because their ancestors had been the first to open the land there before the Japanese period. They asserted their rights derived from their ancestors' precedence, even though Apun Maria's late husband, Tobe Pasigian, was recognized commonly by other members of the community as the first person to have opened the land in Manogatog and he had given his consent to—and had helped—Topdek's family to cultivate the area in the early 1980s. The Yamu Pasigians did not have even the slightest intention of returning the land. In fact, they also claimed that Kaantagan, the land Topdek's family was using at that time, was theirs as well. The barangay captains and most councilors (*kagawad*) did not support either side, as they were in the middle (*benggi*) trying to mediate and negotiate a compromise. They evoked

the authority of the state and the law (*batat*) and suggested that since Topdek and Bernardo had land titles the Yamu people should respect that and return the titled lands to them. However, since Manogatoḡ is a vast area, the Yamu people could use those areas not covered by existing land titles.

Barangay officials' attempts to find a balance between the authority of the state and the Bugkalot notion of precedence failed completely. Timothy, an elder in the church, evoked the Christian ethic when he said to Samuel, one of the Yamu brothers, "Can we bring the land to Heaven? God sees everything we do; He judges our actions." Samuel saw this as a personal attack and reacted angrily. He used to be an elder in the local church, but recently he had been suspended for land grabbing. He resented being disciplined and stopped attending the Sunday service.

Different discourses were intertwined in this *pogong*: the Bugkalot notion of precedence (*sinangat*), the legal landownership instituted by the state, and the Christian ethic. Barangay officials placed emphasis on land titles and expected to derive power from the law, but this failed to impress or persuade the Yamu Pasigians. In fact, the latter said bluntly in private that they did not care how thick Topdek and Bernardo's land titles were; the land was still theirs. The second *pogong* was held in the barangay hall in September, while I was away. That too failed to reach a middle ground between the two sides involved in the land dispute.

The third *pogong* took place in the barangay hall on January 7, 2007. Barangay captains Ramon and Bobby opened the meeting stating their sincere wish to solve the problem of the land. Then Tagem, the father of the Yamu brothers, adopted the traditional oratorical style and said that they had talked to each other (*penen opo*), which was comparable to opening a path to go to the hunting ground, and he hoped they could have some gains. However, Sigmund replied by asking the reason for their gathering there that day. What was their purpose? He acted as though he was in the dark, but was really questioning the Yamu people's sincerity in resolving the land dispute. Topdek's uncle Longilong made it explicit again that that day's *pogong* aimed to solve the problem of the land, and since Topdek and Bernardo had land titles, Tagem and his sons should return the land to them. However, Tagem said they were willing to return only Topdek's land, and that Topdek, Bernardo, and Sigmund could decide how to divide that land among themselves. This was the first time the Yamu Pasigians had made some concession, so Uncle Siklab and the barangay officials encouraged Topdek's family to accept it; they also proposed determining the boundary so that no more disputes would occur in the future.

Understandably, Topdek's family did not consider this a fair offer. Bernardo and Sigmund insisted that their in-laws should return all their lands. However, in typical Bugkalot fashion, they emphasized the opposite. They said they could give all the lands



in Manogatoḡ to their in-laws, as if Samuel's family had paid *lango* (bridewealth) for their sister Alita. This innuendo was intended to shame the Yamu people, because Samuel had violated the rule of uxorilocal postmarital residence when he married Alita, and his family had not paid any *lango* according to Bugkalot tradition. Bernardo's formal talk was punctuated with more sarcasm, as he expressed his heartfelt wish for Samuel to return to the church and attend Sunday services. Although women seldom give speeches at a *pogong*, usually preferring to comment in private, Bernardo's mother, Apun Lonsa, spoke out on this occasion. She recalled her sadness when Samuel did not come to live in her house while he was courting Alita, taking Alita instead to their house in Yamu. She was further saddened by their land grabbing, and asked Tagem why, if Manogatoḡ was indeed their place, he had raised no objection when her family opened their *oma* there when they came from Lipuga. Apun Lonsa also brought up another issue: Samuel's domestic violence toward Alita. Alita had quarreled with Samuel when he grabbed land from her brothers and brother-in-law, but he had silenced her by beating her badly. Samuel defended himself saying he had had good reason to beat Alita, that she had not obeyed her husband as a good wife should always do. Pastor Rene, a Visayan missionary of the New Tribes Mission who was stationed in Giayan, also came that day and tried to mediate. He urged Samuel's family to return all the land so the Lord would be pleased. His words, too, failed to persuade them.

Another *pogong* ended in futility. Compared with the first *pogong*, there was a shift in the rhetoric or discourse. While at the first *pogong* barangay officials had attempted to derive power or authority from the government and the law, this time the land title was mentioned only briefly by Uncle Longilong at the beginning. The focus of this *pogong* was kinship idioms and social norms concerning how relatives (*makatan-agi*) and affines (*niman naagiagi*) should treat each other. Sigmund, Topdek, and Apun Lonsa all expressed their deep sadness and distress. They recalled how close the two families used to be and the mutual conviviality resulting from frequent visits, working together, and joint hunting trips. However, the problem of the land had created a gulf between them, and they no longer visited each other; only their children continued to do so.

The emphasis on kinship idioms did not move the Yamu people to return the land. Although Tagem's stance seemed to soften, he held that he could not force his sons to change their attitude. The failure of yet another *pogong* to resolve this land dispute did not come as a surprise to the people of Ġingin. Before the meetings, they had commented on the "bad character" of the Yamu people and questioned the sincerity of their desire to solve the problem. Many referred to them as "very angry people" (*oliliget ta too*) or "uncivilized." These words connote headhunting, a practice the Yamu people have not abjured completely. In spite of the fact that Tagem and all his sons had been zealous

churchgoers in the past and some of them had been elected as elders, they had “backslid” and resumed the practice of headhunting.<sup>21)</sup> I was constantly warned by the Bugkalot never to go to Yamu or anywhere alone.

The threat of violence and the fear of a possible resurgence of tribal warfare are given by the people of Gingin as some of the reasons why *pogong* fail to resolve land disputes. There are other reasons why barangay officials are unable to assert authority and curb land grabbing. It has already been mentioned that Gingin is located at an area of boundary dispute between the provinces of Nueva Vizcaya and Quirino. In 2007, there were 190 registered voters in New Gumiad (the Vizcaya side) and 202 in La Conwap (the Quirino side).<sup>22)</sup> Barangay elections are often competitive, and the margin of winning or losing is small. For instance, in 2001 Ramon won the election for barangay captain of La Conwap by fewer than 10 votes.<sup>23)</sup> The Pasigian families of Yamu register on the Quirino side and control more than 40 votes, which means that they are able to swing the result of barangay elections. As a formidable power in local politics, they have more grounds to continue with what Pastor Rene describes as a “the paper is yours, but the land is ours” attitude.

Compared with oratorical events in the past, contemporary *pogong* is much more “straight,” direct, simple, and short. However, contrary to what Michelle Rosaldo’s discussion of oratorical style and mode of authority would lead us to expect, straight speech does not enable barangay officials to claim authority by identifying with offices assigned to them by the Philippine government. On the one hand, this can be seen as continuity with the past: the Bugkalot are not responsive to authority and uphold the tradition of strong egalitarianism (Jones 1908, 4; M. Rosaldo 1980; Campa 1988 [1891], 76). On the other hand, there is a significant difference that indicates a fundamental change in their social lives. While the Bugkalot traditionally deploy egalitarian norms to minimize conflict among themselves (M. Rosaldo 1980, 187), this nonresponsiveness to authority now makes the successful mediation of land disputes almost impossible. So

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21) When I discussed this puzzle with Apun Tino, the Tagalog missionary who brought Christianity to Gingin, he explained: “They converted to Christianity for the wrong reason. They just wanted to show off, to be leaders in the church. That’s why they backslid after a few years and went to cut heads again.” The reasons why Bugkalot Christians resumed headhunting are complicated and are dealt with in another article (Yang 2011a).

22) The Philippines has a unique voter registration system. In order to vote, a qualified citizen is required to be a registered voter. Registration as a voter is not mandatory, and is self-initiated by the voter. Because there is some overlap between the Vizcaya and the Quirino sides, the actual number of voters is smaller. Some people are registered on both sides, and some old people who have already passed away are still on the lists.

23) The local election of 2004 was not held, due to a lack of government funding.

far, the heightened social tensions caused by land grabbing still “have no place to go.”

The insult and wrong Topdek's family suffered at the hands of the Yamu people would have led to a headhunting feud in the past. Now, the victims of land grabbing try to find, with increasing difficulty, peace and consolation in their Christian faith. For instance, they interpreted an illness contracted by Tagem's eldest son, Benjamin, as divine retribution. In the fall of 2005, Benjamin started to develop symptoms of a serious illness, which was diagnosed a year later in hospital as bone cancer. He died a painful death in 2007. However, Tagem did not see Benjamin's ailment as punishment (*padusa*) from God, but thought the witchcraft of the Igorot family to whom he had sold Topdek's land in Manogatoğ was to blame. In a state of rage, he fired several gunshots near that Igorot family's house and threatened to kill them. The Igorot were very frightened, and they planned to move to Ganépa to be near their relatives.

Barangay officials' lack of authority and their failure in resolving land disputes reflect both the dynamism of Bugkalot culture and the weakness of the Philippine state. Disillusioned by the incapability of barangay officials, Topdek's family have tried to seek the assistance of other government agencies in this matter. They requested Ramon to plead their case with politicians at the municipal and provincial levels, but they were disappointed. As a result, they withdrew their support for him in the 2007 barangay election and took the matter into their own hands. After the first *poğong* failed, Bernardo reported the crime of land grabbing to the police in Malasin, but they said such a matter should be dealt with by barangay officials and refused to take any action. This is read as another example of the corruption prevalent in the country: “You know what police are like in the Philippines. They are corrupt. If we don't bribe them they will not help.” However, Topdek's family was poor and unable to pay the *pisi* (police). Bernardo made another attempt to obtain government assistance by petitioning the DAR's local office in Malasin. The director there showed sympathy and replied that she would arrange a visit to Ġingin with the DAR's lawyer to explain the law to the Bugkalot so they would “learn how to respect land titles”; but when I left Ġingin in May 2008, this promised visit had not yet come.

Having tried in vain all avenues of resolution they can think of, Topdek's family now see the NCIP as their last hope. Although most Bugkalot do not have a clear idea of the overall politics of the whole land titling situation, they do know that the IPRA and the CADT are about state provisions of land rights. After the CADT was officially awarded to the Bugkalot on February 24, 2006, the NCIP held barangay-level meetings in the following months to explain to the Bugkalot their rights and responsibilities to ancestral domain, and asked each barangay to form a board of so-called CADT officials. CADT officials and barangay officials often overlap, and they constitute what Section 66 of the IPRA refers to as the Council of Elders/Leaders, which has the authority to settle dis-

putes according to customary laws and practices. If all remedies provided under the customary laws are exhausted and a resolution is yet to be found, then a dispute within the ancestral domain shall be brought to NCIP's jurisdiction. This is what Topdek's family hope to do. However, given the financial constraints of the NCIP and its internal ethnic politics, there are considerable grounds for pessimism.<sup>24)</sup> Therefore, Topdek's daughter Rachel often exclaims: "We have no law here!"

### Land Titling, Capitalism, and Dispossession

A young Bugkalot woman's exasperation at the absence of law in Ġingin shows that "the actual application of the law is open to a host of contingent factors" (Aguilar 2005, 127). Land security is not a guaranteed outcome of land titling; it is dependent upon local economic and political conditions. Although communal land tenure, designed to prevent piecemeal dispossession, is a built-in feature of the IPRA, the assumption that indigenous peoples are tightly bound communities and are united in their struggle for land does not stand up to scrutiny. Today the Bugkalot face competition for land not only from settlers but also from fellow Bugkalot. Land disputes in Ġingin cannot be seen simply as a result of conflicts between traditional indigenous land tenure and state legislation. Instead, disputes over land have been concomitant with the emergence of the land market when Ġingin was brought into the orbit of capitalism.

The notion of private landownership began to develop in Ġingin with the arrival of land-grabbing settlers in the 1970s. The private, exclusive, and alienable land right gained legality and state recognition through the DAR's land-titling program in the early 1990s. The coexistence of two types of land tenure systems, one individualized and the other collective, is the historical outcome of capitalist processes and the state's attempt to manage dispossession. The link between the collective, inalienable land tenure currently associated with indigeneity, as pointed out by Li (2010, 410), should not be taken as a prior state to capitalism on a linear, evolutionary trajectory or as a marker of ineffable otherness. Rather, the two co-emerged.

When Bugkalot started to lay claims to previously cleared areas, and to parcel their common land into individual shares in an attempt to resist the encroachment of settlers, the inadvertent consequence was that it facilitated the dispossessory process. Again,

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24) As my Bugkalot friend who works for the NCIP's provincial office pointed out: "The provincial officer is an Igorot, and he doesn't care about the Bugkalot. I want to visit Ġingin to help my people very much, but he withholds travel funds and doesn't give me permission to go there."

when the Bugkalot began to participate in the production of cash crops and to use their lands as collateral to apply for bank loans, a different form of dispossession took place. Some people failed to repay their bank loans and as a result lost their lands. They were caught up in what Li (*ibid.*, 388) calls “mechanisms of dispossession”: the debt was there, the interest the bank charged was too high, the price fetched by their commodities was thus, the cost of inputs exceeded outputs, they could not make ends meet. These dispossessionary effects of the capitalist processes emerging “from below” (*ibid.*, 396) are often overlooked or underestimated by the state.

Because of their desire to obtain pecuniary benefits from capitalist ventures, the Bugkalot are exposed to the risks and opportunities of market participation. The IPRA and the CADT cannot simply erect a wall to protect them by insisting that indigenous peoples’ right to the land is collective and inalienable. In fact, after the Bugkalot were officially awarded their CADT, there was a renewed move to individualize land rights within the Bugkalot ancestral domain. The settlers were acutely aware that their presence in the Bugkalot ancestral domain was problematic and urged the DAR to title more of their lands. The DAR’s local office was dominated by Irogot, Ilocano, and Ifugao settlers, and it swiftly responded. In 2007, the DAR began a new land-titling program in Gisingin that aimed to cover the whole area (Figs. 4 and 5). The DAR asserts that its new land-titling program is fully supported by the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law of 1988 (Republic Act No. 6657), and that it has higher authority in the Bugkalot CADT area because the government issued an Executive Order (#364) that placed the NCIP under the direct supervision of the DAR in 2004. Placing ancestral domain concerns with the DAR has the drawback of misconstruing communal titles belonging to indigenous communities as properties with a corresponding commercial value (Padilla 2008, 468), but this is exactly what the settlers want.

The IPRA recognizes communal land tenure of indigenous peoples as a legitimate right and creates a favorable legal environment for it to continue. Economic forces, however, appear to be pushing in the opposite direction. A similar tilt toward individual ownership of common resources has been observed in the Cordillera region, the sending communities of settlers. Although wet-rice cultivating groups such as the Bontoc Igorot and the Ifugao have developed traditional corporate group tenurial practices that fit squarely with the IPRA’s assumption of communal land tenure, new livelihood opportunities such as cash crop cultivation and even tourism are motivating individuals to claim personal ownership over resources that have been owned by their clans or by the community (Crisologo-Mendoza and Prill-Brett 2009, 36). State provision of land rights and capitalist market forces have combined to shape land relations in new and often surprising ways.



Fig. 4 Gingin Residents and a DAR Official Having a Discussion on Land Titling

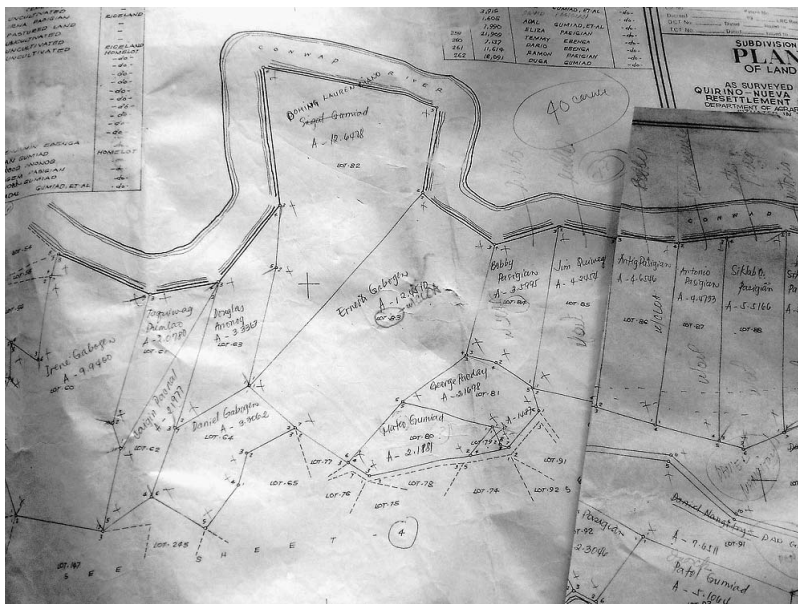


Fig. 5 A Survey Map of the Land-titling Program

In this article, I have exposed some of the diverse and changing forms of dispossession that took place in Gingin. It is apparent that the state should attempt to reverse the dispossessory effects of capitalism. However, the failure of barangay officials and government agencies alike in halting land grabbing reflects the inadequacy of the state in the delivery of service, support, order, and social well-being to the Bugkalot people. It also

indicates “the apparent continuing unwillingness, or inability, of the state to match words with deeds” (Eder and McKenna 2004, 56) when it comes to indigenous peoples’ legislation. Despite the considerable progress toward greater land security for indigenous peoples established in the 1987 Constitution and subsequent legislative and policy initiatives, promise has not yet become practice. It is a sobering reality that a title is but a piece of paper—itself neither altering existing power asymmetries, nor empowering indigenous peoples, nor protecting their territory against encroachment—and that new challenges begin once a title is legally secured (Wenk forthcoming). Title-holding indigenous groups such as the Bugkalot are in need of sincere state assistance and support, which they do not get at the moment. So far the CADT process has succeeded in making the frontier region legible to the state, but it fails to provide land security promised in the IPRA. Thus, 15 years after the passing of the IPRA, the realities on the ground provide sufficient reasons to wonder whether the seemingly novel avenues that the Philippine state has taken to “legitimize” indigenous peoples’ rights, in practice, merely extend state control.

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# Javanese Women and Islam: Identity Formation since the Twentieth Century

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Despite the vast research over the last three decades devoted to the lives and social interaction of Javanese women, little has been written on the formation of these women's identity by focusing on its development from the twentieth century up to the early twenty-first. This paper endeavors to show that the religio-cultural identity of Javanese women was forged through a number of sociocultural circumstances. While revealing different features of the relationship between Javanese women and Islam, I shed light on the role Islam played, particularly since the early twentieth century, in providing transformative power to the role and status of Javanese Muslim women, manifested by the adoption of such Islamic dress codes as veiling, as also an important means of identity politics. I argue that new Islamic discourses have always been born out of the desire to challenge the conservative understanding of the role and status of Javanese women in different historical periods.

**Keywords:** Javanese women, Islam, identity formation, veiling, identity politics

## Introduction

Since the late fifteenth century, Islamization has brought about a significant social transformation in Java. Islamization in Java was marked by the transition from the ancient East Javanese Hindu-Buddhist regimes (Majapahit Kingdom) to the Javanese Islamic rulers on the north coast, and later to the Mataram Islamic Kingdom (Yogyakarta). The shifting configuration wrought changes not only in Javanese religiosity but also in Javanese livelihoods, affecting everyone, including the women. However, over the last three decades, studies of women in Java have tended to overlook Javanese women's dynamic intersection with Islam, framing it within identity formation. For example, some earlier scholars—including Hildred Geertz (1961), Robert Jay (1969), and Koentjaraningrat (1957)—focused on the structure of the relationship between the sexes in Java. Ann

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Stoler (1977) examined rural Javanese women's economic independence under the Dutch cultivation system (1830–70). In the urban-contemporary context, Norma Sullivan (1994) observed the livelihood of a Javanese lower-class urban family in Yogyakarta, and Hotze Lont (2000) studied urban Javanese women's responses to microfinance credit institutions. In a rural setting, Valerie Hull (1976) researched the different degrees of Javanese women's autonomy in Yogyakarta. In the context of the household, G. G. Weix (2000) studied the agency of elite Javanese women in controlling the home-based cigarette business in Kudus, while Ratna Saptari (2000a) focused on the utilization of kin-based and inter-household networks. The dominant role of Javanese women in trading and economic activities has been the subject of copious research by prominent academics such as Geertz (1961), Cora Vreede-De Stuurs (1960), Suzanne Brenner (1995), Barbara Hatley (1990), and Ward Keeler (1990).

Scholars have only recently begun to consider Islam as a variable affecting Indonesian women. Susan Blackburn (2002) looked into the twentieth-century discourse of Indonesian Muslim women's roles in politics, and then further examined the history of Indonesian women in political Islam (2008). Sally White and Maria Ulfah Anshor (2008) provided current snapshots of the growth of Islamic perspectives after 1998. Kathryn Robinson (2009, 11–29) offered the latest analysis of Islam and Indonesian women after 1998, where she provided some examples of the local adaptation (such as in Java) to Islam in the early 1920s. In all, I suggest that there is a gap between the empirical situation of Javanese women's intersection with Islam, which was an important element shaping the formation of the women's identity, and the bulk of research that has only recently begun to address it. This paper bridges that gap by providing a portrait of the role of Islam in the identity formation of Javanese Muslim women, focusing on the subject from the twentieth century up to the early twenty-first.

I contend that the identity formation of Javanese Muslim women has been influenced by the nature of Islam and the political configuration in which, since the early twentieth century, new Islamic discourses have always emerged from the need to challenge conservative understandings of the role and status of Javanese women. Based on the nature of Islamic thinking and practice that influenced the different historical periods as the defining force in shaping Javanese Muslim women's identity, I identify four periods depicting these women's interaction with Islam. While in the first phase the nature of "syncretic" Islam in Java constrained particularly the Javanese noblewomen, in the second phase, since the early twentieth century, Islam (pioneered by the Islamic reformism of Muhammadiyah) and nationalism were positive transformative powers in the social positioning of Javanese women by employing a new discourse and setting out a portrait of the ideal Javanese Muslim woman. In the third phase, the resurgent Islam of the 1970s lent considerable

spirit to Javanese Muslim women to express identity politics as a way of countering the New Order's severe stance on political Islam. In the fourth phase, Islam as a belief has provided a strong religious foundation for female leadership in local politics that has facilitated the rise of Javanese Muslim women as political leaders in direct local elections since 2005.

Koentjaraningrat (1985, 2) defined Java as encompassing the Javanese people, culture, and linguistic group of Central and East Java, while the western part of the island was home to the Sundanese. Based on Koentjaraningrat's concept, the examples explored in this paper are centered mainly on Javanese women in Central and East Java, although a few are derived from West Java to give a general picture of Islamization on the island of Java. The historical records cited in this paper date back from the 1850s through to the 1950s and were obtained mainly from the National Library of Indonesia in Jakarta, with a few from the library of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies in Kyoto University, Japan, in January 2010 and April 2010.

### **Identity Formation: Current Debate and Position**

Erik Erikson's work (1950), based on Freudian psychological theory, is a pioneering treatise on identity formation. However, Erikson and neo-Eriksonian identity theories such as those proposed by James Marcia (1980), or James Cote and Charles Levine (1987), are currently being evaluated in order to incorporate sociocultural aspects. For example, Cote (1996) and Gerald Adams and Sheila Marshall (1996, 438) argued that identity formation was influenced by macro and micro environments,<sup>1</sup> as did Seth Schwartz (2001, 49) and Elli Schachter (2005, 390). In this paper, I adopt Adams and Marshall's concept (1996) that identity formation is influenced by macro and micro environments.<sup>2</sup> In revealing the identity formation of Javanese Muslim women, I initially present the experiences of some individual Javanese women in dealing with Islamic

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1) "Macro environment" refers to culture, economics, population demographics, politics, institutional values, physical environments, social class, caste, and race; "micro environments" include interpersonal communication, conversations, written words, media, and common or routine daily interactions.

2) My concern with the macro environment is reinforced by Shamsul A.B.'s idea (1996, 477–478) that identity formation takes place within "two social realities": the "authority-defined" context, where the discourse on identity is authoritatively defined by people in power; and the "everyday-defined" context, where the discourse on identity is experienced by the people in their everyday lives. At different points I reveal both the "authority-defined" and the "everyday-defined" context in the identity formation of Javanese Muslim women.

norms, values, and ideology that were socialized, constructed, and communicated through signs, symbols, and expectations either in language or discourse in the early stages of Islamization in Java. These are useful for gaining an insight into the general picture of the Javanese Muslim women's identity.

There are numerous studies on identity formation in Indonesia.<sup>3)</sup> This paper is positioned within the ethno-religious gender-based group of studies because it observes specifically the identity formation of ethnic Javanese women. In dealing with Islam, I pay special attention to the norm and practice of wearing the veil, because I believe it is an important aspect signifying identity formation in Javanese Muslim women, which later became an important means of creating a distinct political identity and attracting Islamic-based voters in direct local elections first implemented in 2005.

### Islamization and Its Consequences for Javanese Women

At least up to the late fifteenth century, Hindu civilization was the defining force that shaped the identity of Javanese women. For example, Javanese noblewomen enjoyed a preeminent status and played a strong role in the family and community during the Hindu-Javanese period, including in the Majapahit Kingdom around the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, as noted by Peter Carey and Vincent Houben (1987, 15) and Ann Kumar (2000, 88–104). However, the situation changed considerably following Islamic penetration into Java.

Scholars often disagree on the nature of Java's Islamization. For example, Clifford Geertz's "syncretic Islam" (1960, 5–6, 130) asserts that the Javanese religious system is one of syncretic Islam characterized by a mix of animism, Hinduism, and Islam. Anthony Reid (2000) suggested that Southeast Asian Islam, including that in Malaya and Java, was primarily influenced by mystical Sufism brought by Sufi orders (Malay *tarekat*). Mark Woodward (1989, 2–17) believed that Islamic Sufism was the most influential element in Islamization in Java, while Jay (1963, 6) argued that Islam's spread to Java involved the contestation between syncretism (embraced by the Javanese aristocracy of the Mataram/

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3) For example: ethno-religious studies by scholars such as Zaenuddin Prasojo (2010), who studied the revitalization of the indigenous Dayak Katab Kebahan Muslim community in West Borneo; studies of decentralization and economy politics, such as Moira Moeliono and Godwin Limberg's study (2004) on the impact of regional autonomy since 1999 in Malinau, Northeast Kalimantan, and Manggarai, West Flores; and ethnic- and gender-policy-based studies such as Rebecca Elmhirst's (2000) on the identity formation and struggle of female Javanese transmigrants in North Lampung.

Yogyakarta Islamic court) and orthodox Islam (embraced by the northeastern coastal rulers).

Despite the diverging theories, it is obvious that the history of Islamization in Java is closely linked to the religion's practice by the nobility, as Barbara Andaya (2000, 246) suggests, where the Mataram/Yogyakarta aristocracy took control of Islamization following the defeat of the orthodox Islam (Jay 1963, 11–13) of the northeastern coastal rulers in the mid-seventeenth century. I suggest it was the Javanese noblewomen who initially interacted considerably with, and had to conform to, the Islamic norm. Here, I believe the Javanese noblewomen's early intersection with Islam was not a calm one. The next section explores the tensions surrounding the Javanese noblewomen's adjustment to the new Islamic code of behavior and principles.

### Constructing Identity as Javanese Muslim Women: Struggle and Adjustment

By the end of the sixteenth century, there was a new Islamized Javanese elite as a consequence of Islamic penetration into Java (Ricklefs 2007, 2). The Mataram Islamic court under Sultan Agung (1613–46) actively promoted, to borrow from M. C. Ricklefs, “Islamic mystic piety,” but by the mid-nineteenth century this was to be challenged by Sharia-oriented reformers such as students at *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and religious teachers from the north coast of Java (*ibid.*, 31–52).

While the spread of Islam on the island of Java had started long before the 1870s, stories of its proliferation were recorded in *Slomporet Melayoe*, the first Malay-language newspaper published in Java (Semarang). The *Slomporet Melayoe* from 1870 to 1897 features various issues related to the spread of Islam. For example: the inauguration of two ponds in the Kendal Mosque in which women participated (*Slomporet Melayoe*, August 24, 1878);<sup>4</sup> the influence of Islam on marriage and ceremony in Anyer (*Selomporet Melaijoe*, September 3, 1870); neighborhood conflict arising from the noise of *beduk*,<sup>5</sup> which in this case was amplified during the days and nights of Ramadan in Pandeglang (*Slomporet Melaijoe*, February 19, 1876); the story of *pengulu*<sup>6</sup> at the Semarang Mosque explaining the rationale of issuing *talak*<sup>7</sup> between husbands and wives (*Slomporet Melaijoe*, May 17,

4) There are four ways to spell the magazine title: *Slomporet Melayoe*, *Slomporet Melaijoe*, *Selomporet Melaijoe*, and *Selomporet Melajoe*. I follow the original spellings of the issues containing the articles I have cited.

5) Traditional Islamic gong made from leather used to announce *azhan* (prayer time).

6) *Ulama* who were part of the palace bureaucracy and responsible for managing mosque activities.

7) Divorce initiated by the husband.



1873); and stories of pilgrimage or Haj (*Selomporet Melaijoe*, October 1, 1870, March 11, 1871; *Slomporet Melaijoe*, December 31, 1875).

Equally interesting are the published opinions on the change in manners of Javanese who had recently returned from the Haj. Olo Ngangoer (*Slomporet Melaijoe*, March 8, 1873) criticized the tendency among Javanese who had undertaken the Haj to adopt Arabic-style clothes and shoes, and their preference to be addressed as “*tuan hadji*.” Ngangoer proposed that Javanese pilgrims should retain traditional Javanese dress to preserve Javanese values and customs, because he believed that being a *haji* (a pilgrim) was not always a guarantee of morality and obedience to the Islamic code. All of the foregoing indicate that Islamization in Java had a significant impact not only in signifying Islamic piety through devotion to the five pillars of Islam,<sup>8)</sup> but also in defining the ideal relationship between men and women, behavioral changes related to the adoption of new Islamic principles or Arabic customs, and the gradual spread of mosques that soon dominated the social and architectural landscape in Java. A vivid picture of Islamization in Java can also be seen in the adoption of Islamic-style dress by Javanese women, which had been expected since the sixteenth century and spread further after the early twentieth century, as we shall see below.

The first code of conduct commonly associated with Islam is the adoption of the veil (*kudung*, or veiling).<sup>9)</sup> Andaya (2000, 247) suggested that around the sixteenth century, upper-class women were expected to adopt the veil because Islam decreed that physical beauty was not for public display. However, I believe this normative expectation of veiling among noblewomen had not proliferated widely in Java between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. There are barely any photographs or pictures reflecting widespread adoption of the *kudung* among either noblewomen or ordinary women on the island in the nineteenth century. I suggest that the traditional dress style of Javanese women—namely, the *kemben*<sup>10)</sup>—was the dominant norm until the twentieth century. This is evident in Photos 1 and 2. Photo 1 below shows the typical Javanese noblewoman’s dress.

Why had Javanese women not embraced the *kudung* by the 1800s? I believe this had to do with the social and political conditions in Java at the time. Under the compulsory crop system from 1830 to 1870 (*kultuurstelsel*), all Javanese peasant men were conscripted as forced labor to service Dutch economic prosperity (Ratna 2000b, 17). It was

8) The five pillars of Islam are: *syahadah* (profession of the Islamic faith), prayer, *zakat* (religious alms), fasting, and *haj* (pilgrimage).

9) The *kudung* is the Muslim women’s veil covering the head and neck.

10) Traditional batik cloth worn as a sarong; a tube or length of fabric that covers a woman’s body from her chest all the way down to her legs. Her hair, neck, and arms are visible.



**Photo 1** A Javanese Noblewoman

Source: Seorang wanita Jawa berdarah biru (*Java: Past and Present*, n.d.). Reproduced from the collection at the Indonesian National Library, Jakarta, January 2010.



**Photo 2** Javanese Women Pounding Rice

Source: Para wanita Jawa menumbuk padi. Nederlandsch Oost-Indische, 1856. Reproduced from the collection at the Indonesian National Library, Jakarta, January 2010.

a time of hardship for the majority of Java's indigenous population. There was famine among the peasants due to poverty, which was compounded by the outbreak of a typhoid epidemic in Central Java from the 1840s to the 1850s (Ricklefs 2001, 157–161). Eduard Douwes Dekker's book, *Max Havelaar*, clearly describes the harsh life of Javanese peasants due to exploitation by the colonial government and the Javanese aristocracy.<sup>11)</sup>

Moreover, rather than paying attention to Islamic dress style, Javanese noblewomen were busy defending their existence vis-à-vis the Javanese noblemen's declining supremacy. For example, Florida (1996, 212), in assessing Javano-Islamic literature, reveals that the intensification in Javanese elite men's writing of women's literature in the Surakarta court around the end of the nineteenth century was a result of the diminution of indigenous royal men's power in Java following the end of the Diponegoro War in 1830. Without military or political authority, the royal male elite, particularly in the Surakarta court, tried to assert their power by writing on women's literature to show the dominance of the male voice in constructing gender relations in late-nineteenth-century Java. For example, *Piwulang Estri* resonates with the male voice of the ideal, elite Javanese woman as a good wife (or co-wife) who is perfectly accommodating of her husband's polygamous desires and submissive to his authority (*ibid.*, 210–211). A similar illustration of the total submission of a woman to her husband's authority is given in *Serat Murtasiyah*, a poem in the genre of Islamic *santri* (devout Muslim) dating back to early-nineteenth-

11) See Multatuli (1978, 24–54).

century Java. The poem describes the exemplary, virtuous Javanese wife who surrenders completely to her husband—including to his violence—and devotes herself to his happiness (*ibid.*, 217–219). This example corresponds with Koentjaraningrat's (1980, 13) observation that Javanese intellectuals had to accept Islamic concepts and incorporate them into the Central Javanese cultural tradition from the second half of the eighteenth century.

The second practice associated with Islam, although it is actually not new to Javanese custom (*adat*), is polygamy. During the Hindu-Buddhist civilization, it was common for noblemen to maintain co-wives (*selir*) or concubines. The practice persisted. For example, one edition of *Selompret Melaijoe* contains a description of Javanese *priyayi* (noblemen) who often had two or three wives (*Selompret Melaijoe*, October 26, 1887). Another well-known example is that of R. A. Kartini (1879–1904), daughter of the Regent of Jepara, Central Java. Born of a mother who had been trapped in a polygamous marriage, Kartini wrote in one of her letters that she would be more than willing to end this unfair *adat*, which she believed was exacerbated by a narrow interpretation and practice of Islam.<sup>12</sup> Although Kartini opposed polygamy, she could do nothing when in 1903 her father asked her to marry the Regent of Rembang, who already had three secondary wives (Thomson Zainu'ddin 1980, 9–10; Cote 2005). One instance of resistance to polygamy is Pakubuwono IX's first queen, who committed suicide following her husband's decision to take another wife. There is also Sekar Kadhaton, the daughter of Pakubuwono VII, who refused to get married, in rejection of the male ideology of polygamy and the construction of the virtuous and defeated wife (Florida 1996, 215–216).

The third practice, which I believe already existed in *adat* but was amplified by Islam, is *pingitan*.<sup>13</sup> Islam decreed that pious women and noblewomen should lower their gaze before men, to preserve their purity. Men were encouraged to show their devotion publicly, such as by going to mosques, while women were expected to stay home as a manifestation of their devotion and dignity (Andaya 2000, 246). Seclusion, according to Andaya (*ibid.*, 246–247), was a condition for noblewomen in Java before the 1500s; and when the Dutch arrived in Banten in 1596, they made the same observations of both Java and Flores. The practice persisted until the late nineteenth century among *priyayi* women such as Kartini, who underwent *pingitan* from 1892—when she was 12 years old—to 1898 (Thomson Zainu'ddin 1980, 4; Kartinah 1955).

In the early years of Java's Islamization (from the 1700s to the end of the 1800s), Javanese noblewomen were those most affected, precisely because of the nature of Islam-

12) See Kartini's letter to Stella titled "To Stella Zeehandelaar," in Geertz (1985, 81–82).

13) A period of time in which women were kept at home, secluded from the public sphere.

ization that was implemented in the Javanese royal court. Ordinary Javanese women seem to have been less affected. For example, poverty made it difficult for lower-class Javanese men to have more than one wife (see Locher-Scholten 2000, 32–33). Javanese noblewomen struggled with the various rules of conduct imposed on them by the Javanese male elite through textualized norms such as *Piwulang Estri* or *Serat Murtasiyah*. This was the “authority-defined” context of identity (to borrow from Shamsul A. B. 1996) invoking the Javanese noblewomen to show their Islamic modesty.

In my view this is actually a further consequence of the nature of the syncretic Islam propagated by the Mataram Kingdom since the mid-seventeenth century. I argue that Islamization at this stage was not intended to liberate Javanese women from the established *adat* (for example, the practice of polygamy and *pingitan* explored earlier). I believe that in this early stage of Islamization, Javanese noblewomen found Islamic discourse and practice more hampering than liberating. Although by the mid-nineteenth century there were professional Javanese Islamic groups of *putihan* (the “white” or “pure ones”) in *pesantren* communities throughout Java’s coastal areas, I believe their appearance had little impact on Javanese women because the *pesantren* allowed only males to attend sessions, as Ricklefs (2007, 50–70) points out. However, the situation changed considerably with the Islamic reformist movement of the early twentieth century, which gradually opened the door for Javanese women to actively pursue Islamic teachings and allowed their entry into public schools. This will be discussed shortly.

### Consciousness, Contestation, and Revelation of Identity

The spread of Islam in Java after the early twentieth century occurred at the same time as the rise of women’s emancipation, in line with the spirit of nationalism and the establishment of the Islamic reformist movement. The awakening of women’s consciousness in the East Indies (now Indonesia) had been preceded by a largely Java-based movement to educate women. Kartini has been regarded as the champion of women’s emancipation. After her death, her spirit inspired subsequent efforts to educate women through various educational institutions (Vreede-De Stuers 1960, 58–59). The period between 1912 and 1928 also recorded a rise in the number of women’s associations both across and outside of Java. Prominent among them was Putri Mardika, founded in Jakarta in 1912 with the aid of the nationalist organization Budi Utomo (Indonesia, Department of Information, 1968, 10; Sukanti 1984, 85–86).

Some of the women’s associations published their own magazines to voice their concerns. In the Putri Mardika magazine there is evidence to show how Islam was per-

ceived vis-à-vis the old-fashioned Javanese *adat* in defining the ideal woman in the early twentieth century. Putri Mardika's goal, which was inspired by Kartini's spirit, was as follows: "Mardika" means freedom, which gives women room to express their thoughts as independent citizens who are able to make their own decisions (*Poetri Mardika* 1915; 1917). This goal was underpinned by the rising awareness among *bumiputra Jawa* (lit., the sons of Java, or indigenous Javanese) that the old-fashioned *adat* (child marriage, *pingitan*, no schooling, polygamy, and total submission to the husband) were no longer acceptable and that things must change.<sup>14)</sup>

The early twentieth century was also an era of a global consciousness of nationalism, as reflected in Putri Mardika's goal that both men and women were important elements in the nation's aspirations concerning the progress and dignity of the *bumiputra* (Sd 1915a; S Koesoemo 1917a). Putri Mardika proposed that the ideal Muslim woman should be able to maintain the good aspects of *adat* and imbibe Islamic religiosity so that she would not be easily fooled by her husband in her march toward progress, in order to ensure that Muslim women would not follow in the footsteps of their European counterparts who had crossed boundaries (S Koesoemo 1917b). In practice, Putri Mardika encouraged women to participate in the public sphere in partnership with men (Sd 1915a). The association provided scholarships for women to study in Java or in the Netherlands (*Poetri Mardika* 1915) and built schools for women in West Java, with branches in East Java (Bestuur 1917). *Isteri*, the official magazine of the Indonesian Wives Association (Perikatan Perhimpunan Isteri Indonesia, or PPII, founded in 1928), also framed women's progress within the national consciousness. For example, in one of its 1932 editions it exhorted Indonesian women to be knowledgeable so as to be progressive and to work alongside men in the fight for Indonesian independence (Patrem 1932).

The limits of Javanese women's development were framed by the concept of *kodrat*<sup>15)</sup> or *fitrah*.<sup>16)</sup> K. H Dewantoro, leader of the Perguruan Taman Siswa, an educational institution founded in Yogyakarta in 1922, used the concept of *kodrat* without reference to

14) For a discourse on the criticism and rising awareness regarding the old-fashioned Javanese *adat* and perception of women, see Pr (1915), Sd (1915a; 1915b), and Kijahi (1917).

15) The word *kodrat*, according to Nasaruddin Umar (1999), derives from the Arabic *qudrah*, meaning "the ability to do a particular thing within the bounds of appropriateness." Umar further argued that underlying the concept of *kodrat* were the biological differences between women and men. According to him, this resulted in different roles for men and women: certain roles for women were dictated by their biological structure, for example, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding. On the other hand, certain roles were more appropriately assumed by men, such as work requiring physical strength.

16) *Fitrah* espouses the different roles between women and men on account of their respective biological structures, which implies appropriateness and boundaries for both women and men.

Islam when explaining women's progress. He believed that in trying to achieve progress in the public sphere alongside men, women should remember their *kodrat* rooted in *iman* (belief in God)—without reference to any religion (K. H Dewantoro 1938). *Kodrat*, without reference to Islam or other religions, was also used by PPII representatives in the Budi Utomo Congress (*Isteri* 1931b).

Conversely, the concept of *fitrah* with reference to Islam is apparent in *Taman Moeslimah*, an Islamic magazine published in Solo and affiliated with Muhammadiyah.<sup>17</sup> It states that the progress of Javanese women should be in accordance with *fitrah*—not taking on men's work (as doctors, machinists, or politicians, for instance) and not mixing with men publicly (Sriwijat 1926). A more progressive view was printed in the *Islam Raja* magazine, which was also affiliated with Muhammadiyah and published in Solo. Asm Sdm (1939) said that Muslim women had an obligation to support public movements, or to be educators inside and outside of the home, to perform duties as good wives, and to propagate Islam. Later, in 1940, the norm of being a good wife was further specified as *isteri Islam yang berarti* (the truly Islamic wife), according to which Muslim women were expected to serve as best they could as wives and mothers (*Islam Raja* 1940). Considering *Islam Raja*'s affiliation with Muhammadiyah, it may not be a coincidence that prior to 1940, 'Aisyiyah (Muhammadiyah's female branch) had introduced the classical book titled *Isteri Islam yang berarti* (in 1937), which focused on women's private roles as wife and mother (PP Muhammadiyah Majlis 'Aisyiyah n.d., 10).<sup>18</sup> To facilitate Muslim women's growing understanding of Islamic principles, they were encouraged to join preacher schools to become female preachers (*mubhalighot*), such as those in Solo (*Islam Raja* 1939). These examples reveal the influence Islam had in defining the ideal Javanese woman. Islam was perceived as a guidance and norm (such as *fitrah*) that differentiated its followers from those pursuing European-style progress. In the broader context, the general discourse of Indonesian women's progress is framed in the spirit of nationhood and the concept of *kodrat*.

At the same time, my observations uncovered criticism of Islamic practices. R Soepomo (1931) argued that while women's status and rights according to customary law (*hukum adat*) were equal to those of men (such as in inheritance or divorce) before the arrival of Islam, Islamic practices replaced this customary law, which in effect degraded their status and rights. Dewi Sekartadji (1932b) also criticized Islam, which she believed deprived women of the rights—such as rights in divorce and polygamy—that they enjoyed

17) Muhammadiyah is an Islamic reformist movement founded by K. H. Ahmad Dahlan in 1912. It began in Kauman, Yogyakarta, and then spread throughout Indonesia.

18) For a longitudinal analysis of 'Aisyiyah's normative guidance from the 1930s until today, see my Master thesis Kurniawati (2007, 57–77; 2008).

under Hindu civilization. Sekartadji's writing certainly provoked debate. Muslims writing in the *Bintang Islam* magazine, and a reader in Medan, refuted Sekartadji's opinion. Sekartadji responded by arguing that she did not intend to degrade Islam; rather, she was urging a return to the spirit of nationalism exemplified in Java's past Hindu civilization, and prioritization of Indonesian independence (Dewi 1932a). There was also criticism of the Islamic norm of segregating women in public meetings such as the Indonesia Raya Congress (Rit 1931–32).

Maria Ulfah Santoso, a prominent Indonesian activist, criticized the Islamic practices further by arguing that while the Qur'an was not intended to degrade women, in practice the husband enjoyed a greater religious right in initiating *talak* and that the religious court often refused a woman's initiation of divorce, thereby rendering wives, especially battered wives, more vulnerable to spousal abuse (Maria 1940). In response, devout Muslims, such as those writing in the Solo magazine *Islam Raja*, defended Islam by arguing that it was a religion of progress and was in full compliance with modernity, citing several *santri* who succeeded in managing modern educational institutes, hospitals, orphanages, and a publishing house (Sarwo 1940).

The above exploration clearly indicates a shifting perception toward the contribution of Islam to women's progress. While around the 1920s Islam had been perceived as an alternative value to steer Indonesian women's progress vis-à-vis European progress, between 1920 and 1940 there was a mounting debate between those who perceived Islam as detrimental to women, and the champions of reformist Islam (Muhammadiyah) who defended Islamic practices by acknowledging Islam's contribution to progress.<sup>19)</sup> Although the above discourse in newspapers and magazines refers mostly to Indonesian women, and a few specifically refer to Javanese women, I believe it had a significant impact on the identity formation of Javanese women, who had been surrounded by the raging debate on a daily basis. The deliberations intensified toward the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century, contesting the definition of the ideal Javanese Muslim woman.

Since the early twentieth century, the norm of wearing the *kudung* gained acceptance; polygamy has persisted even to this day, while *pingitan* has become a relic of the past. Andree Feillard's study reveals that prior to the 1920s many women in the Indonesian archipelago wore the traditional *kemben*, but Islamization brought on the adoption of what would become the Malay-Indonesian dress consisting of the *kebaya*,<sup>20)</sup> the sarong, and the head shawl (Feillard 1999). This dress code was observed in both urban and rural

19) For comparison and more written sources from this period with a special focus on Islamic reformists, see White (2004).

20) A close-fitting blouse.

areas, but particularly among *santri*, who wore a *kain*<sup>21)</sup> wrapped tightly around their hips, a *kebaya* blouse, and *kerudung*,<sup>22)</sup> while rural women wrapped the *kerudung* around their necks (*ibid.*).

Islamic groups such as 'Aisiyiah also promoted the adoption of the *kudung*, initially in Kauman, Yogyakarta. Since the 1920s, 'Aisiyiah's promotion of the *kudung* was underpinned by K. H. Ahmad Dahlan's eagerness to elevate the status of female *priyayi* (noblewomen) and *santri* in Kauman. At the time, it was widely believed that the proper place of the *priyayi* was at home (Koentjaraningrat 1985, 242). The unquestioned acceptance of the Islamic-Javanese proverb "*Wadon iku neroko katut, suwargo nunut*"<sup>23)</sup> indicated this subordinate status (Ahmad 2000, 96). Dahlan launched his pursuit to enhance women's social status by citing from the Qur'an verse 97 of *An-Nahl*<sup>24)</sup> and verse 124 of *An-Nisa*<sup>25)</sup> (Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisiyiah n.d.: 1). Dahlan, together with his wife Siti Walidah, developed a religious consciousness among Muslim women by sending girls in Kauman to formal schools (Alfian 1969, 272).

While Islam via Muhammadiyah under Dahlan's leadership liberated Javanese women from the old-fashioned *adat*, the latter still had to conform to the Islamic norm of becoming *wanita sholehah*,<sup>26)</sup> through, among other things, wearing the *kerudung*. It was 'Aisiyiah that initially introduced the Islamic woman's clothing style, for instance wearing the *jarit* as a lower cloth to cover the hips and legs, and the *kebaya* as an upper cloth in combination with the *kudung*, and socks to cover the feet (Lin 1952). 'Aisiyiah's propagation was facilitated by the *Suara 'Aisijiah* magazine, which began using the Indonesian language in 1928 (Soeara 'Aisijiah 1940; Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisiyiah n.d., 30). Photo 3 illustrates the proper way of wearing the *kudung* among (Javanese) Muslim women.

The wearing of the *kudung* was also demonstrated outside of Muhammadiyah, such as in the *Islam Raja* magazine, one of whose regular readers believed that wearing the *kudung* did not lower women's status and that it was a religious obligation for Muslim women to wear it (Soeminar 1940). Much later, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)<sup>27)</sup> also adopted the *kudung* but more tolerantly than did the Islamic reformists. Women in NU believed

21) A length of unstitched cloth worn on the lower part of the body, over the sarong.

22) A shawl covering the head and flowing onto the shoulders.

23) A woman is dragged to hell and carried to heaven by her husband.

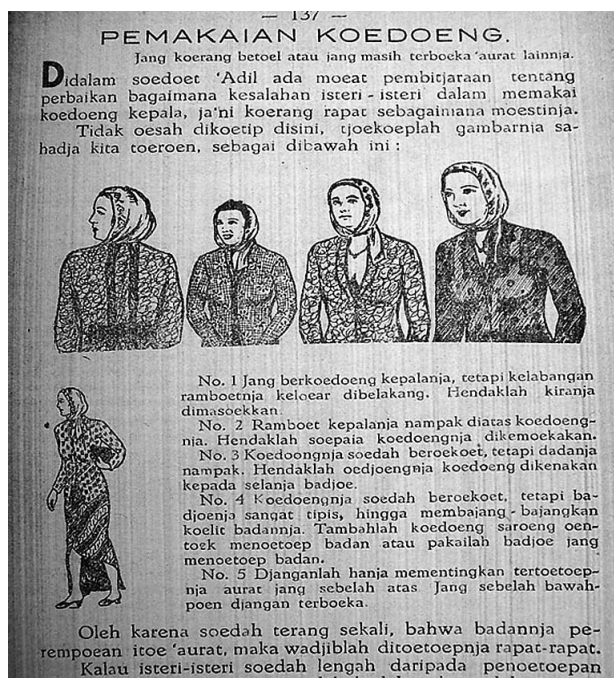
24) This says, "Whosoever does a virtuous deed, be it male or female in believing, Allah will surely give them a goodly life."

25) This says, "Whosoever does a virtuous deed, be it male or female in believing, they will be in heaven and they will not be wronged whatsoever."

26) Pious and loyal Muslim women.

27) This organization, whose name means "Revival of Religious Scholars," is an Indonesian Islamic organization founded by Hasyim Asy'ari and Wahab Chasbullah in 1926, based mainly in Java.





**Photo 3** How to Wear the *Kudung*

Source: Soeara 'Aisjiah (1938)

that an “open *kudung*” was the rule, and they did not talk about the *jilbab*<sup>28)</sup> prior to the 1980s (Feillard 1999). Moreover, the adoption of veiling seems to have varied across social classes and across urban and rural settings. This can be seen from Jay’s notes (1963, 79) on the process of differentiation between orthodox and syncretic Islam in Modjokutho, East Java, around the 1960s. He observed that rural female *santri* wore a white headscarf that framed but did not cover the face; urban female *priyayi* and *santri* wore light and colorful scarves only when they went to town or attended upper-class—and therefore syncretic—urban affairs. According to Jay (*ibid.*), the adoption of the headscarf among *santri* and urban upper-class women resulted in the gradual disappearance of the scarf among *abangan*<sup>29)</sup> communities.

In fact, the *kudung* and the segregation of women in public meetings did not meet with the approval of some Islamic leaders. For example, in a speech at the second convention of the League of Young Muslims (Jong Islamieten Bond, or JIB) in Solo in 1926, Hadji

28) A tighter *kudung*.

29) Nominal Muslims who practice Javanese syncretism.

Agus Salim (1978, 66–71), a prominent Islamic modernist and nationalist, argued that veiling of women and their segregation in public meetings was not an Islamic but an Arabic *adat* or custom. He urged the JIB to free itself from false Arabic *adat* that did not stem from Islamic teachings. Although he opposed veiling and the segregation of women in public meetings, he defended polygamy because he believed the Qur'an allowed it (*ibid.*, 62).

The persistence of polygamy to date is another interesting case in point. For example, the *santri* woman Siti Walidah—Dahlan's wife—could do nothing about her husband's polygamous marriage to four other women (Suratmin 1990, 38).<sup>30</sup> Achmad Djajadiningrat, the assistant *wedono* or sub-district officer in Bojonegoro, as cited in Vreede-De Stuers (1960, 104), noted that polygamy was widely practiced among the upper class in Java, including civil servants, *santri*, and merchants. The 1930 census recorded the incidence of polygamy among Javanese and Madurese men at 1.9 per cent, lower than the rate in the outer islands (4 per cent); while among the Minangkabau it stood at 8.7 per cent (*ibid.*).

Polygamy was further endorsed under the Old Order (1945–66), when President Sukarno issued Government Regulation No. 19/1952, which provided government pensions to the multiple widows of polygamous civil servants (Blackburn 2004, 129). In response, women's organizations held divergent positions. While 'Aisiyiah (*ibid.*) and other Islamic women's organizations defended the practice (*Harian Rakjat*, October 14, 1952), Catholic women (*Harian Rakjat*, October 13, 1952) and other women's organizations, including Isteri Sedar, called for its abolition (Tj. T vis Si De 1940). Sukarno's polygamous marriage in 1954 (Blackburn 2004, 130) also served to fuel the public debate on the issue. And last but not least, while *pingitan* was still practiced in Java in the early twentieth century among *santri* and *priyayi*, as Sewojo noted (cited in Vreede-De Stuers 1960, 51), it gradually disappeared following the rise of the Islamic reformist movement in 1912 and the emergence of women's associations that encouraged education for girls.

The interpreters of Islamic religious texts have been predominantly male. For example, in Muhammadiyah, women were rarely included in the Majelis Tarjih (Council on Lawmaking and Development of Islamic Thought, founded in 1927), resulting in 'Aisiyiah's 40<sup>th</sup> *Muktamar* or Congress in Surabaya in 1978 recommending women's involvement in the Majelis Tarjih (*Suara Muhammadiyah* 1978).<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in the NU

30) They were Nyai Abdullah, a widow of H. Abdullah who was related to the Yogyakarta court; Nyai Rum, the younger sister of Kyai Munawir in Krapyak, Yogyakarta; Nyai Silihan, daughter of the *Pengulu* M. Syafi'i in Pakualaman, Yogyakarta; and Nyai 'Aisiyiah, younger sister of the *Ajengan Pengulu* in Cianjur, West Java.

31) The 20<sup>th</sup> *Tarjih Muktamar* in Garut, West Java, in 1976 was attended by women *ulema* (religious scholars); see *Suara Muhammadiyah* (1976).

tradition, interpretations of the divine message by male *kyais* (religious teachers) were prioritized and women's voices were not officially taken into account until 1938 (Blackburn 2008, 88). However, this does not change the fact that they delivered a different discourse and interpretation of the roles and status of Javanese Muslim women compared to the old Javanese-Islamic literature such as *Piwulang Estri* or *Serat Murtasiyah* explored earlier. In turn, the teaching and interpretation of Islam since the early twentieth century—on issues of veiling, women's education, segregation, child marriage, and the still-contentious issue of polygamy—facilitated a closer connection between Javanese women and Islam, leading to a change in perception of the status, rights, and obligations of their modern Islamic-Javanese identity. By conforming to the Islamic-style *kudung*, pious Javanese Muslim women reveal a new identity that remains distinct from their non-pious counterparts and even other non-Muslim Javanese women. The next section elaborates on the new stages Javanese Muslim women went through in trying to consolidate their identity in light of the social challenges of the New Order.

### Individual Elevation and Collective Action: Revealing Identity Politics

The position of Javanese women during the New Order (1966–98) was largely influenced by Suharto's iron grip on political Islam in the name of economic development. To consolidate power, Suharto steadily undercut the influence of political parties in the lead-up to the 1971 General Election (Emmerson 1978, 99) and promoted a confederation of functional groups, Golkar. Shortly afterward, in 1973, the New Order government launched the "fuse party" policy, which consolidated four existing Islamic political parties into a single entity called the United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan); while the Nationalist, Protestant, and Catholic parties were merged into the Indonesian Democratic Party (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia) (Ricklefs 2001, 361; M. Rusli 1992, 4).

Despite the successful marginalization of Islamic political parties, the New Order policy ironically triggered the rise of pro-democratic Islam beginning in the early 1980s (Hefner 2000, 72). This was inspired by the resurgence of Islam elsewhere in the world, such as in Iran and Pakistan, in the 1970s. One of the pioneers of this cultural movement in Indonesia was Nurcholis Madjid, who proposed *parelisme Islam*, which emphasized the oneness of Indonesia and Islam based on Islamic principles that were universal and inclusive (Nurcholish 1992). Similarly, Abdurrahman Wahid proposed *pribumisasi Islam*, in which Islam complemented Indonesian nation building. This Islamic cultural movement was also promoted by the two biggest Indonesian Islamic organizations, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama. The Muhammadiyah Congress in Ujung Pandang

in 1971 declared no affiliation with political parties.<sup>32)</sup> The Nahdlatul Ulama Congress in Situbondo in 1984 declared a return to the “*khittah 1926*”—or a withdrawal from political praxis to strengthen individuals and society toward developing a civic culture as a basis for democracy (M. A. S Hikam 1999, 40). The younger generation of Javanese Muslim women grew up in this sociopolitical context.

This Islamic resurgence was grasped mainly by Muslim students in high schools and universities, particularly in Java, such as at the Bandung Institute of Technology, Indonesia University, Gadjah Mada University, the Education and Teaching Institute, and the Islamic State Institute. Why did Java figure prominently in this development? We must consider the historical and sociological facts that contributed to the rapid socio-political developments in Java. The 1952 figures from Indonesia’s Ministry of Home Affairs show the islands of Java and Madura as the most densely populated areas, a fact that can be attributed to natural factors such as fertile soil and cultivable land, amount of rainfall, and development initiatives by former Dutch administrators (Indonesia, Ministry of Social Affairs, 1954, 11). This situation persists to this day: for example, 63.83 per cent of the Indonesian population lived on the island of Java in 1971, and the number declined only to 60.12 per cent in 2000 (Leo *et al.* 2003, 4). Moreover, the percentage of women in Java was higher, at 59.32 per cent, than that outside Java, which constituted only 40.68 per cent in 1995 (Indonesia, Biro Pusat Statistik 1995, 11). This unequal population distribution is attributed to education, health facilities, and employment opportunities. Javanese women’s better access to education, as a result, can be seen in the percentage of illiterate women aged 10 to 19: while the lowest percentage—4.11 per cent—was in Yogyakarta province, the highest—32.12 per cent—was in West Kalimantan province in 1980 (Indonesia, Biro Pusat Statistik 1989, 102). Javanese women, therefore, had better opportunities to intersect with both progressive and conservative Islamic ideas, through higher learning.

One of the manifestations of the religio-cultural movement was the practice of adopting the veil among high school and university students in Java. Since the late 1980s there have been several studies on the rationale, dynamics, and meaning of veiling in Java. Brenner (1996) studied the gradual adoption of veiling among young Javanese women in universities and Islamic schools in Yogyakarta and Solo since the 1980s and concluded that in Java, the growing adoption of veiling marked not only a historical consciousness but also a path to modernity. Feillard’s (1999) study in the 1990s on veiling among elite women in Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama in Java concluded that while veiling among ‘Aisyiyah was perceived as a pledge to a virtuous life, the traditionalist Islamic NU viewed

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32) For more on the concept of the “high politics of Muhammadiyah,” see Amien (1995; 1998).

the veil as a modern fashion accessory. Moreover, based on the dramatic increase in the number of Muslim female students who wore the veil in two prominent universities in Yogyakarta from the 1990s to 2003, Nancy Smith-Hefner's (2007, 389) study concluded that the contemporary phenomenon of veiling among those women reflected a valiant struggle to meld their individual autonomy and modern education with a strong commitment to Islam.

At this point I deliver a different interpretation from Brenner's on the growing adoption of veiling among young Javanese Muslim women since the 1980s. While for Brenner the adoption of the *jilbab* in the 1980s signified a path to modernity involving individual transformation from the past to a modern and religious Islamic Java, this phenomenon can also be seen as an expression of identity politics. In my view, the phenomenon is a consequence of Suharto's strong control over Indonesian women—which springs from his patriarchal Javanese background. Suharto, in fact, styled himself as the “father of development” (*Bapak Pembangunan*) and instigated what Julia Suryakusuma (1996, 96) calls “state *ibuisim*”—a gender ideology that expected complete devotion from all Indonesian women as wives and mothers in developing Indonesia. Borrowing from Ratna Saptari (2000b, 19), who used the term “Java-centric” in addressing Sylvia Tiwon's (2000, 71–73) notion of the centrality of the Javanese ideology of womanhood, the politically active husband (Suharto) and his faithful companion-wife (Tien Suharto) were the bedrock of a stable family as the foundation of a strong state. In line with this, Suharto introduced the new Marriage Law No 1/1974, which promoted monogamy (Blackburn 2004, 130–134) and encouraged the division of labor between husband and wife for all Indonesian families. It is at this stage, I suggest, that the influence of resurgent Islam gave considerable spirit to young Javanese Muslim women to collectively adopt the *jilbab* as early as the 1980s, as an expression of political resistance against the New Order's severe policy on political Islam and the construction of defeated women.

This suggestion that the growing adoption of the *jilbab* among young Javanese Muslim women signifies identity politics is strengthened by the fact that the women's actions were initially opposed by the New Order regime. For example, in Jakarta, under the support of the Indonesian Islamic Students' Association (Pelajar Islam Indonesia), girls began to wear the *jilbab* in school although school principals opposed it (Alwi and Fifrda 2002, 30). In response to the growing adoption of the *jilbab* among high school students, the Director-General for Elementary and Tertiary Education (*Direktur Jenderal Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah*) issued the Letter of Instruction (*Surat Keputusan*, SK) No. 052/C/Kep/D.82, which ruled on a compulsory national uniform for all school students (*ibid.*). Following this, various *jilbab* confrontations occurred—not only in high schools in Jakarta, Bandung, Bogor, and Surakarta, but also in Sulawesi and Bengkulu—from 1981 to 1989

(*ibid.*, 28–49). Throughout the year, local and national levels of the Indonesian Council of Ulema (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, or MUI), the Indonesian Council for Islamic Propagation (Dewan Dakwah Islam Indonesia), various religious leaders, and lawyers supported the wearing of the *jilbab* in schools, while the Indonesian Department of Education opposed it. In the aftermath of mounting press coverage on *jilbab* confrontations in late 1990, the Director-General for Elementary and Tertiary Education issued SK No. 100/C/Kep/D/ 1991, which permitted individuals to wear special uniforms according to their faith (*ibid.*, 74). Nevertheless, the series of confrontations indicates the New Order's anxiety over the growing adoption of the *jilbab* among young Javanese Muslim students after the 1980s. I suggest the New Order's anxiety was based on the perception that the phenomenon could potentially endanger the domination of the New Order's narrative and gender ideology of politically defeated women, and its general policy to suppress political Islam.

In examining the more recent context, we shall differentiate the above phenomenon with the current trend of *jilbab* adoption among young Indonesian women post-New Order, which, according to Rachmah Ida, has become part of contemporary—indeed stylish—fashion and has little association with the conservatism of the 1980s (Rachmah 2008, 63–65). In understanding that the growing adoption of the *jilbab* after the New Order is not an expression of political interest as a form of silent resistance to the regime, wearing the *jilbab* reflects a different meaning in the context of popular democracy.

### Engaging Islam and Playing Identity Politics

Since 1998, Indonesia has undergone a process of democratization signified by structural changes to political systems such as the election system, the introduction of the decentralization policy, and a vibrant atmosphere of civil society. One interesting development has been the rising awareness and attention among female Muslim activists and intellectuals with regard to feminism and gender equality in Islam. One leading Muslim feminist—Siti Musdah Mulia, a researcher at the Indonesian Department of Religious Affairs—has criticized the 1974 Marriage Law and the Compilation of Islamic Law (Kompilasi Hukum Islam, or KHI)<sup>33</sup> since 2004, urging that it be reformed as it no longer meets the spirit of gender equality and violates human rights (Siti 2007, 131–149). In October 2004 Mulia and her friends in the Working Group for Gender Mainstreaming at

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33) A special regulation and guidance for Muslim marriages based on Presidential Instruction No. 1/1991.

the Department of Religious Affairs launched the Counter Legal Draft (CLD) to the KHI, which proposed a more equal relationship between husband and wife (Marzuki 2008, 2–4). There were positive and negative responses to the CLD (*ibid.*, 13–17).<sup>34</sup> The controversy ended with the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs officially banning the CLD in February 2005 (*ibid.*, 19), which was followed by a *fatwa*—or religious decree—from the MUI on July 29, 2005 stating that pluralism, liberalism, and secularism, as manifested in the CLD, were contradictory to Islamic teachings and thus Muslims were forbidden (*haram*) to follow such ideas (*Kompas Cyber Media*, July 30, 2005).

In the meantime, the debate over women's leadership hit the ground running when Megawati Sukarnoputri announced her nomination as a female presidential candidate in the first General Election of the democratic era in 1999. Islamic scholars began to look for possible justification for a female presidential candidate. It was the Congress of Indonesian Muslims (November 3–7, 1998) that recommended that the MUI publish a *fatwa* on female leadership, “for temporary women are not allowed to be president” (Sinta 2000, 16). In response to the growing interest over female political leadership, Muhammadiyah and NU both felt the need to address the issue. Since the 1970s Muhammadiyah has been concerned with female leadership (*Suara Muhammadiyah* 1978), which it continued to propagate throughout the 1990s, in the 44<sup>th</sup> Muhammadiyah Congress in Jakarta in 2000, and in the 45<sup>th</sup> Muhammadiyah Congress in Malang in July 2005 (*Jawa Pos*, July 2, 2005). Muhammadiyah generally supported female leadership in any position in society as long as it was endorsed by *Adabul Mar'ah Fil Islam* (Pious Women in Islam), an influential book published by Muhammadiyah's Majlis Tarjih in 1977 (Majlis Tarjih Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah n.d., 56–57). In NU, attention to women's leadership came quite late, compared to Muhammadiyah. The NU National Meeting in Lombok (1997) issued a decision on NU's standpoint titled “The Scholars' Opinion on a Female President (*Pendapat Alim Ulama tentang Presiden Wanita*) No. 004/MN-NU/11/1997.” It stated NU's support for female roles in social and cultural transformation in the era of globalization (PBNU 1997).

Muslim women in contemporary Java have been surrounded by this progressive Islamic discourse and efforts to support female leadership in politics since 1998. Under

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34) Those who supported the effort included: Komnas Perempuan, Fahmina Institute, Lembaga Kajian Agama dan Gender, Rahima, Puan Amal Hayati, Jurnal Perempuan, PSW, Kalyana Mitra, Kapal Perempuan, Solidaritas Perempuan, LBH Apik, Fatayat-NU, Rifka An-Nisa, International Center for Islam and Pluralism, Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace, the Wahid Institute, Jaringan Islam Liberal, Lakpesdam-NU, and Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial. Opponents of the CLD were radical Islamic organizations such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, Front Pembela Islam, Dewan Dakwah Islam Indonesia, Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, and Forum Ulama Ummat Islam.



**Photo 4** Rustriningsih, Ratna Ani Lestari, Siti Qomariyah, (above);  
Rina Iriani, Haeny Relawati Rini Widyastuti (below)

Source: Rustriningsih, Ratna Ani Lestari, Siti Qomariyah, photos courtesy Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi.

Rina Iriani, <http://www.google.co.jp/imglanding?> (December 23, 2008)

Haeny Relawati Rini Widyastuti, <http://www.tokohindonesia.com/ensiklopedi/h/haeny-relawati-rw/index.shtml>. (December 23, 2008)

such sociopolitical change, it is not surprising to see the current trend whereby Javanese Muslim women take a stand in local politics. Here, it is apparent that the force compelling Javanese Muslim women to play a greater role in identity politics grew out of the new political context of progressive Islam and the introduction of direct local head elections in 2005. Today, the percentage of female politicians winning (regent/vice regent/mayor/vice mayor/governor) local elections on the island of Java (West Java, Central Java, and East Java), all of whom are Muslim, is higher (11 women, or 9.91 per cent, in 111 elections) than the percentage of female politicians elected outside of Java (15 pairs or 4.22 per cent in 355 elections) between 2005 and 2008 (Indonesia, Ministry of Home Affairs 2009). Five of the 11 female Muslim leaders who hold key positions as regent are Javanese women from Central and East Java: Rustriningsih, Regent of Kebumen (2000–05, 2005–10) and currently vice governor of Central Java (2008–13); Rina Iriani, Regent of Karanganyar (2002–07, 2008–13); Haeny Relawati Rini Widyastuti, Regent of Tuban (2000–05, 2006–11); Ratna Ani Lestari, Regent of Banyuwangi (2005–10); and Siti



Qomariyah, Regent of Pekalongan (2006–11). Although their social backgrounds vary across the classes of *abangan* (Rustriningsih and Ratna Ani Lestari), *santri* (Siti Qomariyah), and *priyayi* (Haeny Relawati Rini Widyastuti and Rina Iriani), all wear the veil, as shown above.<sup>35)</sup>

While the women's reasons for wearing the veil are sure to vary, we should not ignore the importance of an Islamic identity among Javanese Muslim women in local politics. To be sure, the identity of Javanese Muslim women as exemplified by the veil was not created overnight. Rather, it is a result of the intersection between Javanese women and Islam that began with the Islamization of Java, as I have illustrated throughout this paper. As the reason and meaning behind wearing the veil varies depending on the socio-historical context, perhaps now in contemporary Java wearing the veil is less a signifier of piety for female Javanese Muslim political leaders. Rather, it seems to be a political commodity and part of the code of conduct of these candidates to win the hearts of the predominantly Islamic-based voters of Nahdlatul Ulama, the dominant religious orientation in Java. This is not, however, to deny the fact that some Javanese Muslim women who wear the veil are indeed pious devotees of Islam.

And yet, the rise of Javanese Muslim female leaders in local politics has certainly

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35) *Santri* refers to the religious class whose members are devout Muslims. *Priyayi* comprises the Javanese noble class, the white-collar elite rooted in Hindu-Javanese courts and ethics. *Abangan*, *santri*, and *priyayi* are the three cultural types of Javanese Muslims introduced by Clifford Geertz (1960, 7) in his pioneering study in Modjokuto. Geertz's categorization has since provoked debate, questioning the reliability of his findings in contexts other than Modjokuto and in contemporary times.

Regardless of this criticism, I refer to Geertz's categorization as it is a useful analytic tool to understand and define the three Javanese Muslim women leaders I further observe in this paper. For example, although Rustriningsih was born into a Muslim family and is officially Muslim, her life history does not show a strong connection to Islamic traditions, such as the *pesantren* tradition. Thus, I classify Rustriningsih as *abangan*, which is also consistent with her political affiliation to the Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan), originally an *abangan* or nationalist-based political party. However, after 2004 Rustriningsih's personal orientation changed as she became more pious, undertook the pilgrimage, and donned the veil. This is how Geertz's categorization helps explain Rustriningsih's change from a relatively nominal Muslim (*abangan*) into a more devout Muslim, which I believe is an important factor contributing to her current success in expanding her political support base and acceptability beyond the loyal voters of the nationalist circle.

In the case of Siti Qomariyah, her personal origin from and strong connection to Nahdlatul Ulama *pesantren*, including her consistency in veiling, makes me place her in Geertz's *santri* category as a devout Islamic follower. In the case of Ratna Ani Lestari, although she is Muslim, her life history shows no close encounter with Islamic religious traditions, such as that of the NU *pesantren*, which is the dominant religious orientation in Banyuwangi. Moreover, with the sensitive nature of mixed marriages in Islam, her decision to marry the Hindu Winasa (former Regent of Jembrana) affirms her *abangan* cultural orientation.

been underpinned by strong Islamic legitimacy. According to my interviews with Rustriningsih, Siti Qomariyah, and Ratna Ani Lestari, they found minor religious opposition to female leadership as regents (*bupati*), and when there was any, it was mainly underpinned by political interests.<sup>36)</sup> Further interviews with, and observation of, prominent NU *kyai* in Kebumen, Pekalongan, and Banyuwangi, where the three female leaders were victorious, generally found no strong Islamic foundation on which to oppose females occupying leadership positions as regents (*bupati*) or governors (*gubernur*), because neither is the highest position in the state, as is the president.<sup>37)</sup> Therefore, in the fourth phase of the identity formation of Javanese Muslim women, Islam has provided a strong basis for them to be political leaders to meet the challenge of the direct local head elections since 2005.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have examined identity formation and the critical phase that saw a change from the culture-based Javanese female identity (the Javanese woman) to a religious-cultural-based identity (the Javanese Muslim woman) in line with the various sociocultural contexts over the centuries.

I shed light on the consequences of “syncretic” Islam, especially among Javanese noblewomen from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, during which Islam was perceived as a hampering rather than a liberating force. And yet, the intersection with Islam among Javanese noblewomen and ordinary women intensified in the early twentieth century following the rise of the Islamic reformist movement and national consciousness. Since then, both Javanese noble and ordinary women gained a better understanding of Islamic knowledge through religious learning that was combined with various ideas about progress, and also largely through several publications, which helped them change their stance from relatively passive objects to active subjects in the learning, criticizing, and implementation of divine Islamic messages. Through the active engagement of Javanese women with Islamic texts, which was seen as a lens for viewing social conditions, we can

36) Interview with Rustriningsih in the office of the Vice Governor of Central Java, Semarang, February 3, 2010; Interview with Siti Qomariyah at the official house of the Regent of Pekalongan, June 21, 2009; Interview with Ratna Ani Lestari in the office of the Regent of Banyuwangi, July 29, 2009.

37) Interviews with Kyai Haji MSKB, Chairman of the Kebumen NU Executive Board (1994–2002), July 28, 2010; Gus TH, Chairman of the Kebumen PKB Advisory Council (2007–13), July 28, 2010; Kyai SB, Chairman of the Pekalongan NU Executive Board (2007–12), June 20, 2009; Kyai MAB, Vice Chairman of Pekalongan PKB (2002–08), June 22, 2010; Kyai MK, Chairman of the Banyuwangi NU Executive Board, August 1, 2009. Their names have been withheld for the sake of confidentiality.

observe the pivotal role of Islam as a new ideology in Java that lent considerable spirit and a means to these women to reach a point of awareness that has enabled them to act as agents of change in their particular cultural setting. Thus, since the early twentieth century, Islam has helped liberate Javanese women from the cultural constraints of Javanese *adat*, the perception of them as defeated women, the practice of *pingitan*, and child marriage, even though polygamy remains a contentious battleground.

This growing religio-cultural consciousness has produced competing discourses among various Islamic groups or elite nationalists, both men and women, that are helping forge the emerging identity of Javanese Muslim women. In addition to these contestations is the practice of wearing the *kudung*, which was gradually adopted across social and geographical landscapes from the 1920s to the 1960s, and which I believe signified the changing identity of Javanese Muslim women. During this stage, I believe Javanese Muslim women wore the *kudung* to reveal their desire to remain distinct—not only from the European progress of the early twentieth century, but also from non-pious Javanese Muslim women and other non-Islamic Javanese women.

The New Order regime gave a rather different meaning to Javanese women's intersection with Islam. In my view, the adoption of the *jilbab* since the 1980s among younger-generation Javanese Muslim women has a distinct meaning that goes well beyond piety *per se*. Instead, it could be interpreted as an expression of identity politics against Suharto's severe policy toward political Islam and the Java-centric social construction of defeated womanhood. In this case Islam as a political ideology, and the resurgence of Islam since the 1970s, provided women with the spirit and means to reveal their political existence.

Of course, the individual reasons for female Javanese Muslim politicians adopting the *kudung* in the lead-up to direct local head elections from 2005 onward warrant deeper investigation. That these women adopt the *kudung* regardless of their social background as they go about their political endeavors indicates a possible "manipulation of Islamic piety" to win voters' hearts and minds in a popular democracy. Perhaps even more important, these findings point to the current relationship between Javanese Muslim women and Islam. This paper shows that Islam as a belief now provides a strong religious foundation for Javanese Muslim women to be local political leaders following the introduction of direct local head elections since 2005. In doing so, Javanese Muslim women are actually expanding their expectations and stretching the boundaries of their identity in contemporary Java in a way that was not possible before the collapse of the New Order.

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*Jawa Pos*

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*Slomporet Melaijoe*

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*Slomporet Melayoe*

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## RESEARCH REPORT

# Decision Support System Research and Development Network for Agricultural and Natural Resource Management in Thailand: A TRF-DSS Experience

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This paper aims to introduce the Decision Support System (DSS), which is an area informatics approach to area studies, and the research network complex based on DSS's application in Thailand. In particular, the paper presents and discusses current activities of the DSS research network at the national level in Thailand rather than being a theoretical and analytical study of the DSS mechanism or its cases. DSS has wide applications in Thailand, extending to various fields such as agricultural and natural resource management, economic and social management, historical and cultural preservation, and so on. DSS generally refers to a support system embedded into a computer system for providing intellectual resources with the appropriate numerical model necessary for decision making in production activities. Agricultural and natural resources have been the foundation of social and economic development in Thailand since the country's first national plan in the 1960s. Decision making to maintain agricultural productivity as well as to protect natural resources requires well-integrated data sets. The Thailand Research Fund (TRF) established a DSS research and development network (TRF-DSS) in 2002 to help various research teams in Thailand develop DSS tools and components for addressing agricultural and natural resource management issues. Using a "systems" approach, the DSS framework allows researchers and users to identify and integrate key components as well as to define databases and model-base management systems.

This paper focuses on the TRF-DSS research and development network, which consists of 12 universities, two line agencies in Thailand, and a line agency in Cambodia. During 2002–10, a total of 59 research projects were granted a budget allocation of 140.1 million baht, and a budget of 15.4 million baht was allocated to support activities of the network. In addition, 10 projects were funded to carry out post-project activities, with a total budget of 1.5 million baht. More than 20 DSS tools were developed and implemented by various users, ranging from policy makers to provincial and local government agencies engaged in short- and long-term planning and management. Most DSS tools were designed to allow the integration of biophysical and socioeconomic data as well as the decision support modules for alternatives evaluation and analysis. These approaches support the choices of dynamic simulation models as well as multi-criteria analyses for modelbase software development. They also allow users to evaluate various alternatives in agricultural and natural resource management.

Networking is a powerful platform for DSS research and development and may be applied to other types of research and development agenda in Thailand, such as area study projects. DSS tools contribute to an understanding of sustainability of production systems against a background of climate change, poverty reduction, and food security.

**Keywords:** agricultural systems, natural resource management, Decision Support System, research networking, Thailand

## I Introduction

Agricultural and natural resources have been recognized as the foundation of social and economic development in Thailand since the country's first national economic and development plan in 1961 (Thailand, NESDB 2011). However, the conversion of land into various agricultural systems and industrial development to support pro-industry policy has had a negative impact on agricultural productivity and natural resources (Thailand, NESDB 2007).

In 2007, some 38.7 per cent of the total land area in Thailand was used for agricultural production. This was the highest figure in the region: for example, the comparable figures were 9.2 per cent in Lao PDR, 32.5 per cent in Vietnam, 30.9 per cent in Cambodia, 18.3 per cent in Myanmar, and 24.0 per cent in Malaysia (FAO 2007). However, Thailand's agricultural sector contributed approximately 10 per cent of national gross domestic product (GDP), after the industries and services sectors (Thailand, NESDB 2010). The relatively high percentage of agricultural land in Thailand reflects the importance of agricultural land use type to national and local government planning and management, since household livelihoods and the sustainability of production systems coincide with suitable and favorable land areas. For example, the Central Plain of Thailand—an area of around 1 million hectares, where about 30 per cent of the Thai population lives—has well-designed irrigation systems that enable farmers to produce five rice crops in two years (Thailand, NSO 2007). In the northern part of the country, agriculture is concentrated along the more productive lowlands in the valley floors, where natural resources and human settlement also compete for space and resources. In the high plateau of northeast Thailand, rainfed agriculture is the dominant system of production (Fukui 1993; Grandstaff *et al.* 2008).

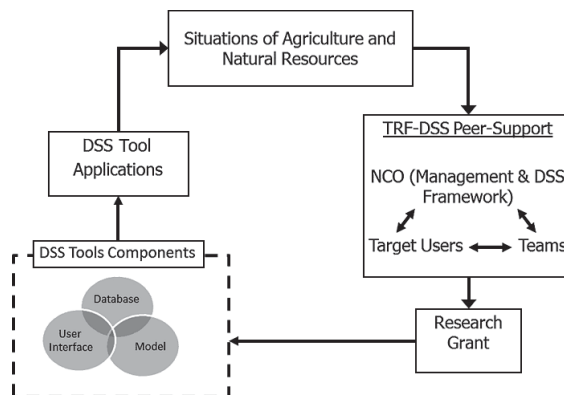
TRF acknowledges the need for integrated data and information systems beyond the provisions of agricultural statistics and censuses. There has been growing concern over the multifunctional roles and interconnectedness of agricultural systems and natural resources. In 1993, TRF was established as an independent research funding agency under the Office of the Prime Minister (Silaporn and Suchata 2009). In 2002, the TRF-DSS program was established with the mandate to support various research groups in Thailand in developing DSS tools to address ill-structured agricultural and natural resource issues.

The aim of this paper is to provide some experiences of the TRF-DSS network in an effort to develop and implement DSS research teams and tools in Thailand during 2002–10. It highlights key DSS research teams in Thailand, provides examples of DSS tool applications, and outlines prospects for how the TRF-DSS network and DSS tools

can contribute to a better understanding of the sustainability of agricultural systems and natural resources in Thailand in particular, and Southeast Asia in general.

## II DSS Development and Application Process and Components

DSS is an acronym for Decision Support Systems, which is an information technology tool used by an organization or group of users to support and enhance decision making when faced with ill-structured situations (Sprague and Carlson 1982; Power 2002), for instance in agricultural and natural resource issues (Cox 1996; McCown 2002; Jones *et al.* 2003; Mysiak *et al.* 2005). In 2002 TRF established a Decision Support System—TRF-DSS, a research and development network. The network is based on the interrelationships of agriculture and natural resources in Thailand, TRF-DSS peer-support components, research grants, DSS tool development, and applications (Fig. 1). TRF-DSS aims to support research teams in Thailand in developing DSS tools to address ill-structured problems and/or situations related to agricultural systems and natural resource management in various parts of the country (Attachai 2009b). In addition to the seven principles of the international agricultural research network (Plucknett and Smith 1984), TRF-DSS uses a peer-support process. Peers provide comments and technical knowledge to encourage research members and teams from various institutions to join in efforts to develop DSS tools for users, for instance at the provincial and sub-district levels, and for researchers of line agencies (Amnat 2009). This process is well accepted among health-care professionals and has been proven to increase productivity of researchers as well as provide innovative solutions to problems (Dennis 2003). Researchers and DSS-



**Fig. 1** DSS Development and Application Process as Implemented within TRF-DSS Network

targeted users within the TRF-DSS network perform and interact as research partners and mentors to achieve defined research goals. The group collectively defines research questions, approaches to the questions, expected DSS outputs and outcomes, and proposed research budget. The project workload is also defined and shared among team members.

The TRF-DSS network's mode of operations includes providing peer support, providing DSS funding for 59 DSS research projects, and organizing six annual meetings as a platform for researchers and users to share research progress and experiences. There are 12 research teams from major universities and institutions joining TRF-DSS to conduct research and develop DSS tools to address various agricultural and natural resource issues. The unique feature of TRF-DSS research is its three integral components: agricultural and natural resources in Thailand, the peer-support process, and DSS tool development and applications.

## II.1 *Situation of Natural Resources and Agriculture in Thailand*

The northern region of Thailand covers about one-third of the country (Phrek *et al.* 1980); 55 per cent and 21 per cent of it have been classified as forestland on mountainous areas and agricultural land, respectively. This region is also home to the four major river basins—Ping, Wang, Yom, and Nan—that join to form the Chao Phraya River in Nakhon Sawan Province. In 2008, Northern Thailand contributed 9.3 per cent to the national GDP and was home to about 12.1 million people, or about 18.1 per cent of the country's total population. Its per capita income was 51.1 per cent of the national average. In 2008, agriculture contributed about 37.7 per cent to gross regional domestic product at current market prices, the highest percentage as compared to other regions in Thailand (Thailand, NESDB 2010). Current issues in Northern Thailand include pressure on agricultural land and deteriorating natural resources (Leisz *et al.* 2009), conflicts over water between user groups (Sneddon and Fox 2006; Gizelis and Wooden 2010), and the establishment of the East-West Economic Corridor cross-border highway from Vietnam to Myanmar, with a major section in Laos and Thailand (Medhi 2004).

Northeast Thailand also covers about one-third of the country (KKU-FORD Project 1982), with 17 per cent and 55 per cent of the region being classified as forestland on mountainous areas and agricultural land, respectively. In 2008, this region contributed 10.7 per cent to the national GDP; however, per capita income was only 31.5 per cent of the national average and was the lowest in the country. Current issues in the region include low agricultural productivity, which is a function of low chemical fertilizer inputs (Wijnhoud *et al.* 2003), low soil fertility, and erratic rainfall patterns (KKU-FORD Project 1982), the latter resulting in frequent droughts and floods.



The Central Plain is the rice bowl of Thailand. Lying within the Chao Phraya-Thachin basin, it covers a land area of 20 per cent of the country's total. Approximately 28 per cent and 40 per cent of the Central Basin have been classified as forestland on mountainous areas and agricultural land, respectively. The Chao Phraya-Thachin river basin covers 30 per cent of Thailand's land area and is home to about 40 per cent of the country's population. Per capita income is 176.8 per cent of the national average. Currently, the Central Plain has few cases of conflict between natural resources and agricultural systems.

The southern part of Thailand covers 14 per cent of the country, with 25 per cent and 44 per cent of the total region being classified as forestland on mountainous areas and agricultural land, respectively. The South is home to approximately 14 per cent of the country's population, with a per capita income of 72.3 per cent of the national average. The region is facing a rapid expansion of oil palm cultivation for biofuel, which may lead to a higher rate of forest conversion (Fitzherbert *et al.* 2008).

## II.2 TRF-DSS Peer-Support Process

The TRF-DSS peer-support process consists of four major interacting components: the Network Coordination Office, targeting DSS users, DSS framework, and DSS research teams.

### *Network Coordination Office Management*

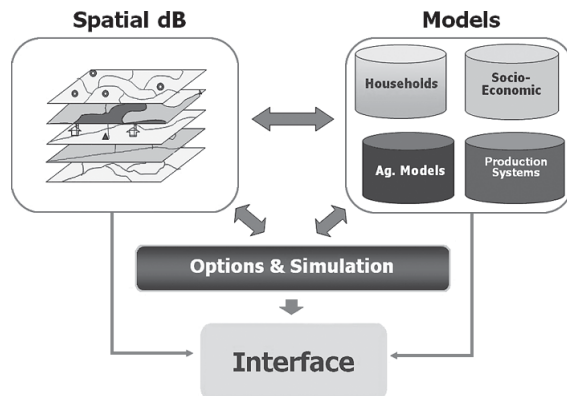
The Network Coordination Office for TRF-DSS was established in Chiang Mai University, Thailand, with one coordinator and two supporting staff. During the 2002–10 calendar years, TRF-DSS was allocated a total of 140.1 million baht to support DSS research projects, 1.5 million baht to support post-DSS project activities, and 15.4 million baht to support TRF-DSS networking activities. A total of 59 DSS research projects and 10 post-DSS project activities were given grants to conduct research and development on DSS tools and components. Included in the 59 DSS research projects were 3 DSS-oriented human resources development (HRD) projects, in which scholarships for master of sciences and doctorate degrees were granted to individuals in Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam to pursue their degrees in Chiang Mai University and Khon Kaen University. The grant contracts were signed by the TRF director and the head of the organization, i.e., the president of the awarded university; and the project leader was the witness of the contract. About 10 per cent to 12 per cent of the total grant budget was earmarked as “institutional fee” or “overhead charge fee” for each organization, except for line agencies that were mandated to conduct research, for example, the Department of Agriculture. Once the contract was signed by both sides, funds were transferred to

the bank account for researchers to manage their itemized funds for supporting their research activities. This was a new approach to research budget in Thailand, whereby researchers were responsible for mobilizing resources to achieve “agreed” final research products.

TRF-DSS realizes the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to deal with issues of agricultural and natural resources management, including the biophysical, socio-economic, ecological, environmental, and information technology aspects. Broadly speaking, a DSS tool is computer software that facilitates and accepts digital inputs of a large number of facts and methods and converts them into meaningful comparisons, graphs, and trends that can facilitate and enhance decision-making processes and outcomes. A DSS tool can assist users in processing, assessing, categorizing, and/or organizing information in a useful fashion such that it can be easily retrieved in different forms. In agricultural and natural resource management, users can employ a DSS to address “what-if?” questions posed by stakeholders when faced with ill-structured situations (Uehara and Tsuji 1998). To guide its work, TRF-DSS uses a “peer-supported” approach to promote “active engagement” of users and research teams in order to effectively develop a research proposal and to implement DSS tools. A peer-supported approach is one whereby users, research teams, and the TRF-DSS coordinator develop an understanding of the situation and formulate a sound research proposal for grant approval. The approach promotes an understanding of how users and research teams can utilize DSS tools to actively engage in addressing “what-if?” questions to improve a situation, using the defined DSS framework within the TRF-DSS research and development network in Thailand.

### *DSS's Targeted Users*

In provincial and local organizations in Thailand, computer-based information systems that combine various components—such as hardware, software, data, people, and procedures—to provide a decision-making system have recently become increasingly visible and important. However, most applications are in electronic data processing tools, and some applications have moved to a management information system, but none have moved to a DSS tool. TRF-DSS has introduced the principles and practices of DSS to users in provincial and local organizations and demonstrated that proper implementation of DSS tools can increase effectiveness and allow a visualization of various alternatives, promote learning, and facilitate communication within and between organizations. DSS users in Thailand may be classified into three types: users dealing with and making decisions in situations within administrative boundaries, users dealing with and making decisions in situations within natural boundaries, and users dealing with and making decisions on specific issues.



**Fig. 2** DSS Framework Adopted within TRD-DSS

Source: (Amnat 2009)

### *DSS Framework*

All DSS tools share a common structure (Sprague and Carlson 1982; Bhatt and Zaveri 2002) consisting of digital databases, dynamic simulation models or analytical tools, and a user interface with the Thai language (Fig. 2). DSS tool development in Thailand can be divided according to three groups of users (Table 1): (1) DSS tools for users making decisions within a given administrative boundary; (2) DSS tools for users making decisions across administrative boundaries under situations within a natural boundary, such as a watershed boundary, national park boundary, or special economic zone; and (3) DSS tools for users making ad hoc decisions or deciding on specific issues related to agricultural systems or natural resources.

### *DSS Tools for Users Making Decisions within Administrative Boundaries*

In 2002–10, a total of 26 research projects were conducted for DSS users making decisions within administrative boundaries, and 37 per cent of the network budget was allocated (Tables 1 and 2). The TRF-DSS network identified two types of users for this DSS category: officials in provincial offices and officials in the Tambon Administrative Organization. Currently, both types of users make decisions based on historical and non-digital format data sets. TRF-DSS research teams together with the users identified the need to develop DSS tools to support data integration for their planning and tasks to deal with agricultural production reports and natural disaster management, i.e., floods and drought affecting agricultural production systems. In general, the system contains databases related to administrative boundaries, population, soil maps, land-use maps, water resources, and transportation networks. The DSS tools are designed to allow users

**Table 1** Number of DSS Projects Carried Out by Researchers in Each Institution for Various Users under TRF-DSS Network in Thailand during 2002–10

| Institution                                      | User Types     |                |        |     | Grand Total |
|--|----------------|----------------|--------|-----|-------------|
|  | Administration | Cross-boundary | Ad Hoc | HRD |             |
| Chiang Mai University                            | 12             | 1              | 10     | 3   | 26          |
| Khon Kaen University                             | 4              |                | 4      |     | 8           |
| Naresuan University                              | 2              | 2              | 3      |     | 7           |
| Ubon Rajathanee University                       | 4              |                |        |     | 4           |
| Department of Agriculture                        |                |                | 2      |     | 2           |
| Kasetsart University                             |                | 1              | 1      |     | 2           |
| Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy             |                | 1              | 1      |     | 2           |
| Independent researcher                           | 1              |                |        |     | 1           |
| National Parks, Wildlife, and Plant Conservation |                | 1              |        |     | 1           |
| Chulalongkorn University                         | 1              |                |        |     | 1           |
| Thammasat University                             |                |                | 1      |     | 1           |
| Payap University                                 | 1              |                |        |     | 1           |
| Maharakham University                            |                |                | 1      |     | 1           |
| Silpakorn University                             | 1              |                |        |     | 1           |
| Silpakorn University (Sanarnchan Palace Campus)  |                | 1              |        |     | 1           |
| Total  | 26             | 7              | 23     | 3   | 59          |

Source: (TRF 2011)

**Table 2** Percentage of Budget Allocation to DSS Tool Development for Various Users under TRF-DSS Network in Thailand during 2002–10

| Institution                                      | User Types     |                |        |      | Grand Total |
|--|----------------|----------------|--------|------|-------------|
|  | Administration | Cross-boundary | Ad Hoc | HRD  |             |
| Chiang Mai University                            | 21.99          | 2.35           | 14.92  | 5.47 | 44.73       |
| Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy             |                | 3.91           | 7.21   |      | 11.13       |
| Khon Kaen University                             | 6.16           |                | 2.94   |      | 9.10        |
| Kasetsart University                             |                | 4.20           | 4.85   |      | 9.06        |
| Naresuan University                              | 1.65           | 4.07           | 1.88   |      | 7.60        |
| Chulalongkorn University                         | 4.32           |                |        |      | 4.32        |
| Thammasat University                             |                |                | 3.30   |      | 3.30        |
| Silpakorn University (Sanarnchan Palace Campus)  |                | 3.18           |        |      | 3.18        |
| Department of Agriculture                        |                |                | 2.07   |      | 2.07        |
| Ubon Rajathanee University                       | 1.79           |                |        |      | 1.79        |
| Maharakham University                            |                |                | 1.44   |      | 1.44        |
| National Parks, Wildlife, and Plant Conservation |                | 1.15           |        |      | 1.15        |
| Independent researcher                           | 0.77           |                |        |      | 0.77        |
| Payap University                                 | 0.19           |                |        |      | 0.19        |
| Silpakorn University                             | 0.18           |                |        |      | 0.18        |
| Total  | 37.05          | 18.86          | 38.62  | 5.47 | 100.00      |

Source: (TRF 2011)

to view all stored data on a Thai-language platform and to allow communications for decision making to be based on provincial and local administrative boundaries.

#### *DSS Tools for Users Making Decisions within Natural Boundaries*

Only seven research projects were conducted for users making decisions within natural boundaries, and 19 per cent of the network budget was allocated (Tables 1 and 2). The pressure on natural resources, i.e., land and water, is continuously increasing in Thailand, and managing these resources collectively and sustainably is a challenge. Therefore, natural boundary systems, for instance watershed or park boundaries, require DSS users to make decisions across administrative boundaries. Such DSS tools must allow users to combine and integrate data from various sources, with a simple-to-use interface, allow communications and coordination among agencies, and contain features of complex systems.

#### *DSS Tools for Users Making Decisions in Special Situations or Ad Hoc Cases*

A total of 23 research projects were conducted for users making decisions in special situations or ad hoc cases, and 39 per cent of the network budget was allocated (Tables 1 and 2). Situations beyond administrative and natural boundaries are grouped in the “special issues” category, for instance the impact of climate variability and change on agriculture and natural resources, or a cultural study of the Royal Road from Angkor Wat in Cambodia to Phimai in Thailand. DSS tools can also be used to facilitate communication between researchers from various backgrounds and countries when dealing with a common situation. Users engaged in medium- and long-term planning are the main users targeted for these types of DSS tools. DSS tools in this category are designed to link climate change scenario data sets, with common data definitions, to process-oriented simulation models. The latter involves an Internet-based interface that is designed to allow communications and coordination among agencies and contains features of complex systems.

#### *TRF-DSS Research Teams*

##### **Chiang Mai University**

The Chiang Mai University research team—as a research unit of the Multiple Cropping Center, Faculty of Agriculture—is the team that introduced the DSS concept and practices into research agenda in Thailand during the early 1990s (Methi *et al.* 2005). The Multiple Cropping Center was established in the 1970s, with a mandate to conduct research to improve the performance of agricultural systems, using various systems approaches, namely, agro-ecosystem analysis (Phrek *et al.* 1980). Under the DSS research

unit, a number of DSS tools have been developed for a variety of application purposes and users, including administrative, non-administrative, and special issues. The application of one of its projects titled “A Support System for Planning to Manage Resources for Agriculture and Services,” started in 2002, has been very successful in terms of its far-reaching impact at the provincial administrative level.

Currently, the main DSS research field includes the development of information technology to support decision making using non-numerical data sets and crop production knowledge management.

### **Khon Kaen University**

Since the mid-1970s, research activities at the Faculty of Agriculture, Khon Kaen University, have focused on cropping systems, farming systems research, agro-ecosystems analysis, and Rapid Rural Appraisal. DSS research was introduced as part of agro-ecosystem analysis in the early years of the twenty-first century.

At present, the main research topics include applications of existing DSS tools to improve performance of agricultural systems in the rainfed environment of Northeast Thailand as well as at the local community and provincial levels.

### **Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy, Thailand Fine Arts Department, Silpakorn University, APSARA Authority Cambodia, and Prince of Songkla University**

In 2005 a bi-national research team from three universities and two national agencies was formed to conduct research, using a multidisciplinary approach, to study the Royal Road from Angkor Wat in Cambodia to Phimai city in Thailand, as the social science and tourism part of DSS. In this research, the team studied the ancient road in detail—its utilization, the people who lived and used this road, the ancient industries along this road, the culture that disappeared, and the culture that continues to flourish along the Royal Road until today. Current technologies were applied in the fields of remote sensing, GIS, archeology, anthropology, and geophysics. Information systems were developed to gather information from this study for scholars to use. In addition, data that were developed from this project can be further utilized by related works in the fields of land-use planning related to cultural management, tourism, etc.

Currently, the research is expanding to study the relationship between ancient and near-present culture in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) and the Malay Peninsula.

### **Ubon Rajathanee University**

In recent years, DSS researchers from the Faculty of Agriculture at Ubon Rajathanee

University have focused on three main fields: (1) Database development for local organizations; (2) decision making and DSS development in local organizations, such as sustainable agricultural production; and (3) systems simulation using intelligent systems technology such as the agent-based simulation platform. The relevant concepts of the main research fields are developed based on the needs of the community.

Recent research emphasizes extending DSS tools to local organizations at the provincial level to support planning, agricultural project improvement, and management. Expanding DSS applications has become a key policy of provinces in lower Northeast Thailand, which are engaged in accelerated rural development.

### **Thammasat University at Rangsit Center and Asian Institute of Technology**

The collaborative project between the Department of Geography, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University, and the Remote Sensing and Geographic Information System field of study at the School of Engineering and Technology, Asian Institute of Technology, aims to assess the effects of climate variability (especially droughts or dry spells) on rice production in rainfed environments and to develop a DSS tool that might help to properly anticipate and adapt farming to maximize agricultural production.

Current research activity focuses on using DSS tools to support real-time/near-real-time weather information in rainfed environments, early warning on rice disease (probability), and yield estimation, including suggestions on response and adaptation methods/strategies for rice cropping under climate variables (based on the rice knowledge bank and experts). The DSS tool developed is expected to be a crucial source of information for stakeholders: farmers, agricultural officers/researchers, and policy makers/planners at local and regional levels.

### **Department of Agriculture, Rice Department, and Land Development**

#### **Department of Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives**

The team from the Department of Agriculture, Rice Department, and the Land Development Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives consists of individual researchers who have been participating in a series of training workshops on using crop growth simulation models since the early 1990s. The team began its DSS research and development in the early years of the twenty-first century and has been testing and implementing DSS tools to study yield gaps of rice, cassava, sugar cane, and maize in major growing areas of Thailand. Current research activities focus on conducting field experiments to generate data for model testing and validation in major ecosystems in Thailand.

### Naresuan University

Established as a regional university in the lower northern region of Thailand in 1990, Naresuan University has developed a good reputation. DSS research activity was begun there in 2001 by a team of researchers from the Faculty of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Environment. The research area focuses on applications of geo-informatic technologies and the development of spatial DSS tools for agricultural systems planning. The recently developed spatial DSS tool “*Rabeang Settakit*” was devised to compile various databases from local agencies in 12 provinces along Thailand’s East-West Economic Corridor. As a spatial-based dialogue DSS tool, *Rabeang Settakit* is useful for policy planners, local administrators, and those who are involved in local policy and plan analysis or local resource management aimed at rural economic development. This tool enables users to generate scenarios of resource utilization, disaster risk management, and rural socioeconomic development. It can display output information in both graphical map and attribute forms at the village level or at the tambon administrative boundary. By using *Rabeang Settakit* DSS tool, users can explore fields or alternatives that fit with defined goals or decision criteria of a specified area.

Currently, the team is developing a DSS tool for establishing an index-based rice crop insurance system using scientific, technological, and social approaches. Under the collaboration of five organizations from the government and private sectors, the rice crop insurance project covers 14 provinces of Thailand.

## III Selected DSS Tools and Applications in Thailand

### III.1 *DSS for Natural Agricultural and Natural Resource Management at Provincial Level*

Fig. 3 displays the basic structure and analysis window of the DSSARM shell, designed to allow users at the provincial level to compile, store, and visualize spatial data sets from various provincial agencies on one stand-alone platform. The shell integrates spatial and attribute data of Chiang Mai and Lumphun Provinces in Northern Thailand, and provincial officers have been trained in installing and applying the shell to communicate among agencies. Currently the shell is in its second version and is being applied in other provinces in Thailand—Lumphun Province in the North and Kalasin Province in the Northeast.

### III.2 *DSS for East-West Economic Corridor*

Recently there has been an increase in the number of projects that cross provincial boundaries. One example of such a project is the East-West Economic Corridor (Chada



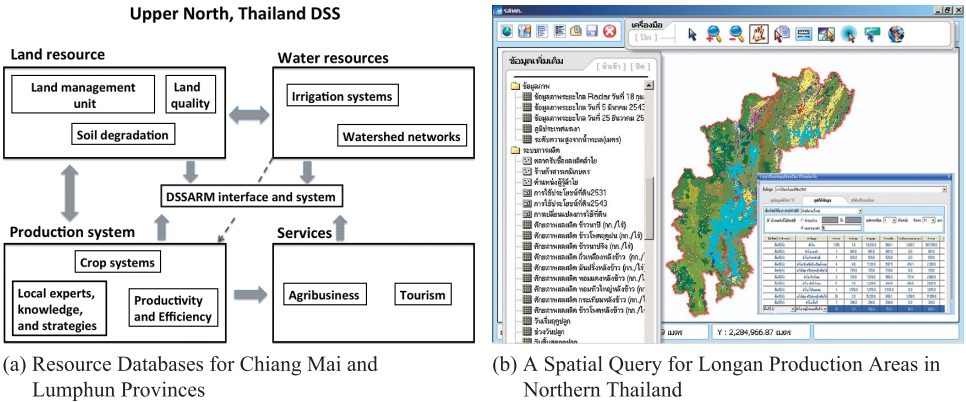


Fig. 3 DSSARM Framework

Source: (Methi *et al.* 2005)

2011). The project team developed a database and display interface on the Internet (<http://www.map.nu.ac.th>) for users to view various types of data (Fig. 4).

Users can view a total of 18 data layers: Administration, Collection points, Crops, Disasters, Food security, Infrastructure, Meteorology, Places, Resources, Rice, Sheets, SMEs, Topography, Tourism, Village Index, Wind, Water, and Water resources.

### III.3 DSS for Living Angkor Road Project

The Living Angkor Road project, which is a collaborative project between Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy, Thailand Fine Arts Department, Silpakorn University, APSARA Authority Cambodia, and Prince of Songkla University, demonstrates the application of geo-informatics technology, using a multidisciplinary approach, in cultural study—in this case the study of Cambodia's Royal Road from Angkor to Phimai (Surat and Shibayama 2009) (Fig. 5).

More information is available at <http://larp.crma.ac.th> (Surat 2011).

### III.4 DSS Tools for Studying Effects of Weather Patterns on Rainfed Rice Production Systems

In one study, two real-time weather observation systems were developed in a large rainfed rice field in Ubonratchathani Province, Northeast Thailand, to provide crop-growth-related parameters for model calibration, simulation, and validation. Actual evapotranspiration (ETa) was estimated from a series of MODIS data using SEBAL (Surface Energy Balance Algorithm for Land). A simulation using the RS-SWAP-GA (Remote Sensing - Soil Water Atmosphere Plant - Genetic Algorithm) method was developed to estimate the spatial and temporal variations of soil moisture and yield in the study

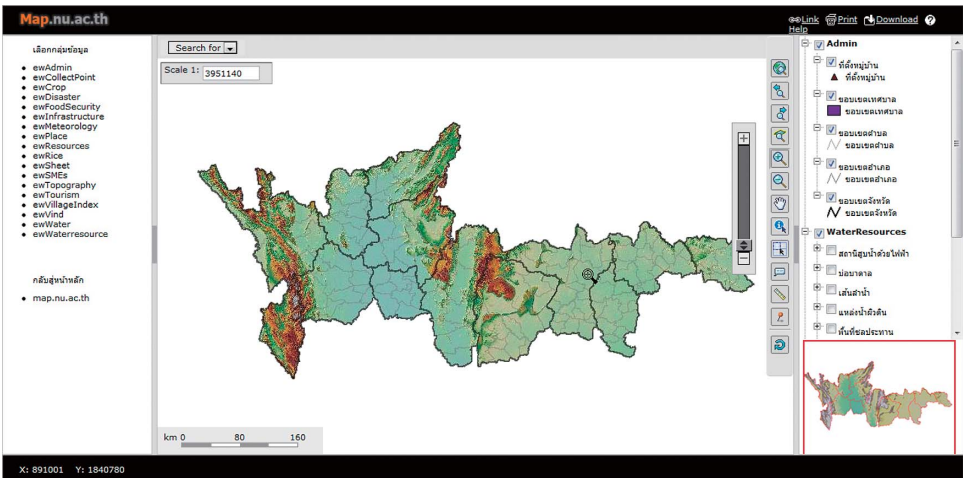


Fig. 4 East-West Economic Corridor Web-based Interface (<http://map.nu.ac.th>)

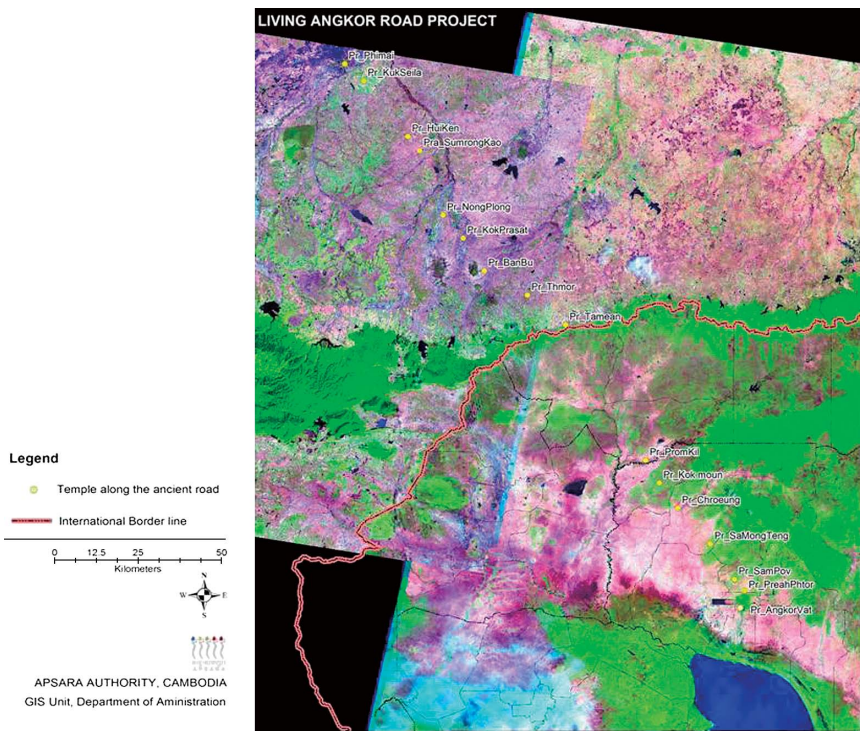
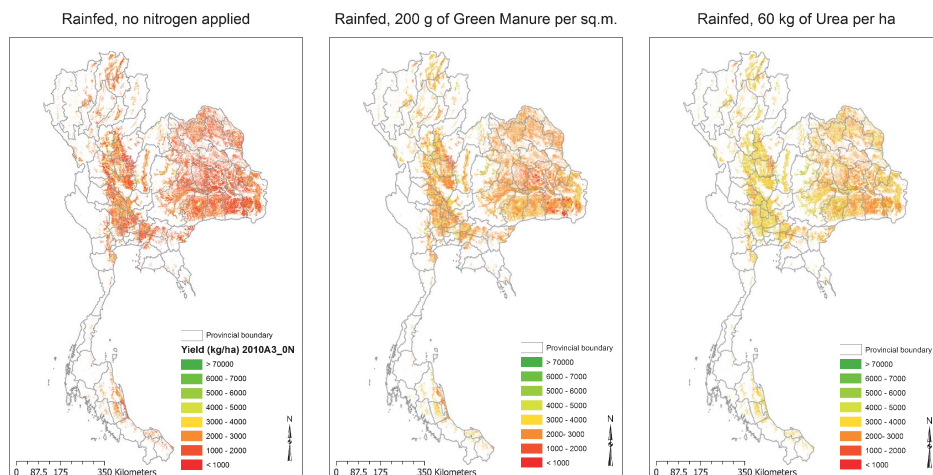


Fig. 5 Rest Houses (*thamma sala*) along the Royal Road from Angkor Wat in Cambodia to Phimai in Thailand

Source: (Surat and Shibayama 2009)



**Fig. 6** Distribution of Simulated Rice Yields (kg/ha) in Thailand under ECHAM4 A2 SRES Scenario during 2010s for Three Production Options

Source: (Attachai and Suppakorn 2011)

area under different dry spell scenarios. Although the analysis revealed the advantage of remote sensing data at the provincial level, cloud contamination during the cropping season imposed limitations on the quantity and accuracy of data. The approach requires a minimum of 15 per cent of remote sensing data in a year to calibrate a crop simulation model. More information and details can be found at [http://203.159.10.20/weather/TRF\\_Drought/Home.php](http://203.159.10.20/weather/TRF_Drought/Home.php) (Honda 2011).

### III.5 DSS for Assessing Impact of Climate Change on Crop Production Systems

The CropDSS shell was developed to link the DSSAT4.5 (Decision Support System for Agrotechnology Transfer version 4.5) crop growth simulation models (Hoogenboom *et al.* 2003; Jones *et al.* 2003) with future climate scenarios from the ECHAM4 Global Climate Model for Thailand (Attachai 2009a). The CropDSS shell allows users to link four spatial databases—administrative, crop planted areas, soil boundary, and climate grid maps—with DSSAT4.5 models. The crop models that have been extensively tested in Thailand require a minimum data set of climate data such as solar radiation, temperature, rainfall, soil profile characteristics, crop genetics characteristics, and crop management. Users may use the CropDSS program to study the impact of climate change on agricultural systems in an integral approach, for instance, the impact on rice production in Thailand (Fig. 6).

The CropDSS program has been used to assess the impact of climate change on the

rice (Chitnucha and Attachai 2009), cassava, sugar cane, and maize (Somchai *et al.* 2009) production systems in Thailand, using ECHAM4 SRES A2 and B2. As a result, a change in policy planning for climate change adaptation under the direction of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) was to use CropDSS to assess the impact of climate change on four major crops in Thailand: rice, cassava, sugar cane, and maize.

## IV Future Prospects

The future prospects of TRF-DSS in regional agricultural and natural resource research depend on demand and supply of DSS tools by various users and researchers, which may include both private and public sector organizations dealing with local and regional issues. TRF has supported TRF-DSS for eight years to demonstrate that DSS tools can be developed provided the demand exists. However, TRF-DSS is a flexible network of researchers with common research interests, a DSS framework, and funding to generate results. Demand from other agencies, both private and public, is the key to future activities and contributions of TRF-DSS for Thailand and Southeast Asia. The challenge is to build bridges between these emerging research communities and well-established research in developed countries as well as the private sector (Brimble and Doner 2007). This challenge may be met by establishing a well-structured and well-organized DSS research infrastructure in Thailand as a platform to create and maintain a critical mass of research supplies.

Thailand will benefit tremendously from regional collaboration, especially in Southeast Asia. Collaborative DSS research projects will help solve local as well as regional agricultural issues and natural resource management problems. Thailand enjoys a worldwide market for agricultural exports. However, with the changing global environment and various regional economic agreements, DSS tools have the potential to help Thailand build a collaborative platform in the region.

## V Conclusion

This paper carries an introduction to the DSS (Decision Support System), which is an area informatics approach in area studies, and the research network complex based on DSS's application in Thailand. The paper focuses on the TRF-DSS research and development network, consisting of 12 universities, two line agencies in Thailand, and a line agency in Cambodia during 2002–10. The development of DSS tools for agricultural and

natural resource management was independently started in Thailand during the early 1990s by research units in various universities. The TRF-DSS research and development network was established in 2002 to provide a network platform and financial support for DSS research, development, and implementation. It has proven effective in promoting DSS research and development, having built a strong record of research achievement. The network combines the power of digital networking with the collaborative facilitation offered by peer-support communities, to support decisions on sustainable agricultural and natural resource management in Thailand. Furthermore, it has created synergies among groups and information exchange among the disciplines of agricultural and natural resource sciences, and information science.

Although DSS users in various agencies, both public and private, can implement the tools to address issues in agricultural and natural resource management, the effectiveness of DSS depends less on the technical or theoretical aspects of the tools themselves than on the institutional and socio-political environment that determines the issues and the resources available (Matthews *et al.* 2008).

DSS tools have led to cooperation and co-learning with other disciplines and agencies, and there is now a feeling among researchers and DSS users in Thailand that there is a need to reinforce their integration with agricultural and natural sciences, using the TRF-DSS research framework. Furthermore, advances in DSS research have clearly identified some research questions in the various fields in which networking and collaboration can contribute to the more sustainable development of agricultural systems and natural resource management. The establishment of TRF-DSS can also contribute to defining the integral role of research conducted by agricultural and natural resource scientists within the interdisciplinary framework of DSS, based on the need to address the sustainability of production systems under various climate change scenarios. Such research may lead to poverty reduction and improvement of food security levels.

Some of the lessons learned during the implementation of TRF-DSS are as follows. DSS tools are a decision support system, not a decision-making system. A funding commitment is required to effectively support research teams to collectively develop and implement DSS tools for various users, with a wide array of issues related to agriculture and natural resources. It is important to involve users in DSS development and testing at a very early stage of a research project. Funding is only one factor in a successful DSS research project; bureaucratic rules and developing collaborative agreements with other agencies are also important factors for project leaders to consider during the course of the project. Successful DSS implementation also depends on training and documentation to the end users. Training sessions can be carried out in the form of workshops to expose users to various DSS components, functions, and limitations. Finally, networking of



research teams, funding agencies, and users in agricultural systems and natural resource management provides a platform for communication based on the same data sets. Lessons learned from the TRF-DSS network may be applied to other issues in Thailand and elsewhere, for example the application and implementation of area informatics to improve an understanding of the relationships between urban and rural communities (Shibayama 2009). The discussed research and development network platform and its results have the potential to provide a strong base for implementing various research area studies agenda to understand the interrelationships between physical environments and resources and suggest a Best Management Practice in the Southeast Asian region.

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*The State and Illegality in Indonesia*

EDWARD ASPINALL and GERRY VAN KLINKEN, eds.

Leiden: KITLV Press, 2010, 328 p, with bibliography and index.

What do analysts do, or ought to do, when the embodiments of legality—the state and state functionaries—are the ones often guilty of illegality? This is a challenging situation confounded by the fact that not a few people whom one might expect should feel outraged by this state of affairs appear to condone, even participate actively in the whole exercise. Drawing from a wealth of on-the-ground experience and scholarly insights, a group of mostly Australia-based Indonesianists bravely took up this challenge and came up with an engaging, theoretically informed, empirically rich and nuanced volume that rethinks long-standing views on the nature of corruption and state in Indonesia. This volume is also important for the ethical questions raised by the grounded, detailed, so-called “area studies approach” analysis as splendidly showcased by the contributors.

In the carefully thought out introduction, the editors, Edward Aspinall and Gerry van Klinken, offer a compelling justification for eschewing the common tendency to analyze corruption as deviations from the legal rationality the state is supposed to embody. They instead take illegality or corruption to be a constituting element of the state-formation process. In the editors’ words: “illegal activities by state officials are best understood, not as an aberration external to the normal workings of the state, but somehow part of its very logic” (p. 19). Thus, the solution they offer entails a “new form of socially embedded state” enabled by a “politically engaged citizenry” (p. 28). While not all the contributors in the volume follow this cue, this analytic path opens up exciting possibilities for the analysis of state and corruption in Indonesia that has been hitherto dominated by the discourse of good governance.

The first three articles by Robert Cribb, Ross McLeod, and Howard Dick and Jeremy Mulholland offer a healthy mix of historical and theoretical perspectives. They also set the volume’s sobering yet realistic and hopeful tone: there is no easy way out of entrenched and widespread illegality in Indonesia, but somehow things can be done. Cribb argues that while corruption and the structures that sustain it are not inherent in the socio-cultural make up of Indonesia, historical circumstances going back to the colonial and revolutionary periods reinforced the situa-

tion that breeds, facilitates, and nurtures what he aptly calls the “system of exemptions.” Running contrary to the editors’ vision of a socially embedded state, Cribb’s analysis points to its strengthening as well as “enhanced surveillance and punishment” to curb the seemingly natural “temptation” to resort to corrupt practices (p. 44).

McLeod, for his part, offers a neat analytic construct that accounts for the institutionalization of public-sector corruption in Indonesia. He argues that it was a legacy of what he calls the “franchise system” installed by Suharto to perpetuate his regime in power. By maintaining the salaries of government officials low, in gross violation of the law of supply and demand, and at the same time allowing them to collect “private taxes” through bribes and other forms of day-to-day corrupt practices, Suharto rendered them perpetually dependent on the status quo. The solution McLeod offers is to correct the imbalance between the market-driven salary rates and the salaries received by government officials. Following the rational choice, “marketist” analysis of corruption, this article also goes against the grain of the editors’ aspiration.

Defining the state as the “transactional space” that acts as a “marketplace” (p. 65) for competing elites, Dick and Mulholland illuminate the mechanisms for the distribution of “political spoils.” In doing so, they flag attention to the rather unsavory partnership between the post-New Order phenomenon of “elite democratic consensus” despite the fierce intra-elite rivalry, on the one hand, and the continuity in altered forms of corrupt practices within the upper echelon of the state in the post-Suharto period, on the other. That the two seem to be mutually reinforcing casts dark clouds on the prospects of a widened democratic space as a platform for solving the problem of illegality. While careful not to fall into a politico-cultural mode of analysis, Dick and Mulholland nevertheless suggest the need to look deep into “culture” and “society” to understand why this problem is difficult to solve.

The succeeding nine articles offer a range of fascinating cases drawn from various geographic locations such as East Kalimantan (McCarthy; Nooteboom), Riau (Ford and Lyons), Aceh (van Klinken and Aspinall), Jakarta (Wilson), various parts of Java (Mietzner), other parts of Indonesia (Widoyoko), and transborder areas (Honna), as well as sectoral contexts including natural resources (McCarthy), labor migration (Ford and Lyons), election campaigns (Mietzner), the construction industry (van Klinken and Aspinall), the education sector (Widoyoko), judiciary (Butt and Lindsey), police-criminals partnership (Nooteboom; Wilson), and transnational security (Honna). Varied though these cases may be, one thing is clear: the systemic—widespread and deeply entrenched—nature of the problem highlights the fact that there is no easy solution in sight. The richness of details and the highly nuanced analysis found in these articles justify the editors’ claim, specifically argued by Jun Honna in his article, for the benefits of an area studies approach to the study of the relationship between the state, society and illegality. The entire volume is a testament to the depth of expertise and the robust state of Indonesian studies in Australia and beyond.

It is also in these articles that the editors’ analytic vision, as spelled out in the Introduction,

is largely realized. Clearly demonstrated in these articles is the close relationship between illicit practices by civilians and the day-to-day activities of state functionaries, an intimate relationship that Nootboom evocatively characterizes as a “marriage out of wedlock” (p.237). So close is this relationship that the boundaries between the legal and illegal hardly matter on the ground. This reviewer wonders about the ethical implications of this line of analysis. Taking illegality not as aberration but as an inherent part of state processes sanctions a conflation of *what is* with other possibilities (including what ought to be). While it is helpful in understanding why formal anti-corruption measures have difficulty in making headway, it may also undercut the anchor that enables a morally informed judgment. When Nootboom concludes that “. . . illegality is not destructive per se; it can also help to sustain order in society” and that it is “essential . . . to poorer people’s lives” (p.219), what is otherwise a plain statement of fact can also be faulted for naturalizing an otherwise deplorable situation. It ignores the possibility that illegality becomes part of poor people’s lives only as a coping strategy in the sense that had the situation been more favorable for them, they may not have had to resort to it. In the case of the wealthy political elites who continue to plunder the nation’s coffers, analyzing corruption as an inherent part of the state’s activities reinforces the normalizing effects of such a discourse. In other words, the line of analysis preferred by the editors courts the danger of falling into a reactionary trap that rationalizes the status quo as something one can only ever live with. By focusing on people’s complicity in corrupt practices, assuming their participation as an act of choice in a levelled playing field, this analytic mode opens up a wider avenue for blaming the victims of the unequal power structures that breed and nurture corrupt practices to which poorer people are more vulnerable. More importantly, by championing an increase in the politicization and empowerment of the citizenry as a vehicle for attaining greater accountability among state officials, the analysis also inadvertently shifts the burden of accountability towards the citizenry. In doing so, it violates the dictum that they who have greater power (state functionaries) ought to have greater responsibility. One would not be surprised if the politicians and state officials in Indonesia, as elsewhere, are happy with this kind of analysis. The chapters by Cribb, McCarthy and Dick-Mulholland offer a more ethically viable analytical path that questions corruption or illegality in Indonesia. This review is not meant to play down the enormous value of the 10 well-written and well-conceived articles, including the Introduction. It only flags the danger that their line of analysis poses.

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

CAROLINE S. HAU and KASIAN TEJAPIRA, eds.

Singapore: National University of Singapore Press in association with Kyoto University Press, 2011, 318 p.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PAULIN G. DJITÉ

Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2011, 264 p.

***English as a Lingua Franca in ASEAN: A Multilingual Model***

ANDY KIRKPATRICK

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

**Dealing with Diversity: Language Policy in Southeast Asia**

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

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

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

highlights the importance of the relationships between English, national languages and local languages in language policy and language education. Not only the language of the ASEAN bureaucracy, English is the first foreign language in the educational systems of ASEAN countries, and is introduced in the early years of primary school. English has been widely accepted as the language of science and commerce, but the role of English in education policy more broadly has been much more contentious.

There has been much debate about whether the rapid spread of English as the global *lingua franca*, of which there are now more non-native speakers than native speakers, is resulting in or contributing to homogenization of the world's linguistic diversity and widening the gap in access to the benefits of the integrated global economy. Yet, as Kirkpatrick explains, there has never been a serious challenge to English as the working language of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Malay (itself a *lingua franca* in insular Southeast Asian), French (a colonial language with some residual capacity in the ex-Indochinese nations) and Mandarin Chinese (the language of the economic future spoken by a large number of ethnic Chinese and others across the region) have been proposed as second working languages alongside English, but none has received any serious support.

Djité's work is a harsh critique of mainstream development, and the role that national language plays in creating barriers for the region's poorest and most vulnerable sectors of society. The author examines the policy and practice of education, health, the economy and governance and the role of language in each, targeting national governments and their emphasis on the national language. Although the analytical rigor of this framework and the argumentation are quite weak, the book raises several key questions that certainly warrant follow-up. For example, what can be learned from experiences with bilingual and mother tongue education among ethnic minorities in Cambodia and Vietnam? What is the significance of the use of multiple languages by marginalized people engaged primarily in the informal economy? How does dominance of the national language in the health sector exacerbate the disadvantaged position of communities that speak minority languages? Djité's decision to conduct a general survey based on macro-economic development indicators is unfortunate, as his integration of language and development is not compelling.

Interestingly, the book's focus is on the Greater Mekong Sub region, which first came into parlance as a program of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), but does not factor into the analysis the role of regional and global financial institutions in driving the economic development agendas that reinforce the national. In these development projects and programs one can see the tension between human diversity and the development prerogative. The ADB, for example, despite justified criticism of its projects' impacts on ethnic minorities, has continued to work towards social safeguards and guidelines to mainstream ethnicity and gender into its work. It should also be noted that the book does not address Thailand or areas of China that are included in the ADB definition of GMS.

Unfortunately there are enough factual errors and unreferenced assertions to cast some doubt on the credibility of the argumentation. For example, the section introducing the linguistic diversity of Laos is highly problematic in terms of accuracy, regarding for example the treatment of ethnolinguistic families and description of the Lao language. The unqualified presentation of dubious national statistics, such as the unlikely claim that Lao is spoken at home by 71 per cent of the population, in fact works to reinforce the misperceptions the author is seeking to critique.

Other mistakes and inconsistencies will trouble the reader. For example, there is discussion of the H'Mông language spoken along the Myanmar-Thai border. This is of course a mistaken reference to the Mon language, which lends its name to the completely unrelated Mon-Khmer family of languages. The term "H'Mông" itself is a Vietnamese usage, which is fine in the context of that country, but is employed by the author in the discussion of Hmong people in Laos as well. Needless to say, the landscape of ethnonyms is packed with political meaning, and these must be used with care. Attacking governments' insensitivity to the complexities of ethnolinguistic diversity with arguments that demonstrate a poor understanding of those very dynamics makes the impassioned call for social justice ring empty.

The real disappointment of this book is that it misses the opportunity to influence the people who should be its main audience: the policy makers themselves, at the national and regional levels. The copious assertions of the importance of language in governance are supported neither by compelling evidence to convince the nay-sayers of nation-state-driven economic development orthodoxy of the value of diversity, nor by constructive contributions on how this massively complex but critically important question can be better addressed. At the same time, it is not clear what a secondary audience, such as academic or development researchers, should make of it all.

The reader is left wondering about alternative approaches to this important and neglected area of inquiry. For such a topic, one might have considered focusing more on a follow-up of the gray literature coming out of development organizations and NGOs, where the real implications of the expected policy-practice gap play out. Focus on a certain aspect of language in development, such as education or health, from various levels of analysis would likely produce interesting results. One could even experiment with an alternative indicator of development that integrates language as a barrier/bridge to participation.

Shifting to the regional lens of analysis, Kirkpatrick does not limit himself to the institutional and policy issues that tend to dominate discussions concerning ASEAN. Instead, he provides an analysis of the English actually spoken among ASEAN delegates. He employs the concept of an identity-communication continuum, and concludes that the English of ASEAN falls clearly on the communication side of this continuum. That is to say, those delegates with higher degrees of fluency tend to adjust their language use to the group, prioritizing communicative effectiveness. Much of the localized English that is spoken around the region, such as Singaporean or Filipino English, is neutralized in ASEAN meetings, creating a shared register that maximizes mutual comprehen-

sion. He concludes that English works in ASEAN because it is used as a lingua franca, which by definition means that it exists alongside other vernaculars.

The ASEAN nations generally place high value on education in English, and many have experimented with shifting certain areas of the national curriculum to English instruction. Some countries are more aggressive in establishing a fast-track approach to English. Kirkpatrick sees this as counter-productive in terms of the quality of English learned, and at the same time as an unnecessary threat to the linguistic diversity that ASEAN policy claims to hold in such high regard. Coming from a pedagogical background, Kirkpatrick recommends a shift away from EFL (English as a Foreign Language) to ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) in education policy, which means the promotion of an English that is more culturally rooted in ASEAN societies and does not seek to emulate American, Australian or British varieties of speech.

One might question this idea as a move to institutionalizing “substandard English,” but Kirkpatrick’s point is precisely that ASEAN English is emerging as a legitimate, culturally-grounded language that serves its main communication purposes. If embraced as such, in the broader context of multilingualism, the pressure on coming generations to shift from local and national languages to English may be reduced and the functionality of English in its role as a lingua franca will be enhanced. Thus, policy promoting ELF would not only increase the communicative efficiency of interactions within the region; it would at the same time contribute to the development of a shared ASEAN culture, perhaps connecting the two ends of the communication-identity continuum. This is a thought-provoking proposition that suggests the importance of cultural forces in the processes of regionalization.

Both authors argue strongly for language policy that promotes diversity and against policy that marginalizes people. The importance of these calls cannot be stressed too much. Although the case for policy reform has been made, the focus on regional and national policy may also obscure the picture because it overlooks dynamic practices of language used at an everyday level by speech communities at all levels. In addition to looking at how governments “deal with diversity,” it would be fruitful to further explore how people “deal in diversity” in their daily lives.

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### ***Water Rights and Social Justice in the Mekong Region***

KATE LAZARUS, NATHAN BADENOCH, NGA DAO and BERNADETTE P. RESURRECCION, eds.  
London and Washington, D.C.: Earthscan, 2011, 285 p.

My attention was immediately attracted to the book’s case studies of water rights and social justice

of the Mekong region, because for many years, I have been waiting for the publications reflecting on the reality of natural resources management in this river region, and this book offers much food for thought on the issue of management of natural resources, including water. The cases cover the planned cross-border water transfer from Laos to northeast Thailand, the Son La hydropower project in Vietnam, the watershed resources management in northern Thailand, the fisheries-aquaculture across the Mekong region, the craft village in Hanoi, and the possible impact of climate changes on the rights of the upland people (the severe droughts in southwest China in the period of 2009–11 and the on-going flooding in Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand in October 2011 seem to be confirming the authors' climate change prediction).

I would like to make corrections, however, of two concepts of the book. Firstly, the "Tibetan Plateau" used in Jianchu Xu and Rajesh Daniel's two chapters (pp. 197–242) should be the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. Secondly, the Mekong region should not be over-extended to include other river basins such as the Son La hydropower project and the craft village in peri-urban Hanoi in Red river basin, the Hmong and Karen villages of Chiang Mai in Ping river basin, a tributary of Chao Phraya river in northern Thailand, and the fisheries-aquaculture in Lijiang, a part of Yangtze river basin in China's Yunnan as well as provinces in Red river basin of northern Vietnam (pp. 1–2, 39–64, 67–89, 91–113, 116, 118–119, 121–125, 133, 167–194, 206, 209). The Mekong issues are best illustrated by the region's own cases, and those of other river regions are to be used for reference and comparison only. A correct definition is found in the two maps in Hori Hiroshi's book (1996, 3–4) and in the Mekong River Commission's frequently used maps.

Regrettably, the cases fail to cover the Mekong river delta, especially the dams and navigation on mainstream Mekong river. With the killing of 13 crew members of two Chinese cargo ships on the Mekong river on October 5, 2011, the question of who should protect local people's water use rights is raised once again.

However, the book has merit in its exposition of three keywords: water rights, social justice and the Mekong region. Nathan Badenoch *et al.* claim that "this book focuses on the complex nature of water rights and social justice in the Mekong region . . . in the hope of bringing to the forefront some of the local nuances required in the formation of a larger vision of justice in the water governance. It is hoped that this contextualized analysis will deepen our understanding of the potential of, and constraints on, water rights in the region, particularly in relation to a Mekong-specific articulation of social justice" (p. 8). I believe that their logic behind this purpose is that water rights are not only redefined and possibly reaffirmed in the new light of social justice, but also provide some new dimensions of water rights to social justice, and the relations between them two are tested and reinforced by the Mekong region cases.

Running through the book, the water rights in the Mekong region refer to the rights of access to water, concerning both the rights of water use and of water ownership. Here, water refers to inland clean fresh water. Nathan Badenoch *et al.* summarize the most controversial arguments in

the debate over water governance: water is treated as an economic good (such as a commodity), a legal right of humanity, and/or a common property resource (pp. 3–4).

It seems that the authors are not satisfied with these concepts. For instance, Bernadette P. Resurreccion *et al.* quote other authors' work to explain in greater detail why the neo-liberal policy environment now in the Mekong region is defective, because it prefers economic rationality and efficiency as the most suitable development paradigms for water management while neglecting social welfare, livelihood security and environmental sustainability goals (p. 250). This, with Bernadette P. Resurreccion *et al.*'s analysis of three detailed reasons for those water injustices (p. 248), could be regarded as the major reason for the occurrence of social injustices in the Mekong region.

Thus, Nathan Badenoch *et al.* hold that the authors of this book "take a broad approach to water rights, writing about not only rights directly associated with access to water but including other rights that affect people's ability to access the areas of governance, through formal and informal means, that affect water resources decision-making" (p. 4). For this purpose, they move from "the legalistic exercise of creating laws and decrees" to "an analysis that is more firmly rooted in real-life, real-time challenges of implementing, adapting and revising these arrangements for water rights, among the sectors of society that face the most serious barriers to exercising those rights" (p. 4). In my understanding, as the chapters of the book suggest, the direct rights are the rights to use water for drinking, farming irrigation, fishing, crafts-making, hydropower, etc., and the other rights that ensure the direct rights include food right, public participation in decision-making, which can be extended to information provision, openness or transparency, consultation, legitimacy, etc. In doing so, water rights are enlarged in the framework of social justice.

I do not think the authors make any new definition of social justice, just as Nathan Badenoch *et al.* assert that the authors "do not seek to propose any model of social justice for the region." However, they do present a very clear-cut case for the importance of social justice as both framework and goal of water rights.

Nathan Badenoch *et al.* conclude that "the outcomes of water governance are a crucial concern for justice within society" (p. 13), and their "perspective underscores the importance of outcomes in terms of equity rather than efficiency" (p. 4), which, I feel, is similar to the consequentialism of Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian justice. Indeed, they select two kinds of justice: distributive and retributive justices. Nathan Badenoch *et al.* agree with the argument that "social justice is not concerned merely a narrow conception of the benefits to individuals, but rather with what is good for the society as a whole," and the special focus is given to the groups of people marginalized from the areas of governance (p. 5), making their concept, I think, different from Bentham's justice of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and similar to Immanuel Kant's justice of categorical imperative, and their principles of justice are those of distribution, desert and equity. Nathan Badenoch *et al.* continue to state that "this book takes livelihood security as a departure point for

its exploration of justice and rights" (p. 6), so I consider that livelihood is regarded as the end result of water rights, and water rights as the guarantee of such a livelihood security. To be sure, equality means equality in social benefits, cost or burden, and risk in an attempt to dismiss the phenomenon of some people being more equal. This social justice of equality is not new, since there are some echoes of justice in world-wide poverty alleviation efforts, such as UN's Millennium Development Goals and Targets/Indicators, for which purpose some works have been published in this aspect of social justice of pro-poor endeavours (Chambers 1983; United Nations 1995; MacCaskill and Kampe 1997; Sen 1999; Mingsarn and Dore 2003). To be politically correct, one has to be, or pretend to be, welfare- and livelihood-oriented in presenting social justice.

The novelty of the authors' contribution consists of the fact that they do apply the idea of social justice to water rights in the Mekong region. The reason, I deem, is that the authors identify inequalities in the allocation of water rights and expect the pursuit of social justice to yield an alternative solution to issues in water rights. Therefore, the dimensions of social justice are enlarged with water rights, and in my view it is perhaps Nathan Badenoch *et al.*'s so-called larger vision of justice in the water governance.

Nathan Badenoch *et al.* write that the authors do not follow John Rawl's mainstream philosophy of justice but Amartya Sen's "more realistic 'idea of justice'—one that focuses on eliminating injustice" (p. 5; Sen 2009, 106). From my viewpoint, it makes no difference in identifying justice or injustice, because they are two sides of a common coin, and when judging justice or injustice, you have to use the same principles. But proceeding from the concept of injustice hopefully leads to the creation of a sense of urgency to eliminate injustice, i.e. translate justice into reality. Thus, the authors also suggest how to remedy or eliminate them.

Firstly, to reassess the parameters of the former justice based on economic equality only, and to base justice also on social equity and welfare (p. 247).

Secondly, to politicize, not to de-politicize, water governance, i.e. to influence the decision-making mechanism (pp. 248–249).

Thirdly, to build capability on the part of the marginalized people, i.e., to reconfigure "policies, norms and material endowments" that "enable stakeholders to share power" (p. 251). For capability-building, I suggest that readers also consult other works (Sen 1999; Comin *et al.* 2008).

Fourthly, to improve institutions of water governance by seeking "more than mere efficiency and effectiveness" and by moving "beyond a simple conception of social justice as the logical outcome of a general idea of water rights can help move towards a more practical vision of change in the governance of the Mekong region's water resources" (p. 13). The case studies in this book do explain in detail how to improve the institutions when it comes to water rights and social justice.

I believe that in the case of institutional improvement, it is a must to give expression to such social justice and equality in the institutional design or redesign of water rights. In the present-day period of historical development, besides moral restraints, a social contract that promotes social

justice is still one of the most effective ways of ensuring justice between sectors of a given society. Self-discipline is neither universally applicable nor available. Thus, it is not very suitable to simply move from “the legalistic exercise of creating laws and decrees” (p. 4). In my own review of water resource laws of Laos, Cambodia and China, I find that their purposes are to attain socio-economic development and the welfare of the people, to ensure the people’s living requirements, or to meet the need of national economic and social development. These points suggest social justice in the water rights. For these purposes, these laws also stipulate the rights and, more importantly, duties and obligations of water users, i.e. water is the property of the people or the state, and its users are obliged to protect the water resource (The National Assembly of Lao PDR 1996; The National Assembly of Cambodia 2007; The National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China 1988). The rights, duties and obligations are likely to avoid the frequently cited “tragedy of the commons.” The laws at least ensure, in Rawls’ words, “procedural justice” (Rawls 1999: 73), and the rights-based approach suggested by Jianchu Xu and Rajesh Daniel (pp.226–230) and Nathan Badenoch *et al.* (p.68) could work. Other improvement approaches could be also considered as complements, such as water trade, transfer of water rights, water rights as share capital (Tang and Deng 2010; Crase 2011), transactional cost (Saleth and Dinar 2006, 273–306) as well as new paradigm and environmental justice in natural resources management (Wescoat *et al.* 2002; Bryant 1995; Knight and Bates 1995).

However, I do not believe that the institutional improvement in water rights is the only passport to the realization of social justice even if there are pro-justice constitutions or water laws in place. It is difficult to make laws, but it is more difficult to strictly enforce them. This phenomenon of gap between rhetoric and practice is found in the cases of water transfer planning from Laos to northeast Thailand presented by Philippe Floch *et al.* (pp.19–38), the Son La hydropower project presented by Tran Van Ha (pp.39–64), the Pak Mun dam on Mun river in northeast Thailand which was and is protested against by local people (Kanokwan and Srisakra 2006, 128), and the lowered quality of life among some involuntary resettlers after Manwan dam was built on the mainstream Mekong in China’s Yunnan (Guo 2008, 202–277). In China, government officials, hydropower developers and some academics have united in arguing with environmentalist NGOs for building hydropower dams on the three rivers of Lancangjiang (the upper reaches of the Mekong river in China), Nujiang (the upper reaches of Salween river in Yunnan), and Jinshajiang (the upper reaches of Yangtze river in Yunnan). The reason for the pros and cons is local people’s livelihood (Feng and He 2006). With this real-life and real-time Rashomon-like scenario, one has to wait and see who will get the upper hand now on Nujiang river, because quite a number of hydropower dams were and are being built on Mekong and Yangtze rivers, including the Three Gorges dam, and Xiluodu dam which will be China’s second largest and the world’s third largest dam.

Consequently, it may well be asked: Who will build the capability of the marginalized and thus helpless people in the rights of water access when there are many competing claims over water



resources among multi-stakeholders or invested interests? In a region where the jungle law rules and the survival of the fittest prevails, can anybody reshuffle, by taking the parliamentary road, by resorting to nonviolent resistance or by making violent revolutions, the gangster logic of “might is right”?

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### ***Beyond the Sacred Forest: Complicating Conservation in Southeast Asia***

MICHAEL R. DOVE, PERCY E. SAJISE and AMITY A. DOOLITTLE, eds.

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011, 372 p.

In recent years, numerous collections on natural resource conservation in Southeast Asia have hit the bookshelf. This latest addition is a joint effort by scholars from Yale University's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, New Haven, and the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture in Los Baños, the Philippines.

The edited volume is divided into three sections. Section I titled "The Boundary between Natural and Social Reproduction" comprises three chapters, in which the authors describe natural resource management as being entangled in historical trajectories, social dynamics and the attendant political and economic context. In chapter 1, the anthropologist Lye Tuck-Po analyzes the social hybridization of the Batek hunter-gatherer group living in the Taman Nagara National Park in Malaysia. She argues that the protected area status of the park has both provided a shelter for this ethnic group from pervasive external influences, allowing them to continue some of their traditional practices, and at the same time subjected them to official conservation narratives and regulations, thereby scrutinizing their "nomadic" lifestyle as potentially destructive to the environment. In chapter 2, the historian Jeyamalar Kathirithamby-Wells looks at the evolution of colonial and postcolonial policies that enabled the emergence of the rubber estate economy in Peninsular Malaysia. She describes how "the plantation-biased government policy, originating in the colonial period, undermined the survival of environmentally sound smallholder practices" (p.88). While this phenomenon has been amply discussed by several scholars, her major argument is that the

colonial perception of smallholder Malay peasants as purely subsistence-oriented paddy cultivators that ignored their long-standing involvement in the market economy paved the way for the indiscriminate expansion of the plantation industry that continues to shape the landscape of Peninsular Malaysia. The anthropologist Michael R. Dove looks at smallholder rubber producers in Borneo in the third and final chapter of section I. His exciting essay explains why the Kantu' of West Kalimantan describe their economically successful and ecologically adapted rubber plantations as "dead land" (*tanah mati*) as opposed to the "living land" of their rice-based swidden agriculture. He argues convincingly that in the Kantu's worldview, the cyclical nature of the swiddens and the related complexity of social and ecological exchange are contrasted with the non-cyclical, fixed (i.e. "dead") character of the rubber economy.

Section II "Community Rights Discourses through Time" moves the volume's focus to questions of access to and control over natural resources. In chapter 4, the rural sociologist Upik Djalins explores the ambiguous role of the *adat* concept in the struggle of *damar* forest garden holders in Krui, Sumatra. She shows how the revival of the authority of the *adat* institution—invoked as a strategy to assert local resource claims against competing government interests—actually empowered traditional community elites, while alienating and marginalizing the common *damar* farmers who had fought hardest for their rights. Her essay provides a vivid account of the ambiguous and recursive nature of traditional, class-based institutions. In a similar vein, the social ecologist Amity A. Doolittle in chapter 5 explores the complex interplay between state law and customary law in a village in Sabah, Malaysia. She demonstrates how the colonial depiction of customary law as static and homogeneous has been perpetuated by present-day government policies and challenges the widely held assumption that members of a village community pursue similar land use strategies and thus have the same needs for tenurial arrangements. In chapter 6, Emily E. Harvell, another social ecologist, questions the rationale of clarifying resource tenure and determining boundaries of access to natural resources, drawing on a case study in the Danau Sentarum Wildlife Reserve in West Kalimantan. She holds that competing claims and resource contestations have often been interpreted as historical inaccuracies that need to be rectified in the process of territorial mapping. Instead, she calls for a "dispute management approach" (p.210) that emphasizes mediation and negotiation among various stakeholder groups. In chapter 7, the final essay of this section, the anthropologist Levita Duhaylungsod shows how the T'boli of Southern Mindanao in the Philippines make creative use of the politics of identity and indigeneity to ascertain their rights to ancestral lands. The price they pay for their political activism and struggle for territorial rights is a stronger engagement with various government agencies and other external actors and the partial transformation of their traditional resource management systems. All four chapters in this section provide evidence that local tenure regimes are embedded in myriad historical, socio-political, cultural and economic factors and that neither government conservation policies nor customary laws and cultural norms are monolithic or static, but rather ambiguous,

contested and in constant flux.

Section III “Reconstructing and Representing Indigenous Environmental Knowledge” comprises two chapters that reflect upon agrarian change processes in Indonesia. In chapter 8, the biologist Endah Sulistyawati presents a rule-based computer model that analyzes the evolution of the composite agricultural system of a Kantu’ community in West Kalimantan. This chapter is in stark contrast to other papers on two accounts: first, it adheres to a rigorous quantitative approach and second, it is the only contribution that explicitly discloses its specific research methods and the analytical process. Yet the findings fail to surprise the critical reader: population pressure affects farm households differentially—some households see their farm area reduced, while others accumulate land resources, leading to social and economic differentiation in the community. In chapter 9, the anthropologist Yunita T. Winarto examines the changes in the relationship between government agencies, farmers and the environment brought about by the promotion of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in villages on the north coast of West Java and in Central Lampung, Sumatra. She argues that the IPM programs popularized in the 1990s—which have gained recognition beyond the country’s borders—restored farmers’ creativity and dignity which had been lost in the Green Revolution era with its sole emphasis on modern varieties and reliance on agrochemicals. However, the weakness of this otherwise rich and detailed essay on the history and significance of IPM in Indonesia is that Winarto misses out on recent trends in this field, where the first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed a certain IPM fatigue among both agricultural extension officers and farmers, coupled with new challenges of meeting food safety and certification standards under the rapidly rising importance of supermarkets and global food supply chains.

This lack of topicality is somewhat emblematic for the entire volume: most of the empirical fieldwork on which the essays are based date back to the 1990s and three of the chapters were already published as journal articles between 1998 and 2005. Thus, some of the latest and most challenging issues that are directly related to environmental conservation—such as the biofuel hype, the land grabbing phenomenon and emerging payment schemes for environmental services, to name but a few—do not play a prominent role in the volume. I also missed some linkages and comparisons with conservation issues in Mainland Southeast Asia, particularly Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam (the only apparent allusion to this region is the cover photo taken in the temple ruins of the former Thai capital of Ayutthaya by one of the contributors!). Notwithstanding these shortcomings, most chapters in this volume provide an empirically rich and theoretically grounded account of the complexity of national and local environmental politics at the interface of forest and agriculture in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, and will be welcomed by many scholars, students and decision-makers in the field of natural resource conservation.

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***Towards a Liveable and Sustainable Urban Environment:  
Eco-Cities in East Asia***

LYE LIANG FOOK and CHEN GANG, eds.

Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2010, 222 p.

Economic developments in East Asia since the end of World War II have fascinated many observers. From Japan's post-war recovery like a phoenix coming back to life, to the rapid growth of the four "little dragons," and to the reemergence of China as a global economic powerhouse, developments of East Asian nations have astounded and impressed the world in the past few decades. In this context, there has long been a debate about the East Asia model.<sup>1)</sup> More recently, the focus has shifted to China and the so-called "Beijing Consensus" as the Chinese version of East Asia's success story.<sup>2)</sup> Many developing countries in other parts of the world hope that they can learn from East Asia and duplicate its successes.

Yet, what is lacking in the discussion of the East Asia model is how East Asia's development trajectory has been evolving, and how nations are moving beyond simply developing their economies. Among other things, these nations are focusing more on sustainable growth now, with heavy emphasis on eco-friendly development by relying more on clean and green energy. This book edited by Lye Liang Fook and Chen Gang records such efforts of East Asian nations in building a more livable and sustainable urban environment.

A collection of papers first presented at a workshop organized by the East Asian Institute of the National University of Singapore in February 2009, the book focuses on a specific new aspect of development in East Asia: establishing eco-cities or developing eco-friendly projects. As the editors explain, the ultimate purpose of the book is to strengthen the call for more action to put into practice the many good ideas, concepts, suggestions, and experiences about sustainable development that are already out there (p. 17). To build successful eco-cities in East Asia is a comprehensive project, which requires concerted efforts by governments, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and individuals to work together for a better future.

The editors are research scholars at the East Asian Institute of National University of Singapore, while the contributors are scholars, officials and environmental specialists from various East Asian countries. Together, they highlight the best practices that are useful to policy makers as Asian governments attempt to transform urban areas into a more livable and sustainable environment.

As the editors suggest in their introductory chapter, an eco-city must be economically, environmentally and socially sustainable (p. 7). The convergence of economic, environmental, and

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1) For studies of the East Asia model, see, for example, Ming Wan (2007) and Zhiqun Zhu (2009).

2) For examinations of China's development model, see, for example, Halper (2010) and S. Philip Hsu *et al.* (2011).

social and cultural needs is at the core of sustainable development of eco-cities. On the environmental front, eco-cities must have important features such as the application of green technologies, environmentally-sustainable transportation, rational use of space, green-belts and parks, and cultural and heritage conservation. On the economic front, eco-cities must be able to contribute to the growth of the economy through attracting investments and generating employment. On the social and cultural front, eco-cities must be able to meet social demands, including promoting interactions and strengthening the bonds among different ethnic and religious groups of a society.

The first two chapters focus on the theoretical evolution of the concepts and key ideas of eco-cities and the urgency of finding a more sustainable model. Chapter one provides a strategic overview of urbanization in Asia and then discusses the objectives and goals of eco-cities in the twenty-first century as well as the policies and measures to achieve them. Chapter two highlights three critically interdependent perspectives: the escalating global climatic crisis and the need to find a sustainable way forward, the global financial turmoil and the importance of a new development model, and the uniqueness of Asian cities due to their rich culture and history and the necessity of using non-Western paradigms to understand contemporary Asian societies. The rest of the book adopts a more specific focus by examining examples of eco-cities or eco-friendly projects being undertaken in Japan, China, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, their achievements and challenges encountered, and the way forward. These chapters offer insight into what each of these countries is doing to implement the eco-city projects.

Since Sir Ebenezer Howard launched the “garden city” movement with the publication of his *Garden Cities of To-morrow* in Britain in 1898, urban planning in the form of garden cities in which man lives harmoniously with the nature has shaped the development of cities in Europe and elsewhere. In more recent decades, there has been a growing awareness of making our environment not only beautiful but also sustainable, and many countries are moving from building “garden cities” to developing “eco-cities.” After the oil crises of the 1970s, the movement to establish eco-friendly cities began to take shape. The term “eco-city” emerged near the end of the 1980s. Concepts such as “ecopolis” and “amenity town” appeared in Europe and Japan respectively in the 1980s.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, many Asian cities are under the dual pressures of continued growth and environmental protection. Urban planning is facing tremendous challenges now. Eco-cities are crucial for the future of human beings as half of the world’s population already live in urban areas, and in some industrialized regions, the number is as high as 80 per cent. The world’s population had reached seven billion by 2011 and continues to grow, posing serious challenges to the global efforts to attain a better future for our children. The editors and contributors of this book explicitly call our attention to the urgency of developing eco-cities or embarking on eco-friendly projects as a means of achieving sustainable development in Asia and elsewhere.

Global warming and other environmental externalities of unregulated growth compel countries around the world to take action now to translate eco-city concepts into actions. With continued

industrialization and globalization, the challenge to human environment has never been so acute. The eco-city movement in East Asia reflects the region's response to globalization; it also enriches the "East Asia model" of development.

This is a welcome addition to the growing body of scholarship on East Asia's globalization and urbanization. Most of the books on eco-cities or eco-friendly projects are written either from the Western perspective or concentrate on the practices of Western countries. By examining how the concepts of eco-cities are applied in the Asian context and outlining a model of urban development, this book contributes to our understanding of Asian perspectives on eco-cities and the Asian model of growth. The book suggests that building eco-cities is fraught with difficulties and is a process that has to be constantly monitored and even micro-managed to achieve the desired outcomes. Developing a more sustainable model of growth also helps promote human rights and social justice. The creation of low-carbon eco-cities is ultimately local: actions must start from the local level by citizens, corporation, and local governments.

The chapters are written in easy-to-understand language. Readers will be impressed by the contributors' enthusiasm about eco-cities. One minor drawback of the book is that it may have underestimated the political, economic, cultural and social differences among these nations in their common pursuit of an eco-friendly objective. The editors and contributors could have devoted more space to discussing the various obstacles to more sustainable growth that exist in each of these nations. Though some questions remain unanswered in the book, such as how to overcome difficulties in implementing the eco-city projects in East Asia, the edited volume helps raise awareness of the importance and urgency of developing a new model of growth as East Asia continues to modernize. If we all heed the calls of this book, the objective of a livable and sustainable urban environment can be achieved sooner in East Asia.

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***Revolutionary Spirit: Jose Rizal in Southeast Asia***

JOHN NERY

Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011, 280p.

Written on a research fellowship at the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore, this book with a yellow cover perhaps betrays the author's sympathies for the current Aquino administration in the Philippines. It also seems to pay respect to the memory of the 1986 EDSA Revolution. In analyzing Rizal's modest place in Southeast Asian history and thought, the book offers a timely contribution to the sesquicentennial commemoration of the birth of the First Filipino.

It is a highly readable yet quite irritating companion volume to the body of writings by and on Rizal. F. Sionil Jose provides a pithy foreword, revealing that he "can even believe" Rizal's retraction of his "anti-Catholic" writings, a view contrary to that of Austin Coates whose biography on Rizal was republished by Sionil Jose's own publishing firm. Nery, however, takes the position that it "did not happen and is actually irrelevant to Rizal's achievement" (p.xix). While I agree with this position, the challenge nevertheless remains for one to write an in-depth examination of the retraction to once and for all determine which Rizal was really the Rizal of December 1896 and hopefully, end the debate.

After a message from the ISEAS director, a preface and a very long acknowledgement, which could have been appended to the former, Nery begins with a discussion of what he calls "the uses of error" on the factual inaccuracies, misinterpretations and distortions made by scholars, and authors who have written about Rizal. The reasons and explanations for them, as Nery tries to discern, are clearly articulated, particularly Miguel de Unamuno's "erroneous" characterization of Rizal as "a poet, a hero of thought and not of action" (p.23), a "Tagalog Quixote-Hamlet" (Unamuno in Retana 1907, 479), which reading drew an objective rebuttal from T.H. Pardo de Tavera, with Nery concluding that Unamuno had read his own life onto Rizal's. On the contrary, Rizal, for Nery, was no dreamer but "a kinetic actor" who "was perpetually wrestling with his will" (p.28). Unamuno's views continue to dazzle scholars; the latest anthology that carries his work is not the one edited by Daroy and Feria (1968), which Nery had cited, but *Himalay* (Melendrez-Cruz and Chua 1991), an anthology of Rizal studies by the Cultural Center of the Philippines in which a Tagalog translation of Unamuno's essay is included. A useful chronology from Rizal's birth to contemporary times, which have a bearing on Rizal, is part of the introduction.



Nery tackles two “turning points,” the title of the first chapter, which, to him, “are fundamental in understanding Rizal’s legacy in Southeast Asian imagination” (p.54). The first is Rizal’s identification as Malay, most especially the formation of a secret society called, enigmatically, Rd. L. M., with Nery favoring the interpretation of Rizal’s nephew Dr. Leoncio Lopez-Rizal as standing for “Redención de los Malayos” or redemption of the Malays. Nery could have explored the connection between Apolinario Mabini’s idea of a Malay federation and this group. Could Mabini be privy to the group’s intentions? The second is Rizal’s letters in Tagalog, which Nery frames as a “question of language” as it “was becoming more and more central to their (Filipino propagandists) attempt to found a nation” (p.67). The fact that Rizal wrote in Tagalog, laments Nery, “remains under-appreciated by Filipinos, even today” and that “some of the most important letters in the Rizal canon were written *in their own language*” (my italics). For native speakers of Tagalog like Nery, this expression would suit them but there are other Filipinos who have their own languages and that could perhaps explain the under-appreciation. Would it not be better to rephrase it as “in his [Rizal’s] native or mother tongue”? Nery, of course, is coming from a background in which Tagalog, renamed Pilipino, and Filipino, has been enthroned as the national language. Thus, it is anachronistic for Nery to refer to Tagalog as “their” language as if Rizal was writing for Filipinos today when in fact he wrote in his mother tongue for his family and friends.

The next two chapters try to establish the connection or more precisely, the complicity of Rizal with the revolution and how revolutionaries linked Rizal with the revolution and how they paid homage to Rizal after his death. The following seven chapters, the crux of the book, deal with the “influence” or in some instances it would be better to say impression, of Rizal on the part of different individuals and their varying historical contexts. Nery chronologically arranges his discussion, beginning with E. F. E. Douwes Dekker, the grandnephew of Multatuli, the author of *Max Havelaar*, which Rizal had read in 1888. Douwes Dekker wrote an account of Rizal after founding the pro-independence association, Indische Partij, in December 1912. The Indonesian communist revolutionary Tan Malaka came to Manila in 1925 and stayed for two years. Nery successfully provided the milieu in which the 1920s, a period that saw the resurgence of the spirit of Bonifacio, had shaped Tan Malaka’s 1948 autobiographical view of Rizal as “an intellectual in relative isolation from the masses” (p. 135). The sixth and seventh chapters tell the story behind the translation into Bahasa Indonesia, radio broadcast, and printing of Rizal’s farewell poem during the Japanese occupation, which served as an inspiration to the pemuda or Indonesian youth fighting for independence, and how the granting, or more accurately the recognition of Philippine independence by the US became an inspiration to the newly-born, still struggling Indonesian republic. A few passing references to Rizal in a number of speeches by Sukarno made Nery state that they do not “privilege either Rizal or the Philippines” (p. 183) and that the first Indonesian president “never read Rizal; he must have only read about him” (p. 187). In any case, one cannot discount the influence of a president mentioning Rizal’s name from a neighboring country, which Tan Malaka viewed as part

of greater Indonesia, in those speeches that led to the alleged popularity of Rizal, according to Rosihan Anwar (and I agree with this), among Indonesian students. The intellectual legacy of Rizal is fleshed out in the ninth chapter in which Nery tackles Malaysian intellectuals such as Syed Hussein Alatas and his *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977), the theme of which had been earlier explored by Rizal in the essay, "On the Indolence of the Filipinos," and Shaharuddin bin Maaruf and his *Concept of a Hero in Malay Society* (1984), in which Rizal figured prominently. Finally, in the tenth chapter, Nery exposes the images of Rizal and the Philippines in the novels of Pramoedya Ananta Toer; yet Nery does not really say how and when the Indonesian writer was inspired by Rizal.

The title is somewhat misleading, since the book only tackles Rizal's "influence" on island Southeast Asia, although Nery explicitly states in the preface that he did not discuss "the possible connection with Burmese or Vietnamese nationalists or his impact on the East Timor struggle for independence" (p. xix). Mariano Ponce, for instance, wrote *Ang mga Pilipino sa Indotsina* (1907). I haven't read it but it is an intriguing possibility, although I might be wrong. Such an admission promises another book on the same topic with a rigorous approach at measuring or delineating Rizal's "influence," which the present work sorely lacks because, again as the author confesses, it is "more journalism than scholarship" (p. xxv). The book only shows the intellectual elite's appropriation of Rizal; it is silent on how the ordinary people saw or claimed Rizal.

There are some issues on the technical aspects of the writing. I find the frequent use of parentheses for statements annoying (p. 2, *passim*) as the author wants to minimize their importance in the main narrative when some, if not all, are as relevant as the other details in the text. The use of author-date citation is unfortunate (p. 6, *passim*); the name of the author if mentioned in the beginning of the statement should be followed by the year and the page in parentheses or placed at the end. Nery mentions the author, and then repeats the name in the citation. It would have been better if, in the references, the date of publication is put after the name of the author. It is rather surprising that Ambeth Ocampo's popular and influential writings on Rizal are not consulted; his name missing in the acknowledgement strikes me as strange, since Nery and Ocampo both write for the same Manila publication.

Scattered sporadically in the text are some factual errors. Paciano Rizal should be Paciano Mercado based on the context (p. 32). The line of Rizal's poem *A la Juventud Filipina* lacks the article "la" between "bella esperanza de" and "patria mia" (p. 32). Nery gives the wrong impression that Antonino Guevara and Mariano Ponce wrote in English; both wrote in Spanish (p. 39). Having read Rizal's annotations of Morga, I do not remember Rizal making any "references to the pre-Spanish Philippines as a Malay polity" (p. 59; my emphasis). There are typographical errors in "Alvarez" (p. 98) and in "Petronila Daroy" (p. 260). The translation of "kasamang mamamayan" should be "fellow citizens," not "residents" nor "farmer-citizens" (p. 102). Ibn Batuta was not Malay (p. 107); he was a Moroccan Berber.

The appendixes are worth reading. “A” could be expanded into a book on Rizal’s letters. “B,” which debunks Renato Constantino’s view of Rizal, is markedly Floro Quibuyen in its use of arguments, but Quibuyen’s work is never cited. The omissions of Rizal’s letters by Renato Constantino to prove Rizal’s reformism, the misreading of the December 15 manifesto along with its proper context, and the flawed dichotomies casting Rizal either as reformist or revolutionary, bear this out. “C” is about the Indonesian translation of “Mi último adios.”

On a side note, it is interesting that Nery belonged to the Ateneo graduating class that celebrated the centenary of Rizal’s graduation. The diplomat Leon Ma. Guerrero, author of an important biography of Rizal, who was asked by the late historian Fr. Horacio de la Costa, S.J. for the occasion, spoke during the commencement exercises about Rizal and posed a question about how their batch would be commemorated a hundred years after. Nery will never know. But with this book, he is, I’m sure, memorializing Rizal’s greatness, which is also his and the Filipino people’s, for all the coming years.

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