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SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

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"Identity Monarchy": Interrogating Heritage for a Divided Malaysia

Anthony Milner*

Malaysia, it has been observed, is currently experiencing a "revival" of "Malay kingship" with the growing importance of "proactive and participating constitutional rulers." In fact, modern Malaysia has since independence been characterized by monarchy—by a multiplicity of Rulers and elaborate royal ceremony and hierarchy—as well as by its "plural society." But the modern monarchs—though they have never become quite "constitutional Rulers"—cannot be seen as merely "traditional," because the institution of monarchy was transformed in a fundamental way during the British colonial period.

Monarchy continues to be an underexamined feature of the Malaysian polity, and when it is discussed there is a tendency to focus on issues of power and to neglect its sociocultural role. One pre-colonial dimension of monarchy that continues to be significant today—though in a manner less psychologically profound than before—is its identity-giving role. The principal concern of this article is to determine—through a process of hermeneutic retrieval—if this role is merely relevant to the Malay community, or does it possess more inclusive possibilities? Are the Rulers of Malaysia essentially "Malay Rulers" or has the institution a nation-building potential that has so far not been fully utilized? The question is important for a country that many see as becoming increasingly divided.

Keywords: monarchy, identity monarchy, Malay Rulers, Malaysia, ideology, baseline knowledge, race paradigm, hermeneutic retrieval

In the lead-up to dramatic protests in Kuala Lumpur on the week-end of July 9–10, 2011, the Malaysian King, Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin, Sultan of Terengganu, surprised some commentators by issuing a statement (a "*Titah Khas*") that seemed to call on the Government as well as the Opposition to step back from open confrontation. He "urge[d] the government to carry out everything that is entrusted to it by the people in a just and wise manner. . . ." The royal statement was a surprise for those who take for granted that the monarch "rarely speaks . . . and those speeches or statements are written by the govern-

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ment of the day" (*Malaysian Insider*, November 4, 2011). Malaysia, it tends to be assumed, has an essentially "constitutional monarchy"—the Constitution (in the words of the standard text *Politics and Government in Malaysia* by Milne and Mauzy) "binds the King very strictly" and he must act on the "advice of the Ministers" just as the British Queen has to do (1978, 243, 37). But how confidently can we speak of a "Westminster monarchy" in Malaysia? How best can we describe the role of this monarchy? The question is not merely of constitutional importance. When we stand back to ask what characterizes Malaysia internationally today it is not only the country's classically plural society. Monarchy—with the structure of prerogatives, ranks, ceremonies and social behavior that accompanies not one but nine Rulers—is also a striking feature.

Striking, yes, but modern Malaysian monarchy has received very little attention in studies of Malaysian politics and society—certainly in comparison with the analytic handling of monarchy in Thailand (Peleggi 2002; McCargo 2005; Handley 2006). Is it time, it can be asked, to make greater effort to factor in Malaysian monarchy? A recently-published survey of the history of "Malay Kingship"—Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian's *Palace, Political Party and Power* (2011)—presents a case for doing so, and for believing that the King's July 2011 intervention is part of a larger pattern. Kobkua, who has written previously on Thai kingship (2003), argues that there is at present a "socio-political revival" of "Malay kingship" (Kobkua 2011, xxii), with the growing importance of "proactive and participating constitutional rulers" (*ibid.*, 391). She writes of a royal "rejection" of the idea of the "Westminster-style constitutional monarch" and the call for "another type of constitutional monarchy"—a monarchy that is "akin to the concept and practice of the Southeast Asian monarchy perfected by the Ruler of Thailand since the 1970s" (*ibid.*, 408).

Kobkua's account, useful as it is, requires (in my view) certain qualifications. First, as I have spelt out in some detail elsewhere (Milner 2011c, 14–23), there is nothing really new about this royal activism. Rulers played a larger role than is often recognized in the process leading to Independence in 1957 (and the Independence Constitution), and have been active political players since that time—in certain cases attracting strong criticism (see, for example, Muaz 2009). They have exercised power and influence—but my second qualification is that Kobkua and others have been rather too focused on issues of power. The significance of monarchy—and the way that significance has changed over time—is of course a topic that reaches well beyond Malaysian studies, attracting cultural anthropologists and historians of ideas as well as political scientists. One lesson from this academic analysis is that a distinction needs to be made between royal power and monarchy's socio-cultural role, and that it can be unwise to dismiss that role as something of merely antiquarian interest. Another important distinction is that between the individuals who serve as monarchs and the institution itself. Some Rulers in Malaysia are

more popular than others; some have been more interventionist in the political process; several Sultans have been criticized for their business dealings or religious decisions rather than (or in addition to) their political initiatives. My concern in this article is with the institution of monarchy, and the possibilities it may offer.

In Malaysia, where there is deep social division, an issue of importance is whether aspects of the institution's socio-cultural role—dating back to pre-colonial history—have the potential to assist the building of a sense of national community. It is well known that this task continues to be an urgent priority in Malaysia, and various forms of monarchy have had a unifying influence in other parts of the world—including, perhaps most notably, in Japan. In considering such a unifying role, a critical matter—to put it succinctly—is whether Malaysians should be thinking more in terms of "monarchy" rather than "Malay monarchy." Here we confront directly the greatest ideological challenge that the country faces: the task of bonding such a racially-divided nation, especially with its sharply-defined "Malay," "Chinese" and "Indian" communities.¹⁾ If Malaysians are open to the probing of their political heritage of ideas—to engaging in a form of hermeneutic retrieval²⁾ to assist in fashioning (or refashioning) institutions for the future—the question might be asked: must Malaysia's "identity monarchy" serve only the Malay community, or are there historical grounds for believing it has the potential for a wider social reach?

Identity Monarchy

Countering Kobkua's stress on the novelty of royal activism, I have noted (Milner 2011c) the observation in the 1980s from former Lord President Raja Azlan Shah that it is "a mistake to think that the role of a King, like that of a President, is confined to what is laid down by the Constitution. His role far exceeds those constitutional provisions" (Azlan Shah 1986, 89). The legal scholar, H. P. Lee reinforced the point when he explained that, like it or not, the "constitutional system in Malaysia" simply does not "accord with present-day notions of parliamentary democracy" (1995, 37). But the references in both these cases, it seems to me, reach beyond issues of power and influence. When Malaysia's former senior judge, Mohd. Salleh bin Abas, calls the King—the Yang di-Pertuan Agong—"a symbol of unity" (1986, 4), or we encounter the often-cited maxim "the Ruler

1) The Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS) at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia is currently engaged in a project examining the history and possible future role of the race societal paradigm in Malaysia. The project is also concerned to identify elements in the Malaysian historical heritage of ideas that might be deployed in countering the race paradigm.

2) This phrase arose in a stimulating discussion with Philip Koh.

and Subject can never be divided,” there is a suggestion of the identity-reinforcing role which monarchy often played on the Peninsula and Archipelago in the pre-colonial period. It appears to be there too when former Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman argued that “without the protecting influence of these Rulers the Malays would lose whatever semblance of belonging they might have in the land of their birth . . .” (cited in Kobkua 2011, 264n).

Kobkua seems to allude to the socio-cultural role of monarchy—for instance, when she refers to “the foundation of traditional Ruler-subjects relations” having “survived . . . under the British residential system” (*ibid.*, 114)—but takes the analysis little further. Nor does she investigate the transformation of the institution of monarchy during the colonial period. Her analysis is cast mainly around matters of power. Yet academic analysis over the last few decades has reminded us of the social and cultural dimensions of monarchy in Southeast Asia and elsewhere in the world—stressing in some cases that even when the Ruler himself/herself may seem weak, the royal institution can be vitally important in the life of the community (e.g. Geertz 1971; 1980; Milner 1982; Thongchai 1994; Fujitani 1998; Drakard 1999; Cannadine 2001; Day 2002; Peleggi 2002; Bellah 2003). The Emperor of post-Meiji Restoration Japan, for instance, lived “above the clouds”—leaving others to exercise “real power”—but he was also understood to be the “axis of the state” (Bellah 2003, 34–35; Fujitani 1998, chapter 6).

In the Malaysian case, on the eve of colonial rule the sultan’s role in his state did not stress “the exercise of pre-eminent power” (Gullick 1965, 44; Milner 1982). The character of this pre-modern kingship, as I have suggested, may have some relevance to modern Malaysia, but it is also important to stress the far-reaching change that has taken place in Malaysian monarchy over the last 200 years. It is misleading to speak of monarchy today as a “traditional institution.” Let us consider just a few dimensions of the kingship or kingdom that operated on the Peninsula in say, 1800. Although in certain cases Rulers did give the impression of exercising considerable power, Malay writings in particular suggest that it was the social and what we might today call the psychological significance of monarchy that was fundamental. The word that most approximated to “kingdom” was “*kerajaan*,” and it meant literally “the condition of having a raja.” The Ruler was the linchpin of the community—and this would appear to have been the case in both the Islamic period or in the earlier, Buddhist polity (Wolters 1970, chapter 8; Milner 1981). He was the head of religion in his community; custom (*adat*) was said to rest “in his hands.” The laws of the polity were seen to “come down to us” via the ruling family (Milner 2002, 148). The polity’s “historical” writings constructed the past in the idiom of “the raja” and his genealogical heritage. The subject—the *rakyat*—seems to have been conceptualized almost as a part of “the Raja.” A community without a Ruler

was said to be in a condition of utter confusion (*huru hara*). The maxim "the Ruler and subject can never be divided," it could be argued, possessed a literal truth within the old *kerajaan* ideology (Gullick 1965; Milner 1982; 2011a, chapter 3).

This observation is underlined too when we consider that the Ruler was presented as a Ruler—a focus of community and identity in himself—not the "Ruler of a state," a territorially-defined state. He did not describe himself in his letters, for instance, as the "Sultan of Perak." The *rakyat* was the subject of a Ruler not a State. The *kerajaan* was conceptualized in terms of the personal relationship between Ruler and *rakyat*—not Ruler and a specific race—and foreigners were often surprised by how uninterested Rulers seemed in the physical dimensions of their "kingdom." In this *kerajaan* paradigm—for all its lack of stress on geographic definition—the various hierarchical relations between Ruler and subject were carefully defined in the position a subject took at ceremonies or the clothes he or she wore. Status was determined in relation to the Ruler, and some court writings convey the assumption that status in this world (*nama, pangkat*) could influence one's fortunes in the hereafter (Milner 2011a, chapter 3; Ahmat Adam 2009).

Such Rulers have been denigrated by outsiders—and by historians—for their preoccupation with mere ceremony (see citations in Milner 2002, chapter 1). This observation conveys a total misunderstanding—as does the downplaying of the significance of ceremony in a good deal of "invention of tradition" writing (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). If we understand ceremony as the defining of the status of the subject—the marking out of hierarchies—then it was fundamental to the *kerajaan*, as important as the policing of territorial borders and state citizenship today. A Ruler's involvement in ceremony was in fact called his "work" (*kerja*), and the correct performance of ceremony (including the naming, addressing and positioning of a Ruler's subjects) was a vital concern. It is not surprising that the court texts of the old kingdoms often praised a Raja in terms of his perfect manners, his refined speech—his capacity to treat people appropriately (Drakard 1990, 78; Milner 1982, 41). Also, in the reported negotiations (in the "Malay Annals") between a famous Ruler and his new subjects, the specific request made by the latter is that they should never be "reviled with evil words" (Winstedt 1938, 56–57). This concern for ceremony (and language), then, is far more than theatre. When the anthropologist, Clifford Geertz employed the expression "Theatre State" (1980), he was successful in capturing how a *kerajaan*-type polity could appear to an outsider. "Theatre" is a useful metaphor. But from the inside, the *kerajaan* was about something more earnest than theatre: today we might say it was about "identity."

The concern for ceremony—for the public defining and ordering of the Ruler's subjects—also had implications for economic life. Within a *kerajaan* hierarchy, material wealth had to be aligned with status. Sumptuary laws controlled the way people of one

status or another might be housed or clothed. Wealth was conceived as flowing from the Ruler, as a product of patronage. Wealth was not seen as an end in itself, but one way of accumulating subjects. In this “*kerajaan* economics,” the accumulation of independent, private wealth was perceived by the royal court as a political threat, and was necessarily discouraged among the Ruler’s *rakyat*. It is thus not surprising to find that sultans were often described by foreigners as the great traders in their polities, or that foreigners sometimes complained about the “plundering” of would-be rich subjects by the “Raja’s men.” They did not understand that the aligning of status and material wealth in the *kerajaan* was a duty of the Ruler (Milner 2003b).

When we think about the kingdom or *kerajaan* of 1800 in these terms, it seems to me that it is just not tenable to assert, as Kobkua does, that “the foundation of traditional ruler-subjects relations” was maintained during the colonial period; or to stress, as Roger Kershaw has done, “the importance of continuity of the monarchy itself” (2001, 18; see also Roff 1994, 256; Muhammad Kamil 1998, 314). Elements survived—and these deserve careful attention; but the *ancien regime* came under sustained attack, and the royal courts themselves undertook far-reaching, ideological renovation. I have written in the past about this transformation of Malaysian monarchy (Milner 2003a)—and about the importance of acknowledging the occurrence of epistemic rupture in Malaysian and other history (2002)—but should emphasize here that the British brought to the Malay Peninsula powerful new concepts of state, government, race, progress, time and so forth. They endorsed a new, colonial knowledge—and this knowledge project has attracted scholarly interest (e.g. Hirschman 1987; Shamsul 1998; Milner 2002). Within a few decades the royal courts were employing the new thinking to remodel the sultanate. In Johor and Perak, for instance, they began to constitute “the state” as a specific territorial entity. Surveying or mapping of territory was important in this and was described as a novel enterprise in court-related writings of the time. In Johor a state constitution was created (in 1895), and an interesting aspect of this text is the way it translates “constitution” as “*undang-undang tuboh kerajaan*.” The word “*tuboh*” conveys “body, in the anatomical sense.” The constitution seems therefore to be conceptualized as giving “body” to the *kerajaan*, and presumably the “State of Johor.” In this way it becomes possible to think of “the state” as an entity independent of the Ruler—a truly revolutionary transition, at least from the perspective of the old *kerajaan* ideology (Milner 2002, 215–216).

In such a “state” the Ruler could no longer be constituted as the linchpin, the center around which all else is articulated. The ceremonies that defined the Ruler-subject relation also had to lose some of their urgency. In certain ways ceremonies were actually elaborated during the colonial period (partly under the influence of British royal practice) (Gullick 1987, 33, 347; 1992, 236), but they could not have the meaning they once pos-

sessed. It cannot be said (as Kobkua has done) that the Rulers maintained their position "at the very centre of all aspects of life in the state" (Kobkua 2011, 85–86). One Malay author in 1925, for instance, noted that "nowadays the royal ceremonial and sumptuary regulations are fading" (cited in Milner 2003a, 183). The Ruler's "work" was to move into new areas: he began to be praised in new ways, judged for the contribution he made to his "State." In texts from early twentieth-century Johor and Perak, Rulers were now complimented for introducing "modern" institutions, for "modernizing education," for "improving the lives" of their subjects, for caring for the different races in their State, and for helping to unite the Malay race. They were praised for being "careful and conscientious" in their administration. Such key terms or expressions as "government," "modernity," and "administrative diligence and energy"—and soon "development" and "progress"—began to contribute to a new royal discourse, and to challenge the dominance of a language concerned largely about ceremonial, custom, language, manners and status (Milner 2003a; 2002, chapters 8 and 9).

As represented in the new royal court writings, the Rulers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were impressive administrators and often subtle diplomats. They were reformers, claiming leadership of their State community (with its component races) in a time of challenge—a time when the Rulers had to deal with British administrative and ideological demands, new religious thinking from the Middle East, and increasing immigration numbers. There is a suggestion here of a performance-based monarchy—some texts from royal courts (including coronation memento albums) could now be read almost as election manifestos (Milner 2003a). These new Rulers, the product of a fresh epistemic era, may not have had the same pivotal, ideological role in their subjects' lives and mentality as their *kerajaan* predecessors possessed. But in considering Kobkua's claim that there is currently in Malaysia an attempt to "revive the monarch's role"—giving Rulers "active participation in the affairs of the nation" (Kobkua 2011, xxiii)—the story of the reconstruction of Malayan monarchy during the colonial period is vital. To a significant extent the new "participating constitutional monarchs," whom Kobkua describes as gaining support today, are the heirs of the colonial-period new Rulers at least as much as of the "traditional" rajas or sultans of 1800.

To use the word "traditional" in reference to Malaysian monarchs today is therefore misleading, but we can ask whether there are ways in which that old *kerajaan* ideology continues to be relevant to modern Malaysia? This question touches on the issue of whether "colonial knowledge" is in fact the real "baseline knowledge" for modern Malaysia (Shamsul 1998, 49), or do some concepts from the pre-colonial era remain potent? The historian, Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, has suggested that the "element of spirituality" in royal sovereignty today only exists "as a belief amongst a small section" of the

community (1992, 281). Few are likely now to fear the supernatural wrath of the Ruler's *daulat* (power). But when Tunku Abdul Rahman wrote of the "semblance of belonging" which the Rulers continue to give their people, then we do get a sense of the 1800 Ruler as linchpin, holding a defining role in his community. We do so again, when the Raja Muda of Perak refers today to the unifying role of monarchy, and its capacity to provide a sense of historical identity and continuity (Smith 2006, 134; Kobkua 2011, 384). I shall return to the issue of precisely how unifying that identity-monarchy role could be.

The influence today of the old *kerajaan* ideology, as has often been remarked, extends beyond conceptualizations of monarchy *per se*. What is sometimes termed feudal thinking has been seen to influence attitudes to political authority in general. Syed Hussein Alatas (1972), Chandra Muzaffar (1979), Shaharuddin Maaruf (1984) and Clive Kessler (1992)—all pioneers in this line of investigation—have examined the impact of royal "tradition" in shaping attitudes toward loyalty, "followership," heroism and ceremony. In my own work I have been interested in the influence of old *kerajaan* ideas on current Malay approaches to entrepreneurialism, so-called money politics, top-down political leadership, the concept of the "plural society," and the manner in which the idea of the "Malay race" (the "*bangsa Melayu*") has been propagated as a focus of identity and loyalty (Milner 2011a, chapters 7 and 8; 2003b; see also Johnson and Milner 2005). The continuing importance of reputation (*nama*, and related terms) in Malay thinking seems also to warrant closer attention (Karim 1992, 7).

In the case of modern monarchy itself, the old *kerajaan* influence is to be encountered naturally in the continued prominence of royal titles and royal ceremonies in Malaysia—by most international standards, this country really is marked by an elaborate monarchialism—but perhaps most of all, as I have indicated, in the depicting of Rulers as a focus of identity and community. While Salleh Abas has spoken of the King as "a symbol of unity," the Ruler of Pahang has been described as a "symbol of the unity of the people" of his State (Shariff Ahmad 1983, xvii, 32). "Symbol" (*simbol*) is of course a relatively new word, and its use here is a reminder of how far removed we are today from the *kerajaan* of 1800. The *kerajaan* Ruler of that time was not conceived a "symbol"—his claim was to be the real basis of unity, the actual center around which all else was articulated. But the claim to promote symbolic unity is still a strong one—potentially much more powerful, one might suggest, than the more recent heritage of the colonial-period administrator Ruler. The question we turn to now, however, is how comprehensive is the unity which the Ruler might be expected to promote in his role as an "identity monarch"? It can be argued, in my view, that the *kerajaan* ideology was race blind: on this basis it makes sense to go on to ask whether modern Malaysian monarchy has drawn upon—or could draw upon—that aspect of the old tradition?

"Malay Rulers" or "Rulers"?

Time and again we encounter the words "Malay Rulers." Kobkua uses the expression herself in the title of her book. But although she often points to the specific role of monarchy with respect to the Malay community—and calls the Rulers "the living symbols of Malay sovereignty" (2011, 393)—she does quote the present Sultan of Selangor stressing that "Malaysia belongs to all Malaysians" (*ibid.*, 387); and notes as well the insistence by the Raja Muda of Perak that monarchy has the capacity to give the national community—both Malays and non-Malays—a sense of common identity (*ibid.*, 384). The tension here between "Ruler" and "Malay Ruler," given the anxiety about national unity in modern Malaysia, should not be neglected in the discussion of the ideology of monarchy in this country.

In pre-colonial times, as suggested, there is a case for speaking of "Rulers," although monarchy is very often assumed to be in historical terms essentially "Malay" (for example, Mahathir 2011, 100). It is, in fact, in the British era that monarchy began increasingly to be constituted as "Malay." The term "Malay," as far as I can see, was not actually used by the Archipelago people to describe the range of polities on Sumatra, the Peninsula and Borneo which were so often called "Malay" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I have argued recently that the use of the expression "Malay world" is misleading for the pre-colonial period, and it might be more accurate to speak of a "*kerajaan* world" or the "Archipelago sultanates"—or even the "Malay-speaking sultanates" (Milner 2011a, chapter 4).

As to the would-be Malayness of the rulers themselves, the Melaka royal line claims descent from Alexander the Great; the Sultan of Deli in Sumatra traces his genealogy back to an Indian who had earlier been an official in the sultanate of Aceh; and the Rulers of Pontianak and Perlis possess Arab origins. Even in the clothing they wore, rulers displayed a flexibility regarding ethnic identification. In the early nineteenth century, Johor ruler Husain dressed his sons in "Tamil fashion, wearing wide trousers and Indian gowns" (Abdullah 2009, 275); and Sultan Abdul Hamid of Kedah (1882–1943) "almost invariably wore western-style suites in preference to Malay dress," though on ceremonial occasions he tended to dress in a Siamese-style uniform (Sheppard 2007, 4, 8–9). With respect to high officials in the *kerajaan*, at the opening of the seventeenth century the Dutch Admiral Matelieff reported that a Peguan (from present-day Burma) was one of "the highest councilors" to the Ruler of Kedah (Commelin 1969, 46). An eighteenth-century Kedah ruler had as his "King's merchant," a "deep cunning villainous Chuliah," who was given the title "Dattoo Sri Raja" (Steuart 1901, 15, 18). In mid-nineteenth cen-

tury Kedah the ruler gave a noble title to a Hakka leader, who was “accorded a high place on State Functions” (Gullick 1992, 372–373); later in the century Kedah’s Sultan Abdul Hamid appointed a “well-known and much-respected Chinese businessman” as “State Treasurer,” with a “royal office . . . sited in an extension to the palace” (Sheppard 2007, 4–5). In Pahang about the same time, a “Tamil Indian” was the “treasurer and tax collector” (Gullick 1965, 52), and earlier in the nineteenth century, Johor Sultan Husain had an influential Indian advisor called Abdul Kadir bin Ahmad Sahib, who was given the title “Tengku Muda” (Abdullah 2009, 275).

Subjects of rulers tended to be described just as “*rakyat*” rather than as members of races or ethnic groups. As suggested already, the self-classification “Malay”—used to refer to a trans-sultanate racial unity—is a relatively modern innovation in Island South-east Asia. Its growing use was particularly influenced by the propagation of European thinking about “race” from the end of the eighteenth century (Milner 2011a, chapters 4 and 5). The term “Malay,” of course, had long been associated with the Melaka polity and the sultanates connected with Melaka, but the idea of a specific “Malay race”—a race with which one identifies, and to which one owes loyalty—was something that emerged primarily in the colonial period. The subjects of the pre-colonial Ruler would in some situations identify with a geographic location, usually a river—calling themselves, for instance, “orang Kemaman” or “orang Muar” (and there are rivers named “Melayu” in Sumatra); but the larger community with which they identified was not a race but a specific *kerajaan*. It was possible to live outside the *kerajaan* entity; and I have suggested elsewhere that the formation of communities from China in particular—communities that lived separately from the Ruler’s subjects, and did not operate by *kerajaan* rules in their social and economic lives—are in a sense a precursor of the “plural society” configuration that was consolidated in colonial Malaya (Milner 2003b). Despite such segmentation, however, the pre-colonial *kerajaan* itself does not appear to have been conceptualized in specifically racial or ethnic terms.

Even in the British period many subjects of rulers on the Peninsula continued to call themselves “Minangkabau,” “Bugis,” “Baweyan” or “Javanese.” Chinese might also be subjects of a ruler at this time (Ratnam 1965, 72; Mohamed Suffian 1972, 207; Emerson 1964, 509). For instance, in a 1931 legal case involving a Chinese man (Ho Chick Kwan), whom the British wanted the Sultan of Selangor to banish, Ho was described as a “natural born subject of the Ruler of the State of Negri Sembilan,” and his adopted mother (Lui Ho) described herself as owing “true allegiance to His Highness the Sultan of Selangor” (Ho Chick Kwan v The Hon’ble British Resident Selangor, criminal appeal no.11 of 1931).

British racializing of the Sultanates was evident even in the early nineteenth century, when the official British presence was limited to Penang. Thomas Stamford

Raffles and John Leiden—at that time planning Britain's future role in the Archipelago—conceptualized the different Sultanates as members of "a general Malay league" that might be placed "under the protection" of a British governor (Raffles 1991, 25). When the British intervened administratively in the Peninsular Sultanates, commencing with Perak in 1874, they identified a special Malay responsibility for the Rulers. The new British advisers—or "Residents"—were to be powerful in some matters, but the areas of "Malay Religion and Custom" were to be left to the Rulers (Gullick 1992, 2). British officials also cooperated with the Sultans in the formulation of policies specifically designed to benefit "The Malay Race in the FMS," to quote the title of a memo written in 1906 (Burns 1971, 5).

Pronouncements from the royal courts themselves in the colonial period, it should be noted, continued to stress the responsibility of the Ruler toward all his subjects. An early twentieth-century Johor text—the "*Hikayat Johor*"—lauds Johor's Sultan Abu Bakar (1885–95) for "looking after the Chinese subjects living in the state." There is also mention of Chinese and Indians welcoming him home from an overseas journey (Mohamed Said 1930, 59, 44). In a later Perak coronation document, again we see a Ruler reaching out to non-Malays, stressing in a speech that he had "not forgotten the help" that "other races in the state" had given "in making Perak wealthy and prosperous." At the coronation itself, not only Malays but also Chinese, Ceylonese, Indians and Japanese made formal declarations of loyalty to the new Ruler. Sultan Abdul Aziz, so the text stresses, "does not distinguish between his subjects" (Milner 2002, 243–244; Lob Ahmad 1940).

In a valuable, left-wing account of British Malaya on the eve of the Japanese invasion, the activist Ibrahim Yaacob referred to a Kelantan Ruler bestowing a prestigious title on a Chinese merchant, and observed that the Johor state council building looked like a Chinese audience hall because it was decorated with Chinese writing. When Ibrahim Yaacob asked what the writing was about, he was told that it recorded the personal service of wealthy Chinese people to the Ruler (Milner 2002, 261). Ibrahim was sympathetic neither to Rulers nor to the influx of Chinese and Indians, whom he saw as pressuring "the Malays" in economic and other areas (*ibid.*, 263). He would have known that Rulers could form alliances with these groups. John Gullick, in his detailed historical research on the Rulers in the colonial period, has described how business activities with both Chinese and Europeans tended to draw Rulers into the "non-Malay, official and business world, which was beginning, by the 1920s if not before, to dominate Malaya" (1992, 213–214, 131n125). Apart from provoking Ibrahim Yaacob, this personal experience would have reinforced a Ruler's sincerity in thanking these "races" for the help they gave to making his State "wealthy and prosperous."

Self-racializing

Despite such royal affirmations of inclusiveness, however, the royal courts were also positioning themselves in one way or another with respect to the “Malay” movement. The “*Hikayat Johor*,” mentioned above, stresses the Sultan’s special concern for his “subjects of the Malay race” (Milner 2003a, 179); the later Perak text indicates the Perak Ruler’s concern about “uniting our race (*bangsa*),” and about the Malays being “left behind” by other races in the development of the Perak state (Milner 2002, 242–243). There is a claim to leadership being conveyed in such statements, and it should be understood in the context of a general royal wariness. The Rulers appear to have understood well that those promoting the *bangsa Melayu* were advocating a focus of identity and loyalty that could compete with monarchy; race also carries an implicit egalitarianism that has the potential to rival the essential hierarchy of monarchy. It is certainly the case that some prominent advocates of race—proponents of the “*bangsa Melayu*”—right back to Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir in the early nineteenth century, were determined critics of specific Rulers and even of the institution of monarchy (*ibid.*, 15; Ibrahim Yaacob 1941, 6, 58).

Not surprisingly the “Malay” movement met royal opposition, as Ibrahim Yaacob’s pre-War survey of British Malaya confirms. Some royal courts, he said, held “firmly to the old feeling and strongly oppose the new desire to unify the Malay people.” In Kedah, members of the ruling elite had opposed the formation of a Malay association on the ground that Kedah “possesses a raja”; in Perak royal opposition initially discouraged the use of the term “Malay” in the name of an association intended to promote unity (Milner 2002, 269–270). In Selangor, there was certainly a “Selangor Malay Association,” but it was led by a member of royalty and was utterly deferential toward the ruler (Smith 2006, 128). Looking to sultanates beyond the Peninsula, D. E. Brown’s study of Brunei notes that sultanate’s suspicion of “ethnic distinctions,” and the insistence that “all indigenous groups enjoyed the common status of subject of the Sultan” (Brown 1970, 4, 9). In mid-twentieth-century East Sumatra it was reported that the *kerajaan* leadership (in such sultanates as Deli, Langkat and Asahan) “never cared for the *suku Melayu*” (the Malay ethnic group), fearing competition from potentially-influential “Malay” associations (Ariffin 1993, 78).

How best then to handle the growing Malay movement? Discourage it, or position oneself in a leadership role? It was in the immediate post-war years, in the struggle against the Malayan Union, that the Rulers were pressed most strongly to identify with the Malay movement. At that time more than ever before, it can be argued, monarchy was racialized. The Japanese Occupation had sharpened further the tension between

"Malays" and "Chinese" in particular, and the movement against the Malayan Union was perceived to be fundamentally "Malay." Kobkua and others have shown that the Rulers were far from passive in the struggle against the British (Kobkua 2011, chapter 4; Smith 1995, chapter 3; 2006), and "*Daulat Tuanku*" ("Power to the Ruler") continued to be a rallying cry (Stockwell 1979, 71). But Cheah Boon Kheng (1988) and Ariffin Omar (1993) have demonstrated how strongly "Malayism" began to compete with monarchy in the process of the Malayan Union debate, and how popular the declaration "*Hidup Melayu*" ("Long Live the Malays") became. While some Sultans continued to take the "Malay" movement head on—the Kedah Ruler, for instance, was determined to "eradicate UMNO influence" from his State (Smith 1995, 176)—the Sultan of Pahang spoke of "we Malays," and the Sultan of Perak declared that he spoke "as a Malay not as a Sultan" (Ariffin 1993, 104).

In the period leading up to Independence, when the Rulers were determined to help shape the constitution for the new nation, they also took pains to advocate a range of Malay causes. They spoke up on such topics as Asian immigration, Malay land reserves, and the protection of Malay economic interests (Kobkua 2011, 149–150, 152). In 1951, during the Malayan Emergency—when the British were concerned to improve the living conditions for Chinese who might potentially join the terrorists—the Rulers warned that "it is very essential to reassure the Malays that they are not being neglected and forgotten" (Smith 1995, 111, 113, 116). In these and other ways the Rulers—in competition with the UMNO leadership—presented themselves (in Kobkua's words) as "credible and respectable champions and guardians of the Malays" (Kobkua 2011, 183).

The 1957 Federal Constitution itself conveys the impression of allocating the Rulers a specific Malay role. In Article 153 (1), the King is given the responsibility "to safeguard the special position" of the Malays (and "natives" of Sabah and Sarawak), and also "the legitimate interests of other communities. . . ." This might appear ethnically even-handed, but public focus has tended to be placed on the Malay dimension—probably because the establishing of the Malay "special position" (with the practical benefits included) is often considered "the most unusual feature of the Malaysian Constitution" (Harding 2007, 120). Important amendments to the Constitution in 1971—following the 1969 riots—reinforced the impression of a privileged Ruler-Malay community linkage. Now it was necessary to have the consent of the Conference of Rulers (which meets regularly and possesses powers outlined in the Federal Constitution) before making a change to the constitutional provisions relating to national language and to the "special position of the Malays" [Article 153 (1)] (*ibid.*, 121–122). It does not assist the inclusiveness of Malaysian monarchy that public discussion of this amendment has emphasized the Rulers' increased responsibility toward Malay interests (see, for example, *Malaysian Mirror*, October 21, 2010); nor is it

helpful—from the point of view of maintaining ethnic neutrality—that press statements on this and other matters, issued by the “Conference of Rulers,” repeatedly refer to the Rulers as “Malay Rulers” (Kobkua 2011, 424–426).

Under the Federal Constitution the Ruler was confirmed as “Head” of the “Muslim religion” in his state, and could “act in his discretion” in performing that role (Sheridan 1961, 4, 73). As not all Muslims in Malaya/Malaysia are Malay, however, this stipulation cannot be defined as essentially ethnic.

The continued racializing—the “Malayizing”—of the Rulers can be seen in many other areas in the post-War public discourse of Malaysia. It takes place when Rulers are described as the “symbol” or “cement” assisting to hold the Malay race together (Ariffin 1993, 53, 102); or (in the 1980s) when Salleh Abas writes of “Malay rulership” as “the nub of Malay custom” (1986, 13). The racializing is happening again in current school history texts, which describe all the old Peninsular sultanates as “*kerajaan Melayu*”—despite the fact that none of the early royal court writings use the phrase (and tend to use the term “*Melayu*” itself with reference only to Melaka and sultanates closely linked with the Melaka ruling family) (Ahmad Fawzi *et al.* 2010, 123, 129; Malay Concordance Project).

In the post-Independence period we have also seen more Malayizing of monarchy on the part of individual Sultans. When the Sultan of Perak spoke in 1946 “as a Malay not as a Sultan,” he had said too that “we are Malays and must not lose our customs and religious practices, which are our prized possessions” (Ariffin 1993, 104). Customs and religion—which in the past, as I have noted, were presented as being “in the hands of the ruler” (Milner 2002, 101)—would now appear to have been recognized by the Ruler himself as being grounded in the “Malay race.” The point is made with even more clarity in a coronation document of 1971 from the royal court of Pahang. Here the Pahang monarchy’s customs and ceremonial—which once would have been of vital importance merely because they were royal customs and ceremonial—are presented as significant because they are a “branch of Malay culture” and a reflection of the “national characteristics of the Malay people (*bangsa Melayu*)” (Anon 1971; see also Milner 2003a, 188–189).

Trans-racial Residue

Although the Rulers are referred to frequently as “Malay Rulers”—even, as I have said, in pronouncements from the Conference of Rulers—it must also be said that the residue of an earlier trans-racial substance has survived in post-Independence as well as colonial times. Looking back half a century, we see this residue when the Rulers favoured a

multilingual system of school education, and not just the learning of Malay and English (Kobkua 2011, 216); it is there again in May 1969 when Chinese people recall that—at a time of acute inter-racial crisis—the Sultan of Trengganu and other Rulers took steps to protect their non-Malay subjects. We see the residue in a different sphere when new Malay “commoner” entrepreneurs express resentment at having to compete in business with Rulers who act through Chinese intermediaries (*ibid.*, 364). There is an important political gesture toward the trans-racial again in a special press statement from the Conference of Rulers in October 2008. Here the Rulers explain that the “institution of the Rulers” is a “protective umbrella ensuring impartiality among the citizens.” The statement explains the Rulers’ “constitutional role” respecting the so-called “Social Contract” between Malays and non-Malays, and assures “non-Malays” that there is no need to “harbour any apprehension or worry over their genuine rights . . .” (*ibid.*, 425–426).

Indications of even-handedness in politics or business are one matter, but in what ways does the institution of monarchy itself continue to be racially-blind? The fact that the Federal Constitution uses the term “Rulers” not “Malay Rulers” (though the present-day Constitutions of the different States require Rulers to be “Malay”) (Legal Research Board 1998) seems significant. It is also a positive sign when a Sultan is described by his supporters—in the case of Pahang—as a “symbol of the unity of the people (*rakyat*)” (and not just the Malay race, or *bangsa*) (Shariff Ahmad 1983, xvii, 32); or, in the case of Kelantan, as the “umbrella sheltering” the people (*rakyat*) (Mohd. Zain Saleh 1987, 14; also, in Perak, Nazrin Shah 2011). The term *rakyat*—used again by the Sultan of Selangor when he speaks of his State’s “citizens, regardless of ethnic background and faith” (*New Straits Times*, January 7, 2011)—may convey to some a memory of “feudal” times, but it is without doubt racially inclusive. It is stressed in the pronouncements of the current Malaysian government, particularly at times when the “1Malaysia” vision is being spelt out (*Berita Harian*, December 6, 2010), and achieved enough conceptual distance from the hierarchy of the *kerajaan* to be employed in the titles of the democratic socialist party, the Partai Ra’ayat (People’s Party) (founded 1955) and the Opposition Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People’s Justice Party), established in 2003.

Here we might return to the matter of ceremony—which is also difficult to detach from the Raja: Rakyat binary. In pre-colonial times ceremony—titles, sumptuary laws, elaborate and lengthy public ceremonies—was vital in defining the *kerajaan* polity and community, giving each person a place with respect to the royal hierarchy. Today, policing on the part of the immigration and citizenship administration of the bordered state is critical in determining membership of the national community. Nevertheless, as observed already, the Malaysian community continues to be characterized by formalized

hierarchy and public ritual. Nine Rulers, an elaborate structure of Tun, Tan Sri, Dato' Sri and Dato' rankings, and vast numbers of lower awards and medals—such an array of titles and distinctions, combined with an immensely busy calendar of public occasions and celebrations at Federal and State level, all convey this strong “monarchialism.” And just as the word “*rakyat*” conveys both hierarchy and inclusiveness, so the royal ceremony has a capacity to bond.

The birthday celebrations for the different Rulers are a time when we see some evidence of the continued trans-racial character of monarchy. Thus, at the Sultan of Perak's Celebration in April 2011 the recipients of the high honors included a leading businessman whose father was Goanese and a wide range of Chinese and Indian people—from academia, the media and the arts, as well as the business community (Sagaran 2011). The ceremony on such occasions, so many would object, is considered today to be distinctly “Malay,” and thus by no means race-blind—and the fact that this objection is widely held, it must be admitted, has to damage the potential bonding capacity of monarchy. There is confusion here, however, as the discussion in this article should indicate. The argument that monarchy—the *kerajaan*—is a “branch of Malay culture” is relatively recent. Historical analysis suggests that the *kerajaan* (including its ceremony)—with its complex combination of Islamic and pre-Islamic features—precedes the development of Malay ethnic consciousness, and the argument could be made that it still has the potential to transcend racial sentiment and identity today.

The “bonding of the nation,” as is well known, is an urgent issue in Malaysia, where racial or ethnic communities have often attracted more loyalty than the state itself. Over the years there have been numerous attempts to counter the race paradigm—the project to create a “People's Constitution” in the 1940s; Lee Kuan Yew's advocacy of a “Malaysian Malaysia” in the 1960s; Mahathir's suggestion of a single “Malaysian people,” a “*Bangsa Malaysia*”; and so forth. The current Opposition party, Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People's Justice Party) seeks to go beyond race; the Government also seems to want to do so when it speaks of “1Malaysia.” One attempt after another, however, seems almost inevitably to become entangled in racial or communal politics.³⁾ Frustrated in planning ahead, it is not unusual to reach back for assistance from the past. In interrogating the historical heritage of ideas of Malaysia, searching for concepts that might be appropriated in planning a more inclusive national community, the old *kerajaan*—the historical foundation for an “identity monarchy” that would still seem to possess a degree of potency today—does appear to be a societal paradigm that has a claim to attention. In the last century, although monarchy has become embroiled in race issues, it contains an ideo-

3) See footnote 1).

logical residue—if we can disassemble ideology in that way—that is racially inclusive or, perhaps more accurately, racially blind.

Conclusion

In her recent book, Kobkua has written interestingly of a "socio-political revival" of "Malay kingship" but has focused most of all on the political, stressing fluctuations in royal power over the years. Malaysia, it is true, is characterized in part by its monarchialism—it has been so since Independence, and the phrases "Westminster monarchy" or "constitutional monarchy" do not quite fit. In my view, however, it is most of all the social and cultural construction of Malaysian monarchy that has been under-examined, and we need to investigate this dimension in a "history of ideas"—or a history of ideology—that reaches back beyond the colonial era.

As an institution the modern monarchy is fundamentally different from the *kerajaan* polity of some 200 years ago, and the current Rulers are the heirs of the performance-based administrator royals of the colonial period as much as (or more than) of the pre-colonial "traditional" Sultans. Nevertheless, there would seem to be advantages in examining ways in which the old *kerajaan* might have significance for current Malaysia. It should be said at the outset that reaching back to pre-colonial times to consider the possible current relevance of the historical heritage, the importance of the *kerajaan* ruler would not appear to rest on the wielding of administrative power. With this in mind, an exercise in hermeneutic retrieval is unlikely to provide much ideological justification for the enhancement today of royal authority in day-to-day government administration. One avenue that could prove more profitable in a project of retrieval would involve a close examination of the way pre-colonial Rulers provided religious leadership. This would seem to be a neglected field of historical investigation, and a recent visit to Morocco—where the King's current and historical role in the religious life of the community seems to be profound—encourages me to suggest the advantage of examining Malaysian historical materials in a comparative context.

Considering the way current Malaysian deliberation has focused on the country's deep social divisions, however, it is perhaps the identity-giving function of the pre-colonial ruler—as the linchpin of his community in a fundamental sense—that adds most substance to monarchy's claim to present-day relevance. When one prominent royal spokesman referred in recent times to the monarchy's capacity to provide "social glue" (Nazrin Shah 2004, 6), he invoked a continuing theme in this country, reaching back to the earliest Malay-language records. But do we need to think of "identity monarchy" only

with reference to the Malay community? My first concern here, of course, is not with how individual Sultans have behaved toward one ethnic group or another but with the ideology of monarchy.

The final section of this article considers whether there is historical support for believing the unifying role of kingship has the potential to transcend ethnic division—and here I suspect my analysis has diverged somewhat from the current majority view. Malaysia's monarchy, it can be argued, is not in historical terms an essentially "Malay" institution. Its specifically "Malay" character is a product primarily of the colonial period and the decolonization process. The *kerajaan* of pre-colonial times was not racially defined—and we get a hint today of this characteristic of the old institution when the term "*rakyat*" is used to describe "the people" in political rather than racial terms, and when ceremonies and pronouncements of the reigning Rulers continue to incorporate members of all ethnic groups. Focusing on the race-blind character of the precolonial institution, we have the opportunity to recover something of the old royal tradition which might be employed on behalf of the "bonding of the nation." Exactly how it could be employed is a topic that would require a separate analysis, but in Japan, the United Kingdom and elsewhere we encounter useful case studies, and they suggest that where monarchy offers a nation "social glue" this does not necessarily entail a shift of personal power toward individual monarchs. Given the current Malaysian government's stress on identifying ideological substance that might support a "1Malaysia" vision, an attempt to find an effective and politically safe way to harness the *kerajaan*'s ideological strengths would seem warranted.

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A Posthumous Return from Exile: The Legacy of an Anticolonial Religious Leader in Today's Vietnam

Janet Hoskins*

The 2006 return of the body Phạm Công Tắc, one of the founding spirit mediums of Caodaism and its most famous 20th century leader, re-awakened controversies about his life and legacy among Caodaists both in Vietnam and in the diaspora. This paper argues that his most important contribution lay in formulating a utopian project to support the struggle for independence by providing a religiously based repertoire of concepts to imagine national autonomy, and a separate apparatus of power to achieve it. Rather than stressing Tắc's political actions, which have been well documented in earlier studies (Blagov 2001; Bernard Fall 1955; Werner 1976), I focus instead on a reading of his sermons, his séance transcripts and commentaries, histories published both in Vietnam and in the diaspora, and conversations with Caodaists in several countries when the appropriateness of returning his body was being debated.

Keywords: Vietnamese religion, anti-colonial struggle, diaspora, postcolonial theory

On November 1, 2006, excited crowds in Tây Ninh gathered in front of the huge central gate to their sacred city, which had not been opened for half a century. The large octagonal tomb on the way to the Great Temple had been built for Phạm Công Tắc, Caodaism's most famous and controversial 20th century leader, and planned as his final resting place, but it had sat empty for decades. Now, news had come that the gate would be opened on this day to receive a funeral procession coming from Cambodia, bearing his remains in a dragon shaped carriage, where his body would be welcomed, celebrated with a full night of prayers and chanting, and then finally laid to rest.

Since his death, a larger-than-life-size statue had been erected on the balcony of the large saffron colored building that had been his office in the 1940s and 1950s, where he delivered sermons that still define the ideals of worship for Tây Ninh followers. Just below it, a colorful hologram showed an image of Jesus Christ when looked at from the

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front, an image of Buddha when looked at from his right and an image of Phạm Công Tắc when looked at from his left. This summarized a key doctrine of the Tây Ninh religious hierarchy: Phạm Công Tắc was a spiritual leader on the same order as Buddha and Jesus. It should be noted, however, that Tắc never made this claim himself, and that it might be contested not only by followers of other religions but also by Caodaists affiliated with other denominations.

The British historian Ralph B. Smith noted accurately that Phạm Công Tắc was “the most prominent, but not necessarily the most important”¹⁾ Caodai leader (Smith 1970a, 336), and his legacy is one both of extraordinary charisma and activism and also of divisive exclusions. The ambitious and articulate young spirit medium remained a controversial figure half a century after his death. Within the Caodai community, some 800 temples display his image facing the great altar and see him as the human being who came closest to achieving divinity. About 500 others display the image of Ngô Văn Chiêu, Nguyễn Ngọc Trương or some other leader instead of Phạm Công Tắc, and see him as an important medium in the early years who later tried to monopolize access to spiritual communication.

At the very moment when hundreds of Caodai followers thronged into the incense-choked courtyard to pay their last respects to him, debates were raging in Caodai temples around the world about whether this sudden return to the great temple at Tây Ninh was wise. Many Caodaists had anticipated the day that their leader’s body would be returned as a time when religious freedom would return to Vietnam, there would be a normalization of decades of state censure, and the religious leadership would follow the original constitution received in spirit séances. I had visited his tomb in Phnom Penh in 2004 and interviewed a group of dignitaries and followers there. They were aware of efforts by some in the Tây Ninh hierarchy²⁾ to bring him back to the stupa-like tomb erected for him decades before, but they said the time when that would be possible was still “very far away.” “Our leader would not want to return to Vietnam as it is today,” they told me. “He had to leave because of conflict between one Vietnamese brother and another. He asked King Sihanouk to let him stay in Cambodia until Vietnam was peaceful, unified and neutral.”

While thousands of people in Tây Ninh awaited his arrival with eager anticipation, there were also others—especially members of the overseas community—who were skeptical and even openly hostile to these plans. They said that bringing Phạm Công Tắc’s body home now would be putting the cart before the horse: His return was to mark the achievement of a full normalization of Caodaism in its relation to the present govern-

1) Ralph B. Smith, “An Introduction to Caodaism: Origins and Early History” originally published in 1970–71, reprinted in *Pre-Communist Indochina*, edited by Beryl Williams (2009, 115–130).

2) Notably Cardinal Tam, the highest-ranking member of the governance committee that works with the Vietnamese state.

ment. This full normalization would include the re-sanctification of the section of the Great Temple reserved for *séance* communications with the deities, and the re-opening of *séances* (forbidden since 1975) as the authorized pathway of communication between humanity and deities.³⁾

But in November 2006, none of these concessions had yet been made. The government of Vietnam was responding to pressures from the American government to “show progress” on issues of human rights and religious freedom, since 2004 when Vietnam was listed as a “country of particular concern.” Vietnam wanted to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). It was rumored that this might happen just before President George Bush visited Vietnam to attend the ASEAN meetings in Hanoi. On the day that the Presidential delegation landed, there was still no approval for the WTO, but the US government offered another concession: They removed Vietnam from the list of countries abusing religious freedom. One condition of this change was some immediate action to re-integrate once sanctioned religious groups. Phạm Công Tắc, after resting for 47 years in Cambodia, was suddenly allowed to return to be re-buried in his homeland.

How would Phạm Công Tắc have reacted to the challenge of this politically charged decision? Would his famously powerful spirit consent to this transfer of his bodily remains? Many skeptics argued that, once opened in Phnom Penh, his tomb would be revealed to be empty—perhaps because of looting by thieves looking for gold, or perhaps because this government scheme was pre-destined to fail. Others condemned the Tây Ninh Governance Committee for “collaborating” with the communist regime and playing into their strategy of masking continued suppression of religious organizations.

A Spirit Medium as Anti-Colonial Activist

The heavily polarized debates within the Caodai community which centered on this controversial return would be familiar to Phạm Công Tắc, who was the most politicized of Caodai leaders and the one most willing to be seen as a spokesman not only for the religious hierarchy but also for Vietnam’s nationalist aspirations. Misrepresented in most English language histories as the Caodai “Pope,” he fused religion and politics when he

3) One group of Texas based Caodaists apparently hoped to bring Phạm Công Tắc’s remains to Texas, where a new Caodai temple was planned, using the three million dollar jackpot that a Caodai follower in Dallas had won in the lottery. To persuade the King of Cambodia to oppose moving the remains back to Vietnam, they presented a large “gift” to charity at the royal court. Rumors of bribes to other ministers also circulated. But ultimately, the Vietnamese government pressure proved more powerful than dollars sent from overseas congregations.

attended the Geneva Conference in 1954 and tried in vain to prevent the partition of the country. A reading of official Vietnamese histories after 1975 presents him as the leader of a “reactionary and opportunistic organization with some religious overtones” (Blagov 2001).

I argue in this paper that Phạm Công Tắc’s most important contribution lay in formulating a utopian project to support the struggle for independence by providing a religiously based repertoire of concepts to imagine national autonomy, and a separate apparatus of power to achieve it.⁴⁾ Rather than stressing Phạm Công Tắc’s political actions, which have been well documented in earlier studies (*ibid.*; Bernard Fall 1955; Werner 1976), I focus instead on a reading of his sermons, his séance transcripts and commentaries, histories published both in Vietnam and in the diaspora,⁵⁾ and conversations with Caodaists in both countries when the appropriateness of returning his body was being debated.

Phạm Công Tắc was an important religious innovator, who created a new style of mediumistic séances and a new type of scripture. After many centuries of Sino-Vietnamese phoenix writing, his séances received messages not in Chinese characters traced in sand but in the Romanized cursive of *quốc ngữ*, a form of literacy which made it possible to receive dictation in both Vietnamese and French, and was thus supremely well adopted to the bicultural and bilingual milieu of the early spiritist circles of young colonial subjects educated in French language schools. As a spirit medium, however, he never claimed “authorship” of these innovations, which were all attributed to divine guidance. But the model that he presented for conversations with divinities, rather than serving as a simply vehicle (the “voice” or “hand” of the spirit dictating a message) was to have profound implications on Caodai doctrine.⁶⁾ It developed in new directions over

4) This insight comes from conversations with Caodaists in California, France and Vietnam, and also from conversations with Jérémy Jammes in France in 2005, and the reading of his 2006 dissertation, a work that straddles Vietnamese and diasporic communities and contributed greatly to my understanding of Caodaism. “Le Caodaïsme: Rituels médiumiques. Oracles et exegeses, approche ethnologique d’un mouvement religieux vietnamien et de ses réseaux” [Caodaism: Mediumistic rituals, oracles and exegesis, an ethnographic approach to a Vietnamese religious movement and its networks] (2006b). Ph.D. thesis, Université Paris X Nanterre.

5) See Đỗ Văn Lý (1989); Đồng Tân (2006); Huệ Nhân (2005) (all in Vietnamese) and the article by the Australian scholar Trần Mỹ-Vân (2000), as well as the translations of Phạm Công Tắc’s sermons posted on line by Đào Công Tâm and Christopher Hartney at the website of the Sydney Centre for Studies in Caodaism (2007).

6) The goal of a religious visionary may in fact be somewhat more like the goal of a novelist, seeking not so much to change reality but to replace it—to offer another life, endowed with its own attributes, that is created to discredit real life, to offer an alternative to the mundane. These visions serve to “re-enchant” the world, to place it within a wider celestial framework, and to infuse it with meanings beyond those ordinarily perceived. Political utopias often disappoint because their goals cannot be reached during the lifetime of their proponents. Religious utopias, which always also project these goals onto another world, cannot be discredited by the same process.

the almost 35 years that he played a pivotal role in articulating Caodai teachings, and his subtle finessing of the issue of authorship was, I will argue, one of his most significant leadership strategies.

Phạm Công Tắc's career has sometimes been compared, both favorably and unfavorably, to that of M. K. Gandhi in India.⁷⁾ The unfavorable comparisons come from French archival documents in the early 1930s, which note their fear that "This person threatens to be another Gandhi." Like Gandhi, Phạm Công Tắc tried to use "Orientalism" (a western discourse about the differences between East and West) against empire, but the ways in which he did so balanced uneasily between asserting the powerful, progressive dynamics of an Asian "yang" (*duong*, associated with the left eye) perspective and integrating elements of Europeanized Christianity into a new universal doctrine. They also present a challenge to the ways in which religion and politics have been studied in the postcolonial world.

Religion and Postcolonial Theory

One of canonical texts of postcolonial studies, Homi Bhabha's "Signs Taken for Wonders," begins with an extended description by an Indian native missionary of the effects of distributing copies of the Hindi Bible in 1817 under a tree outside Delhi. Excited by finally being able to read the words of God directly, in their own language, virtually everyone wanted a copy of the book, and soon they had formed their own party, all dressed in white, to implement its teachings. But they refused to take the sacrament, since they had read that it was eating the blood and body of Christ, and they knew that Christians ate cow flesh. They explained to the frustrated missionary that they could never become so unclean. In the same year, another missionary lamented that although everyone wanted a Bible, some saw it as a curiosity, others as a source of income, and some even used it for waste paper. As soon as the Holy Book was made accessible to them in their own language, Bhabha argues, it became "ready for a specific colonial appropriation" (Bhabha 1994, 104).

Religious movements—identified with transcendent ideas of unity, infused with

7) Virginia Thompson, an American scholar, was the first to develop this comparison in English in *French Indochina* (1937). Ralph Smith, a British scholar, speculated about Gandhi's influence in *Viet-Nam and the West* (1968, 75), in his 1970–71 article "An Introduction to Caodaism I: Origins and Early History" (1970a) and posthumously collected papers *Pre-Communist Indochina* (2009, 117). He also noted the possibility that another Indian self-sufficient community, Tagore's Santiniketan, might have been an inspiration (1968, 75).

moral authority and a search for justice, offering access to divine knowledge—have often been the focus of ideological battles, and even bloody military ones, in the colonial context. Yet postcolonial theory has paid little attention to religion, as noted in a recent history of postcolonialism: “The field is distinguished by an unmediated secularism, opposed to and consistently excluding the religions that have taken on the political identity of providing alternative value-systems to those of the west” (Young 2001, 338; see also Chakrabarty 2000).

Caodaism has often been called “the least understood of all Vietnamese movements of the 20th century” (Popkin 1979, 193; see also Wolf 1968; Smith 1970a; 1970b; Taylor 2001; Woodside 2006). Stereotyped as a “traditionalist movement,” which “rose out of the mystical depths of the Mekong Delta,” and consisted of peasants “merely waiting for the will of Heaven to change, at which point (so they were convinced) the French would disappear and all the Vietnamese would become Cao Dai or Hoa Hao” (Fitzgerald 1972, 59), it has been wrongly associated with passivity. I argue that one of the key innovations of exoteric Caodaism was its activism, its forging of new ideas of citizenship and personal purity which fused what Bhabha calls “colonial appropriation” with new organizational forms and an anti-colonial agenda.

Phạm Công Tắc was the figure most identified with fusing national aspirations and religious teachings in Vietnam. He fashioned a modernist millenarianism designed to develop a new kind of agency, giving the Vietnamese people the confidence that they could change the course of history and were, in fact, destined to do so. Drawing on the power of older prophecies that “One day, a country now in servitude will become the master teacher of all humanity” (Hương Hiếu 1968, 242), Caodai teachings identified the left eye of God (Thiên Nhân) with dynamism, progression and modernity (*duong*), upsetting Orientalist clichés and encompassing Jesus into an Asian pantheon by designating him as the son of the Jade Emperor. Born in the urban spaces of Saigon, Cholon and Gia Dinh, Caodaism became the largest mass-movement in French Indochina by building a following in the same areas as the Indochina Communist Party, and functioning at times as a political force in itself (Werner 1980). But rather than arguing (as some French observers did) that this was a “party masquerading as a religion,” I will try to place Caodaism instead within the ethnographic record of new religions that promote the emblems, narratives, and technologies of modern nation states.

Building on Phạm Công Tắc’s autobiographic reflections and writings, I present a case that links stagecraft (Phạm Công Tắc’s dramatic presentations in ritual) to statecraft (creating “Vietnam” as an autonomous religious space, “a state within a state”). This utopian project supported the struggle for independence by providing a new repertoire of concepts for imagining nation independence, and a separate apparatus of power

to try to achieve them.⁸⁾

Caodaism's formation of an alternative apparatus of power can be seen to have a kinship with other indigenous movements against occupying states, like the Native American prophet Handsome Lake, who led a Seneca millenarian group and claimed to have conversed in a trance with George Washington, speaking at Washington's house as the First President played with his dog on the veranda (Kehoe 1989). By incorporating and appropriating certain elements of the power of the colonial masters, religious leaders create a competitive model that derives its persuasive force from its capacity to both imitate and assimilate other forms of power. By including and transforming the messages of Victor Hugo and Jeanne d'Arc, the Caodai Holy See mirrored to French colonial power the imagined modern nation that its construction was to bring into being. Its master planning, its intricate administrative hierarchy is proof of this new religious movement's ability to create something new, to capture modernity in both its Asian and European aspects—its institutions, forms of knowledge, modes of power, and radiant future—by means of its likeness. The copy itself becomes an original, a new model for a new order of being.

Phạm Công Tắc's career should not, however, be taken as the prototype for all of Caodaism. Many contemporary Caodaists express ambivalence about Phạm Công Tắc's later political prominence, although they all acknowledge his importance during the formation of the new religion. As Đồng Tân (2006), one of his most stringent critics, notes "He was the main person that God used during the early years of the Great Way." But signs of schism began very early, because of what some critics have called Phạm Công Tắc's "strong personality," his efforts to establish exclusive religious authority and his efforts to use spirit messages to mobilize the masses against colonial rule.⁹⁾

One Caodai historian has argued that Phạm Công Tắc "wanted to be Richelieu to Bảo Đài's Louis 13th, serving as a religious advisor to a secular king" (Đỗ Văn Lý 1989). Others claim, even more critically, that he came to imagine himself more like Louis 16th: "Le Caodaisme, c'est moi"—eclipsing the ideal of spreading mystical enlightenment

8) See also the following works by Jérémy Jammes on this topic: "Caodaism and Its Global Networks: An Ethnological Approach of a Vietnamese Religious Movement in Vietnam, Cambodia and Overseas" (2009) and "Le Saint Siège Caodaïste de Tây Ninh et le Médium Phạm Công Tắc (1890–1959): Millénarisme, prosélytisme et oracles politiques en Cochinchine" [The Tây Ninh Holy See and the medium Phạm Công Tắc (1890–1959): Millenarianism, proselytizing and political oracles in Cochinchina] (2006a).

9) His critics within Caodaism do not deny his charismatic powers, but instead argue that his own spirit became too strong to be a vessel for God's messages. Reports of Phạm Công Tắc successfully healing patients with his hands and exorcizing evil spirits (Đồng Tân 2006, 44–46) are presented to show how he followed a mystical formula established by older religious traditions (*huyền thoại cựu giáo*) which was not consistent with the modern form of Caodaist teachings (*ibid.*, 49).

through the fold and monopolizing contact with the divine to specially trained mediums in a college of mediums designated with his own patronym (Đồng Tân 2006, 46). At the same time that some of his followers identify him as a reincarnation of Jesus (Chong 2000) or Buddha (Danny Phạm 2006), others argue that he corrupted the original intent of the Caodai Religious Constitution (which he himself received as a medium and published) and compromised the faith by tying it to political and military agendas.

Tắc's Public and Private Life: History and Autobiography

Phạm Công Tắc was born on June 21, 1893, in Binh Lap village, Chau Thanh, in Long An, where his father was working as a minor official for the colonial administration. He was the eighth of nine children, and since his father was Catholic, he was baptized as a baby, although his mother was Buddhist (Trần Mỹ-Vân 2000, 3). Phạm Công Tắc described his father as an official in the French colonial administration, who achieved a good position but “objected strongly to the authorities when they were unjust” (Sermon #18, Jan 6, 1949, 56). He was fired when Phạm Công Tắc was four years old, forcing him to work as a trader in order to support the family, “a herd of children in a very ragged nest.” As the youngest son, Phạm Công Tắc described himself as “the one who remained with the parents because the second to last must stay with family,” and the youngest child was a daughter. He remembered a childhood in which he played the peacemaker in the family, trying to persuade his older brothers and sisters not to quarrel.

He was a good student, attending Catholic schools and appearing healthy, but also prone to long, deep sleeps, sometimes accompanied by fever and strange visions. His mother was greatly disturbed by this condition and tried unsuccessfully to find a cure (Trần Mỹ-Vân 2000, 3). His father died when Phạm Công Tắc was 12 years old, and he remembered childhood fears that his mother would also die soon. At 16, he was accepted to study at the prestigious French Lycée Chasseloup Laubat in Saigon. There he became involved in nationalist student politics, and particularly the Travel to the East Movement (Phong Trào Đông Du) spearheaded by Phan Bội Châu. After the Japanese defeated the Russians in 1905, the Japanese independent path to modernity inspired a number of Vietnamese nationalist leaders, including the exiled Prince Cường Để and Phan Bội Châu, who wanted to send a new generation of students to Japan to have “both their minds and their vision transformed” (*ibid.*, 4). Phạm Công Tắc was selected to go in the fourth group, and received financial sponsorship to pursue studies in Japan to train him for eventual leadership in organizations seeking Vietnamese independence.

But French Sûreté forces caught wind of the scheme and raided its Saigon headquar-

ters, capturing documents in which Phạm Công Tắc's name was listed as a scholarship recipient. Fearing arrest, Phạm Công Tắc fled the city and went to live with his grandparents in An Hò village, Trảng Bàng district, Tây Ninh Province. He realized that his chances for study overseas were doomed because the French had signed an alliance with the Japanese, expelling Phan Bội Châu and all other Vietnamese nationalist students. In 1949, 40 years later, Phạm Công Tắc would speak with some regret of "those children of upper class families who are fortunate enough to be able to study overseas" (Sermon #24, Feb 27, 1949, 76), and that experience seems to have left a bitter taste in his mouth which developed into a strong commitment to nationalist struggle. His sermons do not, however, include any direct reference to the educational opportunities he first enjoyed and then saw cut short because of his political activism.

Expelled from his prestigious lycée, Phạm Công Tắc completed his studies in Tây Ninh and returned to Saigon to work as a waiter at the famous Continental restaurant. He met the Chief of the Customs Office who came in to order a meal and impressed him with his fluent French. In 1910, he was hired to serve as this Chief's private secretary, and began a career as a civil servant (Đồng Tân 2006, 36). He also studied traditional Vietnamese music and performed at times with the "Pathé" folk singing group.

Phạm Công Tắc was married to Nguyễn Thị Nhiều on May 30, 1911, and soon became a father. He later spoke of working from the age of 17 to support his family, eventually choosing government service because his brother-in-law advised him that there was "no honor" in working in commerce (Sermon #18). Phạm Công Tắc remembers his mother's death when he was 22, while his wife was pregnant, and says his grief at that time was relieved only by the thought that she "entered into the spiritual form of the Great Divine Mother" (Sermon #20, Jan 16, 1949, 62). Without parents, he became attached to his brother-in-law ("I loved him more than my blood brother") and his younger sister, but both of them also died within a few years. His sorrow at the loss of family members was not assuaged until he received "a touch of enlightenment" and followed the Supreme Being who "delivered a profound love to me, a love a million times more rewarding than the love of a family" (Sermon #18, 57).

Phạm Công Tắc and his wife eventually had eight children, six of them dying in childhood (Đồng Tân 2006, 36), but these personal losses of descendants are not mentioned in his sermons. Nor does he make any explicit reference to the fact that the two children who did survive were daughters, thus depriving him of any direct descendants in the Phạm line. Some commentators have implied that his creation of the "Phạm Môn" or secret medium's college (the name can be interpreted as "Buddha's gateway" or as his own family name) was in part a way of ensuring his spiritual legacy would live on, even if he did not produce any human sons (*ibid.*).

There are also suggestions that he blamed the French for his loss of sons who could carry on his descent line. Phạm Công Tắc worked for the French office of Customs and Monopolies, first posted to Saigon, then Qui Nhon, and then back in Saigon. Werner notes:

After working as a clerk for 18 years, his “penchant for spirits,” (as the comment in his Sûreté file dryly put it) and involvement in Caodaism was discovered, at which point he was abruptly transferred from Saigon to Phnom Penh, and perhaps demoted. This was evidently a hard blow since he was seeking care for a sick child in Saigon who later died (Werner 1976, 96, citing Lalaurette and Vilmont, “Le Caodaïsme” 1931, 62–63— I note the French article refers to a son, *un enfant*).

Phạm Công Tắc was transferred in 1926, and finally decided to quit his job in Phnom Penh without giving notice in 1928 to devote himself full time to his religious duties at the Holy See in Tây Ninh. His French superior described him as “intelligent but unstable.”

In Qui Nhon, Phạm Công Tắc helped establish a literary journal (*Văn Dân Thị Xã*) in the period 1915–20, publishing a number articles under the pen name Ái Dân (“He who loves the people”). In Saigon, he wrote for two other Vietnamese periodicals (*Nông Cổ Mìn Đàm* in 1907, *Lục Tinh Tân Văn* in 1908) as well as the French language *La Voix Libre* (1907) and *La Cloche Félée*, all of them critical of the colonial government. One article published in *La Cloche Félée* in 1907 was titled “Illegitimate Grandeur, Rebellion in the Lower Ranks” and appeared alongside the writings of Nguyễn Ái Quốc, the future Hồ Chí Minh (Jammes 2006b, 184). Similar critiques of colonial abuses were later found in spirit messages Phạm Công Tắc received from Victor Hugo and other French literary and historical figures.

The Birth of a Spirit Medium: Intimate Séances in Saigon

In 1925, at the age of 32, Phạm Công Tắc formed a spiritist circle with a well known poet and musician, Cao Quỳnh Cư and his nephew, Cao Hoài Sang, who also worked at the Customs office in Saigon. Initially, they were simply intrigued by the European vogue of spiritism, and interested in experimenting with it in the hopes of improving their own literary productions, finding a poetic muse among the immortals to inspire their verses. “Being poetic, and holding deep in their hearts a resentment of living in a conquered nation, the trio indulged in the pleasure of evoking spirits, tipping the table to raise questions about the country’s future and to compose and exchange poetry as a pastime,” as Hương Hiếu, Cư’s wife and the fourth person at the séances, was to recall (Hương Hiếu 1968, 6). Phạm Công Tắc was, by his own account, the most skeptical among them, since at first he held “no faith or belief at all,” and was simply curious to test the existence of the unseen world (Sermon #18, Jan 6, 1949, 2).

They used the same method as Victor Hugo in his posthumously published transcriptions of spirit séances (*Chez Victor Hugo: Les Tables Tournantes de Jersey*, 1923)¹⁰: Spirits were supposed to shake the table and cause it to rap the floor, with each successive rap indicating a letter of the alphabet. The first message, given as a poem, came from Cao Quỳnh Cư's father, who had died 27 years ago, and the second, five days later, from a local girl who had died before marrying. After confirming her identity by finding her tomb, the three spiritists adopted her as their spiritual sister. On the third session, a strange message came in the form of a riddle about hot pepper ("the more one thinks of it, the hotter it is"), and the spirit, when asked his age, began to beat the floor so violently the raps could not be counted. Phạm Công Tắc was disturbed by this response, and wanted to cut off the séance, and challenged the spirit to state where he lived. The spirit answered: "My house is a dark blue cloud, and my vehicle is a white crane. I orchestrate the Đạo through the instrument of humanity, and bless my disciples so that love may abound" (Hương Hiếu 1968, 6, translated in Bùi and Beck 2000).

These cryptic answers hinted at a higher level of philosophical discourse, however, so the three became more respectful, and followed this spirit's instructions to prepare a banquet at the time of the autumn moon (Tết Trung Thu) to welcome the Mother Goddess (Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu) and nine female immortals to dine with them. For five months, this spirit answered to the name of A Ẻ Ẻ, the first three letters of the Vietnamese alphabet. On Christmas Eve, he revealed himself to be the Jade Emperor, also known as Cao Đài, "the highest tower," who had come to found the "Great Way of the Third Universal Redemption" (Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ).

The fact that the Supreme Being chose to disguise his identity by using the first three letters of the Romanized alphabet is enormously significant, and marks a key linkage between the "print capitalism" that Benedict Anderson (1991) saw as so important to the emergence of nationalist ideas of an "imagined community," and what could be called "print spiritualism" that swept early 20th century Vietnam (McHale 2003). The transformation in the forms of literacy and mass communication due to the French conquest was seen as opening the way for a new spiritual technology which would permit contact not only with the great spirits of the Asian tradition (who dictated their messages

10) Hugo described the spirit séances as "those works willed by me to the twentieth century" (Chambers 1998, 180), which would be "probably the basis of a new religion" once they were published. The séances held on the island of Jersey for several months in 1854 were published in 1923, almost 50 years after Hugo's death, because "the spirit of Death" had advised him to space out his posthumous works so that he could "say while dying, you will awaken me in 1920, in 1940 . . . in the year 2000" (*ibid.*, 178–179). Hugo also predicted that by the time these transcripts appeared, "it will be discovered that my revelation has already been revealed" (*ibid.*, 180). Cao daists interpret these writings as prophesying the emergence of their new faith 75 years in the future.

by tracing Chinese characters in sand) but also with those of the European West (who wrote in alphabetic cursive).

Caodaism is the first revealed religion to use a Romanized version of an Asian language for its teachings (*quốc ngữ*), and its syncretistic beginnings express already, in the new form of literacy that they employ, the profound transformations of the world of the Vietnamese literati at the beginning of the 20th century. Phạm Công Tắc himself seems initially to have been more at ease in reading and writing French than Vietnamese, as the skillful versions of alexandrine verse that he penned while communicating with the spirit of Victor Hugo and other French luminaries might indicate.¹¹⁾ In the first séances, the chief medium was Cao Quỳnh Cư, who had written a number of well-known songs and was suspected by French agents of “ghostwriting” (in a very literal sense) the verses received from the spirits of the dead (Lalaurette and Vilmont 1931). Convinced by the revelations of details unknown to the participants, Phạm Công Tắc soon became “engrossed and enthralled” in the séance sessions, and learned to be a talented and receptive medium as well.

In January 1926, the Jade Emperor sternly announced to his disciples that this was not a parlor game or an idle pastime, and he would instruct them in the Đạo and in their own responsibilities. In December, he had told them to borrow a phoenix basket (*ngọc cò*), a device used for many centuries in Chinese spirit writing, in order to receive his messages more quickly. “Flying phoenix” writing, also known as *phò loan*, “serving the mythological loan bird” traditionally uses a beaked basket or winnow held by two mediums to trace Chinese characters in sand (Clart 2003; Jordan and Overmyer 1986; Lang and Ragvald 1998) and enjoyed a resurgence in the second half of the 19th century in both China and Vietnam (Kelley 2007).

Phạm Công Tắc and his companions borrowed a basket from Âu Kiệt Lâm, the founding medium of Minh Lý Đạo, and this became the primary instrument for future spirit communications. Âu Kiệt Lâm was half-Chinese, and able to read and record messages in both Chinese and Vietnamese, but Tắc and other members of his generation received their messages only in *quốc ngữ*, and—increasingly, for Tắc, in French. Employing the language of the colonial masters in order to criticize them with a technology—spiritism—that also had its origins in Europe was to become the most distinctive characteristic of

11) A 1931 Sûreté report contains this ambivalent recognition of Phạm Công Tắc’s literary skills: “He has a gift for poetry: he makes up verses in *quốc-ngữ* and in French in the style of Victor Hugo and he sometimes manages to capture the rhythm, the image, the alexandrine line of the poet. Inspired by the Great Romantic, he transmits to the Hiệp Thiên Đài messages from the beyond relayed to him by the beaked basket.” The Parisian scholar Trần Thu Dũng (1996) has published a literary analysis of Hugo’s messages received by Phạm Công Tắc.

the séances which Phạm Công Tắc was soon to lead, after the death of Cao Quỳnh Cư in April 1929.

Establishing Ties to Other Leaders: The Esoteric-Exoteric Division

On Christmas Eve, the coming of the revelation of the Third Redemption was preceded by an “introduction” by the spirit of Lý Thái Bạch, the Tang dynasty poet whose immortal poetry and heavy drinking had earned him fame in ancient China. He quickly assumed the position of a master of ceremonies of the séances, introducing others and passing on instructions from the Supreme Being, and was later to be designated as the “Invisible Pope” (*Giáo Tông Vô Vi*) of the great way. His presence was a clear “Sinicizing” of Caodai séances, which came to assume the characteristics of a younger generation of mediums educated in French language schools kneeling before the sages of Asia, and soon Europe as well, awaiting instruction and guidance. Authoritative discourse flowed down from distant centuries, but many of the instructions were practical ones about how to organize a more open, worldly and activist version of the earlier secret societies that had suffered from French repression.

The Saigon spiritists were instructed to go to visit two prominent city residents: The secular materialist Lê Văn Trung, a once successful entrepreneur known for his fondness for wine, women and opium, who had served as the only Vietnamese member of the Conseil Supérieur de l’Indochine, and the ascetic mystic Ngô Văn Chiêu, who was reported to have had a vision of the Left Eye of God (Thiên Nhãn) on the island of Phú Quốc.

Phạm Công Tắc’s animosity to those who supported French colonial rule was so intense that he later admitted that he disliked Lê Văn Trung, and was reluctant to visit his home even after being instructed to do so in a spirit séance: “Lê Văn Trung met regularly with people in the French government, the only Vietnamese able to reach such a position. . . . I could not tolerate him. I could never be a mandarin for the French powers after our country was taken away from us. So when we brought the phoenix basket to him, we were just following orders from the Supreme Being” (Trần Mỹ-Vân 2000). Lê Văn Trung was known for his hostility to religion, but he had attended a number of earlier séances where he had received messages from Lý Thái Bạch which had encouraged him to believe that he could be cured of his failing vision. Suddenly, as the phoenix basket began to move, Lê Văn Trung found that his eyesight was restored, and the Supreme Being instructed him: “Now you can see, and you should remember why you have become able to see!” Lê Văn Trung became a Cao Đài disciple immediately,

and was soon divinely appointed as a Cardinal (*Đầu Sư*) and afterwards as Interim Pope. He was also able to rid himself of his opium habit and commit to a new life of vegetarian diet and religious discipline.

Ngô Văn Chiêu was a respected scholar who had served as the District Officer on Phú Quốc and was known for his high moral standards and years of attendance at Taoist syncretist séances. Ngô Văn Chiêu told the younger spiritists about his vision, in which the Left Eye appeared in the sky at the same time as the moon, the north star and the rising sun, and showed them the altar he had constructed in his home to worship the Jade Emperor using this image. Following instructions they received at the séance with Ngô Văn Chiêu, the Saigon spiritists established a similar altar in Lê Văn Trung's home, and on the evening of Tết 1926, they received an official message from the Jade Emperor, opening up the Great Way of the Third Universal Redemption (*Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ*).

Since Ngô Văn Chiêu had received the first sign, he is still considered "the first disciple" of Cao Đài, but he quickly withdrew from efforts to organize it as a mass movement. Offered the position of Pope in a séance, he declined to accept it, seeing this offer as yet another worldly temptation which would keep him from immersing himself in the spiritual search that was most important. Instead, he retired to Cần Thơ, where he instructed a few other disciples in what came to be known as the "esoteric branch" (*phái vô vi*, also called *nội giáo tâm truyền*). He was never to write down any doctrine or teaching, and practiced only in the classic Taoist fashion, by speaking personally to a few students who then passed on his teachings only to those who observed the most stringent ascetic restrictions (complete vegetarianism, celibacy, long daily meditation sessions).

Caodaism in its exoteric branch (*phổ độ* or *ngoại giáo công truyền*) was to go completely in the opposite direction: Demonstration séances were organized to recruit thousands of new members, more relaxed rules (10 vegetarian days a month) were established for most of the disciples, and intensive proselytizing was begun to provide salvation to millions before the impending end of present world. Lê Văn Trung's conversion galvanized hundreds of others to follow suit, and soon a very large number of civil servants, notables and teachers had joined the new faith. In October 1926, Lê Văn Trung presented an official declaration, signed by 28 disciples—employees of the colonial administration, teachers and businessmen, all of them educated and several of them very wealthy—to Governor Le Fol, asking that Caodaism be formally recognized as a new religion in Cochinchina. Le Fol was courteous but non-committal, and later visited the home of Ngô Văn Chiêu to participate in a private séance to see how spiritism worked (Đồng Tân 1967). But the gesture made in this declaration was a revolutionary one: It brought together a coalition of hundreds of secret societies, which had practiced esoteric arts in the shadows and under the threat of French investigations, out into the public sphere, and claimed the

protection of the law based on French ideas of religious freedom.

While Lê Văn Trung, a respected government figure in his 60s, was the nominal head of this movement (described—wrongly—in colonial documents as its “creator”), he was upstaged in many ways by Phạm Công Tắc, whose flamboyant leadership of the spirit séances and announcement of doctrinal innovations drew increasing attention to himself. In 1931, the French colonial officer Lalaurette identified Phạm Công Tắc as “the indomitable driving force behind Caodai occultism at the Holy See and the instinctive adversary to everything that is French,” and the real behind the scenes force defining its political direction. Phạm Công Tắc was credited with “intelligence and generally wide knowledge” (and seen as more dynamic than the by then ailing Lê Văn Trung), but mocked as an “ex-petty clerk” who aspired to dress in “feudal robes.”

The first photograph that we have of the Saigon spiritists shows a group of young men and women dressed in western clothing. The mysterious spirit A ã ã instructed his disciples to dress in *áo dài* tunics for worship, but Phạm Công Tắc apparently showed up in something much more elaborate, since an early séance text has the Supreme Being chortling gently on his arrival, speaking to him in the tones that an indulgent father might well take to his rather flamboyantly dressed son: “*Laughing: Perhaps he managed to get himself that costume as an opera performer, but he is so poor. I as his Teacher do not understand*” (Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh 1972a, *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*, 36). The chatty intimacy of the conversations these young mediums had with the Jade Emperor underscores the ways in which a distant ruler of the universe was brought closer, addressed in a personal and parental role, transforming the abstract doctrines of the “Great Teachings” into a new Asian monotheism in which the ascension of the dynamic, masculine power of the Left Eye was linked to the end of the colonial era and a New Age of self-determination for formerly subjugated peoples.

Phạm Công Tắc was divinely appointed to be the Hộ Pháp, “Defender of the Faith,” a guardian figure often represented near the entrance to Buddhist pagodas. His choice of a warrior’s costume was dictated in part by this title, but influenced by his sense of dramatic performance, as suggested by a French observer:

He knows perfectly well that if he is to strike the imagination of the adherents who listen to him, he must comport himself in imposing mandarin dress, so he has chosen a costume from the tradition of Sino-Annamite theater, the costume worn by a conquering general. He even wears the sword, and there he is, primed mentally and physically to play a role in the new religion: the Hộ Pháp, Grand Master of Rites and of Justice and Chief of the Corps of Mediums! (Lalaurette and Vilmont 1931)

The costumes of each Caodai dignitary and the duties of her or his office, are specified in the *Pháp Chánh Truyền*, which Phạm Công Tắc compiled, translated and published as

the Caodai Religious Constitution. This document is composed of a series of séance messages received at the inauguration ceremony held at the Gò Kén Pagoda in Tây Ninh province in 1926. The divine text is supplemented by explanations and commentaries by the Hộ Pháp, which record not only the instructions he received, but also—amazingly—his own reservations and occasional efforts at insubordination. From this document, it is very clear that instead of simply serving as the vehicle for spirit writing, Phạm Công Tắc became a direct interlocutor in these conversations. For this reason, his influence upon the divine charter of the faith is much greater than that of Lê Văn Trung or any other of the founding disciples.

In a section that would soon become the focus of controversy, the Hộ Pháp asks his divine interlocutor to explain the role of the Pope as the “elder brother” (*anh cả*) :

“According to the teachings of Catholicism, the Pope has full power on the bodies and the spirits. Because of this extensive power, Catholicism has much material influence. If today, you remove part of the power on the spirits, I fear that the Pope would not have enough authority in guiding humanity to conversion.” His Master answers, smiling: “That was mistake on my part. When I carried a physical body, I gave to an incarnated person the same authority on the spirits as myself. He climbed on my throne, took over the supreme powers, abused them and rendered man slave of his own body. Moreover, I did not realize that the precious powers I gave you because I loved you represented a knife with double edges that encouraged you to generate disorder among yourselves. Today, I am not coming to take these powers back but rather to destroy their deleterious effects. . . . The best way is to divide those powers so as to prevent dictatorship. . . . Once these powers belong to the hands of one, man escapes only rarely from oppression.” (Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh 1972c, *Pháp Chánh Truyền*, Bùi trans. 2002, 17)

Phạm Công Tắc, a young man baptized and raised in the Catholic Church, argues for a centralized Pope, who could provide effective leadership, and he is told that the errors made in designing the Catholic hierarchy need to be rectified by a more clearly defined separation of powers, in a complexly structured spiritual bureaucracy.

In a later section, Phạm Công Tắc challenges his interlocutor, who had decreed that Caodaism would establish equal rights for female and male dignitaries, by asking why, if this was the case, women were not able to become Censor Cardinals (*Chưởng Pháp*) or Pope (*Giáo Tông*). The Supreme Being answers: “Heaven and Earth possess two constitutive elements, yin and yang (*âm-dương*). If yang dominates, everything lives, if the yin rules, everything dies. . . . If a day came when the yang disappeared and the yin reigned, the universe would fall into decay and be destroyed. . . . If I allow the female college to hold the power of Pope in its hands, I will be sanctioning the triumph of yin over yang, so that the holy doctrine will be brought to nothing” (*ibid.*, 119). Even after this strict correction, the Hộ Pháp presses once again for an explanation for an apparent

inconsistency in the doctrine of sexual equality, and the divine master answers angrily “The Law of heaven is thus set down,” closing off discussion and leaving the séance abruptly.

Both of these passages suggest that Phạm Công Tắc wished to introduce a number of European influenced ideas (a centralized ecclesiastical hierarchy, women’s rights) into a more traditional Confucian spiritual bureaucracy headed by Lý Thái Bạch as the “great immortal” (Đại Tiên) administering a complex administrative apparatus. The young man in his 30s who wanted to train in Japan as a soldier for the revolution is told in no uncertain terms that he must learn patience and incorporate a more nuanced and gradualist perspective on changing the world. But, as events soon showed, schisms and defections soon placed Phạm Công Tắc in a position to bypass the counsel he received from the ancient Chinese masters and seek further advice from French writers and heroines who would support his innovations.

Schisms and Sanctions: The Road to the Eighth Decree

The three-day festival held to inaugurate the “Great Way” in 1926 eventually stretched on, in Caodai legend, to almost three months, and attracted a huge number of pilgrims, on lookers and new converts, including the visits of thousands of Cambodians who crossed the border to kneel in front of a huge statue of Buddha-Sakyamuni on a white horse. Almost immediately, government sanctions were imposed to limit its expansion, with French colonial officers denying permits for the construction of new temples, and the Cambodian king calling back his subjects amidst rumors that a new religious leader might try to usurp his power. Some French analysts noted with concern that this kind of popular messianism had the potential to produce “another Gandhi”¹²⁾ (since M. K. Gandhi at that time had captured the leadership of the Congress Party by allying Hindus with Muslims on a platform fusing religious and nationalist ideals). Others linked Caodaism to the religious and political agitators responsible for armed insurrection, calling it “communism masquerading as a religion” (Thompson 1937, 474).

The brief, inspirational unification of a number of disparate groups began to fragment by the early 1930s, when Lê Văn Trung assumed the papacy and claimed a million disciples. Several charismatic leaders from the Mekong Delta, almost all of whom had been involved in the clandestine Minh Sư secret societies, eventually returned to their home

12) This concern is expressed in *Rapports mensuels du résident de Tây Ninh, 1929–33*, Box 65553, 7F68, Centre D’Archives d’Outre Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France.

territory rather than accepting to remain as Cardinals at the “Vatican” in Tây Ninh. The first of these was Nguyễn Văn Ca, who became the Pope of the dissident branch of Minh Chơn Lý in Mỹ Tho. The most serious rift involved the defection of Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, the District Chief (*đốc phủ sứ*) of Cần Giuộc, and Lê Bá Trang, a Chợ Lớn official, since Nguyễn Ngọc Tương had been suggested as a possible successor to Lê Văn Trung. Phạm Công Tắc accused them of being a “Francophiles” and failing to stand up to colonial restrictions on the expansion of Caodaism, and Lê Bá Trang filed a complaint against Lê Văn Trung at the French tribunal. Lê Văn Trung agreed to step down momentarily, citing his failing health, and designated four others—Phạm Công Tắc, Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, Lê Bá Trang and the female cardinal Lâm Thị Thanh as his replacements. Sanctions imposed by the French government increased, and in 1934 the “Interim Pope” himself was imprisoned by the French on charges of fiscal irregularities, and protested by furiously returning his Legion d’Honneur medal. Shortly after he was released, Lê Văn Trung fell ill and died, on the very day that Nguyễn Ngọc Tương and Lê Bá Trang had convened a conference to “reform the religion.” When Nguyễn Ngọc Tương and Lê Bá Trang tried to return to attend the funeral, they were not allowed to enter the Holy See, and were left standing in the rain with the message that Lê Văn Trung did not want them to see his face.

Lê Văn Trung had declared before he died that Phạm Công Tắc was the only one he designated to assume his authority as the leader of the faith, even if Phạm Công Tắc, as the divinely appointed Hộ Pháp, could not actually assume the position of Pope. Tương and Trang eventually formed the second largest branch of Caodaism, “the Reformed Religion” (Ban Chính Đạo), and in 1935 a council of dignitaries remaining in Tây Ninh proclaimed Phạm Công Tắc the “Superior” of the “mother church of Caodaism,” although his religious title as the Spirit Medium heading the mystical, “legislative branch” remained unchanged.

How could a religion founded on the separation of the “executive” branch (*Cửu Trùng Đài*) and the “legislative” branch (*Hiệp Thiên Đài*) be administered by a single person? The answer is presented by Phạm Công Tắc in a cleverly constructed commentary to the Religious Constitution, in which exegesis of the symbolism of the Hộ Pháp’s costume is used to “demonstrate” that this fusion of different branches was pre-ordained by the divine decrees issued in 1926. At the largest religious ceremonies, the Hộ Pháp wears elaborate golden armor with a trident “Three Mountain” (*Tam Sơn*) headdress as he sits on his throne in front of the *khí* (breath, energy) character. His left hand grasps the “Rule over Evil” staff, intended to exorcise demons, while the right cradles the beads of compassion. The explanation for this reads: “This means that the Hộ Pháp holds the power over both spiritual and temporal affairs” (Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh 1972c, *Pháp Chánh Truyền*,

Bùi trans. 2002, 190–191). Using the rhetorical strategy of explaining the arcane symbolism of his dress, Phạm Công Tắc argues against his critics within Caodaism who protested that he has “monopolized” the powers that should have been divided. His sacramental dress establishes his spiritual mandate, and presents a visual confirmation of his powers to all who might challenge him.¹³⁾

Visual statements are often more subtle and nuanced than verbal ones. In later years, the Hộ Pháp chose to make most of his public appearances in simpler yellow silk robes, without the elaborate coverings or general’s insignia that he wore so often in the early years of the religion. The “spiritual warrior” who wielded a sword as well as a pen at the age of 32 came to present himself as a “poor monk” (*Bần Đạo*) in his 50s and 60s, becoming more humble and self-ironic as he ascended to a position of greater temporal power. The martial dress of his early years, redolent of stereotypes of Oriental despots, feudal lords and medieval fiefdoms, was, however, to continue to haunt his public image, and to make it all the more difficult for him to convince a European (and later American) public that he was really a prophet of peace and non-violence.

No other Caodaist leader, not even the most respected spirit mediums of other branches, has ever worn a costume close to that of Phạm Công Tắc. The second most famous Caodai medium of the 1920s and 1930s, Liên Hoa, who received the messages contained in the “Great Cycle of Esoterism” (*Đại Thừa Chơn Giáo*) followed a more conventional Sino-Vietnamese model. Liên Hoa’s own voice is never heard in the messages themselves. He “ventriloquizes” the words of great religious teachers, including figures like Buddha, Lao Tzu and Confucius who do not speak directly in the Tây Ninh séances organized by Phạm Công Tắc. Liên Hoa himself dressed either in the severe black robes of the Minh Lý Đạo, a small temple in Saigon where he often retreated to meditate, or in the pure white used by mediums in the central Vietnamese group (Truyền Giáo Trung Việt). The texts in this esoteric “Bible” are a series of moral instructions, in the Chinese tradition of ethical teachings (Clart 2003; Jordan and Overmyer 1986; Kelley 2007), which are sprinkled with Taoist aphorisms “The Cao Đài which is not Cao Đài is

13) On May 30, 1948, during the period that the Hộ Pháp was delivering his sermons in Tây Ninh, a séance was held in which the Invisible Pope Lý Đại Tiên clarified his position further by designating him as “Hộ Pháp Chương Quân Nhị Hữu Hình Đài”—“the Defender of the Faith who has supreme powers over both visible palaces,” meaning the Hiệp Thiên Đài (Palace to Unite with Heaven, or Legislative/Spirit Medium Section) and the Cửu Trung Đài (Palace of the Nine Spheres or the Executive Section). This message also contains the line “Nhị kiếp Tây Âu cảm mây tạo,” which can be translated “In a previous life, he spread this message in the west.” Some interpret this as evidence that Phạm Công Tắc was a reincarnation of Jesus Christ, but it is in fact rather vague about which “Western” person Phạm Công Tắc has reincarnated (recorded in the unofficial selection of spirit messages (*Thánh Ngôn Sư Tập*, 3/4, 72, published by the Great Temple at Tây Ninh (Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh 1972d))).

the real Cao Đài,” like Lao Tzu’s “The Way which is not the way is the real way,” and doomsday prophecies.

For several years, Caodaism as a religion of unity was in a state of crisis. In 1930, the Tây Ninh Holy See issued a series of decrees to establish doctrinal conformity. Séances could not be held outside of the sanctified space of the Cung Đạo at the Holy See, and dignitaries and adepts had no right to challenge canonical scriptures. Some time later, in response to defections and new branches, Phạm Công Tắc issued the “Eighth Decree,” which excommunicated schismatic groups and treated them as apostates. Co-signed in a séance by the “Invisible Pope” Lý Đại Tiên, this document has proved to be the greatest obstacle to many decades of efforts to re-unify the various branches of Caodaism. Members of many smaller groups have pledged to try to achieve a new unity, but they have failed to draw Tây Ninh leaders to their meetings in any official capacity, Phạm Công Tắc’s position, which cast a great shadow over his successors, has been that the “mother church awaits the return of her errant children,” but the “children” cannot start re-uniting themselves.

Phạm Công Tắc’s sermons speak of three times in his life when he was in deep despair: when close family members died during his youth, when he was arrested and exiled by the French (1940–46), and “when the Đạo was in a state of emergency and about to fall” (Sermon #18, Jan 6, 1949, 58). His focus is on how he “offered his life for this religion” and received “solace” in return, but it is no doubt significant that he refers only to internal strife and exile as causes for great distress, and so moves the emphasis away from his extensive role in national politics.

Phạm Công Tắc proved to be a very capable and careful administrator, who rebuilt the religious hierarchy in Tây Ninh (drawing on some of his own loyal mediums in the Phạm Môn) at the same time that he constructed the largest and most impressive indigenous religious structure in Vietnam. Although French critics described him as very emotional (“He gets impassioned easily, his words, his bearing give the appearance of someone in a trance”), he saw himself as a modernizer and a reformer, who sought first to heal the wounds of colonialism through persuasion and compromise. While he was described in 1931 as a figure from the past (“In his daily contact with his co-religionists, he looks like the old sorcerer/magician of the secret societies of long ago and his hold on them has taken on the allure of former times,” Lalaurette and Vilmont 1931), by 1935 the new Governor of Cochinchina Pagès conceded that Caodaism was not a relic of another era, but “the transposition onto a modern world of ancient belief systems” (Blagov 2001, 32). For a few years, first under the new Governor-General Robin and then under the leftist Front Populaire government, Caodaism was allowed to flourish.

Dialogues with European Spirits: Victor Hugo and Spiritual Kinship

Caodaism's reputation for syncretism and borrowings from European tradition is almost entirely a result of the legacy of Phạm Công Tắc, as none of the other branches aspired to the same "international" profile or received as much moral and religious instruction from non-Asian figures. Clifford Geertz described it as a "*syncretisme à l'outrance*," whose excessive, almost transgressive mixing of East and West in dramatic configurations attracted much attention and ridicule from foreign observers (personal communication). Victor Hugo and Jeanne d'Arc, the most famous "European saints" in Caodaism, were both spirits who initially conversed only with Phạm Công Tắc, refusing to "come down" to a séance if he were not there as a medium to "receive" them.¹⁴⁾

Victor Hugo was by far the most widely read writer in colonial Indochina, popular among the Vietnamese as well as the French, and strongly identified as a defender of the oppressed and a critic of surveillance and imprisonment. Hugo's mystical poems and his practice of spiritism inspired a sense of recognition among his young readers in Saigon, who saw him as revealing the intersection of eastern and western traditions. Hugo had "oceanic" visions of Asian wisdom spreading to Europe, and toyed with vegetarianism and ideas of reincarnation in his verses, without ever forming a coherent or systematic belief based on these connections.

The inclusion of Western historical and literary figures in the Caodai pantheon is far from a glorification of Occidental culture. On the contrary, it honors a few brave souls while sounding the death knells for western imperial rule. So Victor Hugo, the great enemy of Napoleon the Third during his lifetime, speaks in séances to condemn the conquest of Indochina and the "tyranny of potentates." Jeanne d'Arc, a village girl who heard voices that told her to rise up against an occupying army, says that "an oppressed people once raised to consciousness will prove impossible to defeat." Shakespeare, although praised for having inspired an empire "without borders or truces" (*sans arrêt et sans trêve*), is also informed that the glory days of British Asia are over, and after a great war the godless colonial administration will "march into an abyss" (*marche vers le gouffre*) and perish as well (Trần Quang Vinh 1962, 58, 90, 108).

Victor Hugo is controversial in Caodaism today not because of his writings, which

14) When Phạm Công Tắc was imprisoned in Madagascar, Trần Quang Vinh received a short message from Victor Hugo at an unofficial séance in Căn Cứ on October 19, 1944, telling him to be careful but persist in his efforts (Trần Quang Vinh 1972, 164). After the Hộ Pháp returned, the divine sanction for the creation of the Caodai Army was confirmed in an official séance in the Cung Đạo Tòa Thánh on April 9, 1948 by messages from the Invisible Pope Lý Thái Bạch and Lê Văn Trung, with the Hộ Pháp as chief medium (*ibid.*, 187–189).

are still widely admired by an older generation of Vietnamese intellectuals, but because of the messages attributed to him in which he supports Phạm Công Tắc's struggles with his critics: "You are blessed, in your capacity as medium. . . . Even if terrestrial spirits are unfaithful to you, the gates of Paradise will applaud your actions" (*ibid.*, 85–86). Phạm Công Tắc's assumption of the leadership of Tây Ninh is also defended by the spirit of La Fontaine, the French fabulist whose story of the hardworking black ant is used to criticize the "lazy yellow ants" who want to assume hierarchical positions based on the seniority and rank they had in the French colonial administration. The "younger brothers" of the College of Spirit Mediums (Hiệp Thiên Đài) are said to prevail "from hard work and intelligence," while their elders are swollen "with pride that will soon prove fatal" (*ibid.*, 75).

In Chinese traditions, mediums are often "adopted" by the spirits they converse with, who make them part of an invisible family.¹⁵ But while Victor Hugo spoke to Phạm Công Tắc in the affectionate tones of an avuncular schoolmaster, two other adepts in Phnom Penh were designated in séances as his spiritual sons: Đặng Trung Chử as his older son Charles and Trần Quang Vinh as his younger son François. This spiritual kinship was announced in December 1931, when Trần Quang Vinh returned from spending several months in France, helping to mount the Exposition Coloniale Internationale in Paris for his employer, the Musée Sarraute of Indochinese Art. It was revealed that Hugo, as the Spiritual Head of the Caodai Overseas Mission, had sent Trần Quang Vinh on a religious mission to seek political support for the new religion, and form a circle of 15 French Caodaists practicing in the metropole. Both of Hugo's spiritual sons eventually rose to become archbishops (Phối Sư) in the administrative hierarchy.

It is interesting to explore the ramifications of these different forms of defining spiritual kinship within Caodaism. In his sermons, Phạm Công Tắc notes the Taoist and Buddhist traditions identify spiritual teachers as "schoolmasters" (*thầy*), while the Christian one instructs its adherents to address God as "father." In Sermon #17 (Dec 26, 1948), the Hộ Pháp asks his advisor Victor Hugo ("Chưởng Đạo") "So why is it that the Supreme Being called himself Master?" He is answered with a poem: "As a Father I look after my children with love and diligence, As a Master I welcome them into My Divinity" (Sermon #17, 53). The intimate, affectionate dialogues that Phạm Công Tắc (as a medium) receives and re-enacts for Trần Quang Vinh and Đặng Trung Chử are not

15) In Chinese spirit medium practices, the medium is called the *tang-ki* (equivalent to the Vietnamese *dòng tử*), literally meaning "young medium," but his intimate connection to the god which possesses him is expressed by calling him the "ritually adopted child of the deity" (Seaman 1980, 67). His birth parents give up their child to the service of the gods, and the medium must learn to behave as "someone who has the high reputation of his divine father to consider" (*ibid.*, 68).

extended to himself. Hugo's spiritual sons are considered to be reincarnations of his French sons, and like Hugo's French sons they grew up to be writers and revolutionaries, people who penned poetry and manned the ramparts of anti-imperial resistance. Like Hugo's French son François, who transcribed his father's séances and later translated Shakespeare, Hugo's Vietnamese son Trần Quang Vinh transcribed spirit séances, edited Hugo's posthumous verses in a collection published in 1960, translated them into Vietnamese from the original French, and celebrated the 167th anniversary of Hugo's birth May 22, 1937 with the consecration of a temple in Phnom Penh containing a portrait of his spiritual father.¹⁶⁾ In his autobiography, Trần Quang Vinh notes that he received the news of this designation as marking him out for a special spiritual destiny that he could not refuse (Trần Quang Vinh 1972). Following a worldly path, Trần Quang Vinh later became the founder of the Caodai Army in 1945 and Defense Minister of South Vietnam in 1950.

The Hộ Pháp, in contrast, saw his own destiny as leading in a more ethereal direction, one more on the same plane as the divinities. His vow of celibacy is not explicitly discussed in his sermons, but its necessity for purifying the body and preparing it to receive spirit messages is acknowledged, and he had no more children after he received this divine appointment. A human being, the Hộ Pháp notes in his sermons, is "an angel riding upon an animal" (Sermon #21, Feb 9, 1949, 65). Spiritual aspirations towards self cultivation and self-illuminated reflect "the desire to leave our animal self in order to transform into a Buddha" (Sermon #21, 67), so that "the method of our spirit is to struggle to defeat the material" (Sermon #22, Feb 15, 1949, 69), since "true happiness is not corporeal, it is spiritual" (Sermon #22, 69), not transitory (or physical) but enduring.

In a sermon delivered in 1949 on the anniversary of Hugo's death, Phạm Công Tắc revealed that Victor Hugo himself emerged from the spiritual lineage of Nguyễn Du. In this way, Hugo is "indigenized" and tied to a Vietnamese literary giant, while Du becomes more "cosmopolitan" and finds his own genius plotted on a map with French coordinates. This twist came at a political moment when efforts to renew the social contract and heal

16) Victor Hugo's sons by birth both died well before he did. Charles (reincarnated as Đặng Trung Chử, made archbishop in 1946), who served as the chief medium at the séances in Jersey, died at the age of 44 of a heart attack followed by a massive hemorrhage caused by obesity, over-indulgence and long winter nights spent manning the guns on the ramparts of Paris during political uprisings (Robb 1997, 462). He and his brother François had been imprisoned in the Conciergerie in 1851, when the prison had become "an informal socialist university" where Victor Hugo prophesied a revolution which would lead to the "United States of Europe" (*ibid.*, 290). François, the younger son (reincarnated as Trần Quang Vinh), translated Shakespeare into French and defended the 1848 uprising, finally dying of tuberculosis two years later (*ibid.*, 490). While both had relatively short lives, they were filled with political turmoil, literary aspirations and spiritual longings.

the wounds of colonialism ceded to a post-World War II realization of the inevitability of decolonization. It also marked a change in the perspective of Phạm Công Tắc himself, who once sat as a student reading the works of the French humanists, but later saw their insights as dwarfed by a more encompassing Asian religious vision. Absorbing Hugo into a new position as the “younger brother” or more recent incarnation of Nguyễn Du can only be read as an attempt to disprove the civilizing role attributed to colonialism.

Using Orientalism against Empire: Theology as Political and Cultural Critique

When the American scholar Virginia Thompson visited French Indochina in the 1930s, she found Caodaism to be “the one constructive indigenous movement among the Annamites” (1937, 475) and was particularly full of praise for what the Hộ Pháp had done with Tây Ninh, building schools, printing presses and weaver’s looms with a “Gandhiesque flavor about creating a community which is self-sufficient” (*ibid.*, 474). Both Gandhi and Phạm Công Tắc foregrounded cultural nationalism as a major strategy of anti-colonial resistance. The notion of a return to pure, indigenous traditions with emphasis on certain forms of moral and ethical strength, was important in preparing people to resist an apparently overwhelming colonial power. Influenced by Social Darwinism, Gandhi argued that Indians had brought on the degeneracy of India by their own moral faults and complicity by following foreign consumer fashions. Phạm Công Tắc drew on an earlier tradition of prophecies that the Vietnamese brought colonialism on themselves as a punishment for their sins, but had now paid their karmic debts and would be rewarded for their suffering under the colonial yoke by becoming the “spiritual masters of mankind.”

Paul Mus, in trying to explain why the “mysticism” of the Caodaists tended to detach itself from the colonial project, argued that the French misunderstood the religious content of Vietnamese supernaturalism: “We mistook divinatory magic for instrumental magic” (1952, 292). Diviners in the East Asian tradition seek to discern cosmic patterns rather than to change them through some sort of supernatural agency. So the philosophical and religious ideas of the great teachers were used to *diagnose* the Western malaise rather than to act directly against it. Mus explains: “Human ideas, and the means and efforts that they are part of, are nothing if they do not translate an idea of cosmic harmony, celestial order which is strong enough to make them successful. Assistance must fall from the sky and come out of the land. To build a religious restoration of a mystical Vietnam, rooted in the popular beliefs of the masses still steeped in the past, it is necessary first to prove that this is efficacious” (*ibid.*, 292–293). He was critical of

French efforts to “prove” their superior power with technology, which were, as his students like Francis Fitzgerald have later added, even more accentuated by American military forces (Fitzgerald 1972).

In arguing that Vietnamese “patriotism, like their religion, is divinatory” (Mus 1952, 293) Mus argued that it was linked to efforts to discern the wider elements at work in the universe. Defending the land of their ancestors from foreign intrusions came to appear as a spiritual mission. Since ancestor worship is “the only religion without skeptics,” Mus argues that airplanes are powerless against guerilla warriors defending their native soil, who believe that their own ancestors empower them by remaining within the bodies of their descendants and being visualized at each incense offering in front of the family altar.

But he failed to take into account the innovations in Vietnamese patriotism introduced by Phạm Công Tắc’s exoteric Caodaism. The Hộ Pháp established a more instrumental form of séance, which sought not only to understand the world but (in Marx’s words) also to change it. At the same time that these religious teachings were rooted in tradition and presented themselves as revivals, they introduced a different system of weighting cultural strains and placed many practices of the cultural periphery back in the center. The central doctrine of Caodaism was the millenarian claim that the end of the Age of Empire was also the end of a cosmic cycle, and it would be the formerly colonized peoples (and especially the Vietnamese) who would emerge as the new spiritual leaders of the world. Drawing on the “recessive elements of Christianity” which were also important in Gandhi’s message (Nandy 2005, 74), they argued that the meek would not only inherit the earth but they could use a sense of the moral supremacy of the oppressed as one of their most important weapons.

Far from being a “cargo cult” which worshipped the sources of foreign power and wealth and praised them, Caodaist doctrines preached that resistance to colonial ideology and material practices would allow the Vietnamese to detach themselves and experience a rebirth in which they could reincarnate East Asian cultural values restored to their pristine state. Gandhi had been quick to see that Theosophy, and an idealized notion of the spiritual values of the East, could have great political potential, and he used that potential both by allying himself with Annie Besant’s Home Rule for India League and by focusing not so much on colonialism itself as on the moral and cultural superiority of Indian civilization. Phạm Công Tắc also appropriated what we could anachronistically call “counter culture discourses” from “Annamophiles” in French spiritist and Theosophy circles, and mounted a concerted long distance public relations campaign to force the French to permit the expansion of Caodaism.

Phạm Công Tắc used his facility in French and his wish to draw on the colonial

arsenal to chart a pathway in which a westernized young man full of anti-colonial sentiment is gradually instructed by the spirits in Asian verities, and moves from being the “hand” or the “pen” of the gods to becoming their conversation partner and even—in his later visions—an active combatant, driving out demonic forces.¹⁷ The older, more mature Phạm Công Tắc no longer gets lessons from the French literary figures he studied in colonial schools. He no longer seeks to reform to colonialism by reconciling the ideals of the French enlightenment with the actions of narrow-minded administrators. Instead, he inserts himself into his own journey to the east, moving away from a nativist search for heritage to a more cosmopolitan vision of a syncretic, unifying faith.

Paul Mus described Caodaism as a “religion of reversal” (*religion de remplacement*) in which the colonial subjects would come to replace their masters: “In trying to revive

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- 17) Phạm Công Tắc’s sermons culminate with a narrative of his voyages to the upperworld, traveling in a plane-like “dharma vehicle” which moves from cloud to cloud, where he encounters Lucifer (Kim Quang Sú), described as a “great Immortal” who is “almost at the level of a Buddha” but was frustrated because his immense ambitions and striving for personal power undermined his sanctity. Phạm Công Tắc’s exegesis directs us to read this passage as a comment on his own struggles to maintain control of Caodaism. At the time of the inauguration of the Great Way of the Third Age of Redemption, Lucifer was also granted an “amnesty” (the possibility of redemption) and the gates of hell were formally closed. So Lucifer was present when the first temple was erected at Gò Kén, and “he attended the first séances, held the beaked phoenix basket and signed his name” (Sermon #33, Apr 19, 1949, 115), but he has always been a force of divisiveness, leaving behind a poem at the time when “we had no bad intentions against each other; there was not even a whisper of rebellion” (Sermon #33, 114), and suggesting an ultimatum:

All nine immortals fear my face
I may bow to Sakyamuni, but chaos thunders in my wake
You see how I’m received at that Palace of Jade
But will truth or heresy usher you into the Pure Land? (Sermon #33, 114)

The Supreme God allowed Lucifer to “carry out over 20 years, trick after scheming trick” (Sermon #33, 115) because human beings had to exercise their free will, they had to choose the Tao over alternatives. Lucifer’s temptations provided the field upon which virtuous conduct would be a conscious choice rather than a simple reflex. At the gates to Paradise, Lê Văn Trung fights Lucifer off with a stick, but each time he strikes, the blow only divides his enemy into two. Aided by another Caodai dignitary, he leads a great battle, which the Hộ Pháp himself is finally forced to join. He puts on his golden armor, takes up his golden whip and his exorcist’s staff, and casts his whip like a giant net to isolate his enemy and finally drive him off, vaporizing him into an aura (Sermon #33, 117).

Inscribing himself as the hero in a *Journey to the West*-like epic, Phạm Công Tắc in this passage moves out of his habitual role as Tripitaka (Tam Tạng, “This is why I pray to the Supreme Being as Tripitaka did on his journeys to India seeking Buddhist scriptures” Sermon #28, Mar 21, 1949, 92), the bearer of scripture for a new faith, and acts much more like the Monkey Saint (Tê Thiên Đại Thánh), jumping into the fray. Intriguingly, several recent scholars (Seaman 1986, 488; Yu 1983) have speculated that popular Chinese religious accounts of supernatural voyages (*Tây Du Ký*, *Bắc Du Ký*) may themselves have developed out of spirit writing séances, in which the medium was—as we see in this passage—“playing all the parts” or at least narrating them for his audience.

a Vietnamese empire, these theocratic sects do not only go beyond our ideas, they annihilate them" (Mus 1952, 248). He argued, on that basis, that their vision of change was in many ways more radical than that of the communists, who "remain within the lines of our own worldview": "The more 'conservative' anti-colonial forces, and especially those with a mystical bent, may fight with us against communism, but they see our own cultural influence as similar to that of the communists, who are the ungrateful heirs of western materialism" (*ibid.*, 249).

While Phạm Công Tắc (like Gandhi) was usually seen as preaching a "counter-modernity," and spoke of restoring traditional values, it is also true that "his counter-modernity proved to be the most modern of all those of anti-colonial activists" (Young 2001, 334). In the final decade of his life, the Hộ Pháp began to operate in a media war, using the society of spectacle as his secret weapon. He gave a series of press conferences, met with foreign reporters, traveled to Geneva and to Japan, Taiwan and Hanoi as a "spirit medium diplomat," desperately opposing partition.

Bernard Fall visited Phạm Công Tắc in August 1953 to ask for his perspective on the decolonization process. The Caodist leader impressed him deeply, as noted in a letter to his wife not published until recently: "The man had a piercing intelligence and his approach to things is very realistic. I learned more about Indochina than I'd learned before in three and half months. To think that he was sitting there with me telling me about the need for French help after he'd spent five years in French banishment in Madagascar. The man was fascinating and I can see why two million people think he's the next thing to God himself—and that includes a lot of educated Europeans" (Dorothy Fall 2004, 77–78). Fall famously described Phạm Công Tắc as "the shrewdest Vietnamese politician," but remained skeptical about whether he could use his religious base to reconcile the increasingly polarized forces of what became the DRV and RVN (Bernard Fall 1955, 249, republished in 1966, 148).

In 1953–54, Phạm Công Tắc gave a series of press conferences praising both Bảo Đại and Hồ Chí Minh and calling for national union. When the French were defeated at Điện Biên Phủ in 1954, he called for a reconciliation of the southern nationalists with the northern communists. Phạm Công Tắc believed that his religion of unity would provide the ideal setting for negotiations to bring Vietnam's different political groups together, and he hoped for French and American backing for this to proceed. He attended the Geneva Conventions and tried to work behind the scenes to convince others, but this proposal was doomed to defeat when the French and Việt Minh agreed to the "temporary measure" of a partition at the 17th parallel.

Phạm Công Tắc and many other Caodaists had been willing to work with Bảo Đại, but as Ngô Đình Diệm moved to consolidate his own power with US backing, the non-

aligned nationalists were forcibly dissolved. In October 1955, Ngô Đình Diệm ordered Caodai General Phương to invade the Holy See and strip Phạm Công Tắc of all his temporal powers. Three hundred of his papal guardsmen were disarmed and Phạm Công Tắc became a virtual prisoner of his own troops. On February 19, 1956, Phạm Công Tắc's daughters and a number of other religious leaders were arrested, but he himself managed to slip away. He made contact with his followers several weeks later from Phnom Penh, and lived out the last three years of his life in exile in Cambodia.

The non-violence that Phạm Công Tắc consistently preached in his final years and his much-touted concept of "peaceful coexistence" (*hòa bình chung sống*) never had, of course, the purity of Gandhi's doctrine of passive resistance. Although he did not know about the formation of the Caodai Army during his over five years of exile in French colonial prisons in Madagascar and the Comores Islands, Phạm Công Tắc's acceptance of the militarization of Caodaism is, for other Caodaists as well as for many outsiders, the most controversial aspect of his career. The Hộ Pháp called the Caodai militia "the fire inside the heart which may burn and destroy it" (*tâm nuôi hỏa*) (Bùi and Beck 2000, 85) and immediately moved its military headquarters out of the Holy See, but he did see the political expediency of having a "defense force" to protect his followers and give him leverage in a precarious balancing act, suspended between the French and the Việt Minh.

Phạm Công Tắc insisted that Caodaism needed to remain "independent" (*độc lập*), refusing to align with either side and seeking a peaceful path through the decolonization process. Caodaists had long nourished a utopian vision of living as an autonomous community, owing deference neither to the French colonial government nor to the Việt Minh. During the period 1946–54, they came close to realizing that dream, because the French agreed to create a "state within a state," where Caodaists had their own administration, collected their own taxes, enjoyed religious freedom, and received French weapons and funding for their troops. Caodai soldiers served under their own commanders, as a peace-keeping force, but were not sent to fight the Việt Minh in the north. This created a mini-theocracy within the province of Tây Ninh, whose dramatic performance of power could be interpreted as an effort to demonstrate the nationalist dream of autonomy, even as it was made possible by the embattled French colonial administration.

A number of other Caodaists, associated with branches like Minh Chơn Lý, Minh Chơn Đạo, Ban Chính Đạo, and Tiên Thiên, joined the Việt Minh against the French. The "Franco-Caodai Pact" negotiated with the Tây Ninh Church did not provide for the release of other Caodai leaders from prison or exile, and for this reason it served to divide rather than unite the religion. Phạm Công Tắc's efforts to play the peacemaker were ultimately unsuccessful, and his praise for the principle of "peaceful co-existence" put him out of

favor with more strongly anti-communist leaders. Although Phạm Công Tắc described himself as following “the same path as Gandhi” (Sermon #20, Jan 16, 1949), even those sympathetic to his political goals found his choice of a martial idiom showed “more ego and a greater search for personal power” than the Indian independence leader.

Gandhi considered the partition of India on one level a personal failure, and Phạm Công Tắc’s final writings sound a similar note, suggesting that Caodaists, and all Vietnamese, should seek expiation for their divisiveness.¹⁸⁾ His deathbed request to King Sihanouk was that he would not be returned to Vietnam until the country was “unified, or pursuing the policy of peace and neutrality to which I gave my life.” But even as he saw many his hopes crushed, the Hộ Pháp still knew how to use man’s sense of guilt creatively: He promised his followers a moral victory by drawing on the non-martial self of the apparent victors to create doubts about their victory in them. On an ethical plane, his final words echoed Romain Rolland’s formula “Victory is always more catastrophic for the vanquishers than for the vanquished” (Nandy 2005). The suffering of the defeated can enhance their moral character and make them strong, while the triumphant celebrations of their opponents open the way for corruption and decadence.

Conclusions: A Legacy Combining Stagecraft and Statecraft

The lively debates that I witnessed about the repatriation of the Hộ Pháp’s remains in November 2006 reflect several dimensions of the mimesis among religions in the colonial and post-colonial context and the propensities of southern Vietnamese religions to both imitate and assimilate symbolically various sources of power. The precocious embrace of modernity that we see in Caodaism went further than normative colonial or even communist ideologies at the time, and was part of a “spiritual re-structuring” of the nation also evident in other Vietnamese religions (Taylor 2007). Understanding Phạm Công Tắc as a performer, drawing on various “repertoires” and fusing them into an efficacious enactment of a discourse of power, allows our analysis to come closer to that of contemporary scholars of East Asian religion, who have argued that Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are—as Caodai scriptures teach—closer to “repertoires” than to “religions,”

18) In the spirit message from Lý Đại Tiên received by the Hộ Pháp on April 9, 1948, Phạm Công Tắc is asked “not to feel hurt that the army was established in his absence,” but instead to accept it as part of a divine mechanism. He is however cautioned that his main trials lie ahead, since “this divisiveness does not help to save the world” (*mà lại đổ kị chẳng dám cứu đời*), and if the Vietnamese people do not respond to the call to religion, they cannot be saved (Trần Quang Vinh 1972, 188–189).

since their doctrines are not mutually exclusive and they are more properly understood as cultural resources from which individuals have marshaled different ideas and practices at different times (Campany 2003; 2006).

Since Caodaists formed pacts with a series of allies who failed to lead them to victory, it can be argued that Caodai leaders like Phạm Công Tắc may have perfected, perhaps a bit opportunistically, a “theology of the vanquished,” which privileges the moral authority of the oppressed and constantly defers the moment when the prophesied triumph will come. While that may be true, it is also a theology that has periodically—like the magical phoenix bird that is its central occult icon—managed to regenerate itself and regain its moral forcefulness at critical junctures. For many Tây Ninh Caodaists, the return of the Hộ Pháp’s body in November 2006 was one of those junctures, and whether this means that the Hộ Pháp’s spirit will be “pushing the wheel of karma in a new direction” (as one of his followers recently told me) remains to be seen.

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Fostering Incentive-Based Policies and Partnerships for Integrated Watershed Management in the Southeast Asian Uplands

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This paper attempts to identify the major factors associated with some of the failures and successes of integrated watershed management policies and projects with a particular emphasis on the uplands of mainland Southeast Asia. It argues that many policy measures have been misguided by failing to acknowledge the multi-dimensional facets of sustainable watershed management and putting too much emphasis on command-and-control approaches to resource management and one-size-fits-all conservation models. Attempts to introduce soil and water conservation measures, for instance, have largely failed because they concentrated merely on the technical feasibility and potential ecological effects, while neglecting economic viability and socio-cultural acceptance. The production of agricultural commodities, on the other hand, has mostly been market-driven and often induced boom and bust cycles that compromised the ecological and social dimensions of sustainability. Purely community-based approaches to watershed management, on their part, have often failed to address issues of elite capture and competing interests within and between heterogeneous uplands communities.

Drawing on a review of recent experience and on lessons from initiatives in a long-term collaborative research program in Thailand (The Uplands Program) aimed at bridging the various dimensions of sustainability in the Southeast Asian uplands, this paper discusses how a socially, institutionally and ecologically sustainable mix of agricultural production, ecosystem services and rural livelihood opportunities can be achieved through incentive-based policies and multi-stakeholder partnerships that attempt to overcome the (perceived) antagonism between conservation and development in upland watersheds of Southeast Asia.

Keywords: multi-stakeholder partnerships, sustainability, payments for environmental services, watershed protection, mountainous regions, Southeast Asia

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I Introduction

Policies and programs towards sustainable upland development and integrated watershed management in Southeast Asia have produced mixed results since concerns for upland areas¹⁾ have moved from the fringes of public interest to the center of national and international policy agendas. The mountainous regions of Thailand, Myanmar and Laos forming the Golden Triangle started to become a focus already in the late 1960s and 1970s when opium poppy cultivation was thriving and national security in these border regions topped the political agenda. The upland areas of Indonesia and the Philippines came into the international limelight following the timber boom of the 1970s and 1980s that left large areas denuded of forests and prone to environmental degradation (Li 2002). In Vietnam and Laos, upland development and conservation issues became more popular only in the late 1980s with the beginning of the *doi moi* (renovation) and *jintanakan mai* (new economic mechanism) policies of the Vietnamese and Laotian governments respectively, and the rising interest in modernizing the marginal areas of the countries associated with these policy shifts (e.g. Friederichsen and Neef 2010). Today, governments in all these countries—with the exception of Myanmar—have stepped up their efforts to protect the fragile natural resources of upland areas and to promote sustainable agricultural practices and soil and water conservation measures. In this context, “integrated watershed management” has become a major buzzword alongside the terms “participation” and “sustainability.”

In this paper I aim to identify some of the major factors associated with the many failures and few success stories of integrated watershed management policies and projects in the Southeast Asian uplands. Integrated watershed management is defined in the context of this paper as all policies and practical measures that affect upland watersheds as socio-ecological systems with human-nature and upstream-downstream interdependencies.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: Section II describes the common failures of mono-dimensional approaches to watershed management. Section III outlines three major components of a comprehensive strategy that can bridge the various dimensions of sustainability and bring the state, the market and the community together in support of integrated watershed management. These components are (1) collaborative natural resource governance, (2) payments for environmental services (PES), and (3)

1) Upland areas and their associated watersheds in Southeast Asia are defined in this paper as areas that range from 500 m above sea level to high-elevation mountains and are characterized by high ecological fragility, ethnic heterogeneity and various degrees of socio-political and economic marginalization.

rural processing and marketing networks. Drawing on the findings from a case study in northern Thailand, I argue that while none of these components alone is sufficient, the combination of all three approaches in the form of well-orchestrated multi-stakeholder partnerships has great potential to support sustainable rural livelihoods and promote sound natural resource management in the Southeast Asian uplands. Section IV discusses the results and concludes the paper.

II Mono-Dimensional Approaches to Sustainable Watershed Management

Many past development and conservation efforts in the mountains of Southeast Asia did not have a long-term impact because they tended to focus on one dimension of sustainability only (Fig. 1) rather than employing a multi-dimensional approach that considers the ecological, economic and social dimensions of sustainability. The mono-dimensional approaches often go along with a one-sided emphasis on the state (in charge of the ecological dimension), the market (covering the economic dimension) or the community (representing the social dimension).

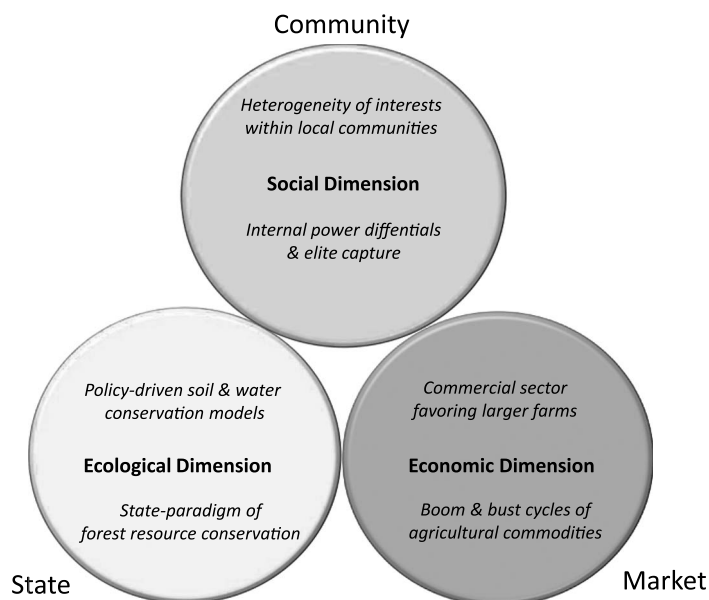


Fig. 1 The Shortcomings of Mono-dimensional Approaches to Watershed Management

II-1 *State-Driven Natural Resource Conservation: Biased towards the Ecological Dimension of Sustainability*

Forest departments in Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia manage 40%, 55% and 70% respectively of these nations' total land area (Fox *et al.* 2009). Although the failure of the state-paradigm of forest conservation has become evident, most Southeast Asian governments continue to pursue a command-and-control forest conservation policy. Communal systems of resource management have often been ignored, downgraded and undermined (e.g. Vandergeest 1996; Anan 1998; Neef *et al.* 2003; Forsyth and Walker 2008). Fuelled by the global environmental movement and local concerns about dwindling forest resources and biodiversity, the area under national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and watershed conservation zones in Thailand was expanded to more than 15% of the country's territory in 2003, exceeding the average percentage of protected areas (PA) in other Asian countries by nearly 50% (World Resources Institute 2003) and disregarding the fact that the major share of the newly declared protected areas has been inhabited for many decades by ethnic minority people. In many cases, lowland people have taken advantage of the tenure insecurity of local communities and encroached onto hillsides in order to establish large-scale plantations, appropriate land for speculation or engage in illegal logging activities (Neef *et al.* 2006). In Vietnam and Lao PDR land allocation processes have focused on increasing tenure security for individual farm households, but have largely failed to secure communal forms of forest resource management. To date, the rights of local communities in highland areas to manage forest resources have not been endorsed by law. The governments of both countries have taken measures to phase out swidden cultivation, although long-term research on composite swiddening agriculture (CSA) in the northwestern mountains of Vietnam suggests that CSA is a dynamic system appropriate for less densely populated mountainous areas, in fact causing low rates of deforestation and soil loss. It was found that CSA can actually enhance household resilience and—against all odds—helps to lift people out of poverty (Tran Duc Vien *et al.* 2006).

Efforts of government extension services and development projects to introduce soil and water conservation measures have largely failed in Southeast Asian watersheds because they concentrated on the technical feasibility and potential ecological effects of these measures, while neglecting economic viability and socio-cultural acceptance. In Thailand, 22 technologies and 14 approaches for soil and water conservation on steep slopes available for extension and implementation have been identified in the late 1990s, ranging from mechanical structures to biological methods (El-Swaify and Evans 1999). Twenty years earlier, one of the very first integrated watershed projects in northern Thailand, the Mae Sa Integrated Watershed and Forest Land Use Project supported by

UNDP and FAO, had already come up with a myriad of similar agronomic and engineering conservation measures, such as terraces, check-dams, vegetative barriers and mulching (FAO 1976). Yet, rates of adoption have remained miserably low. Demonstration plots with a variety of “sustainable conservation measures” established by the Department of Land Development in cooperation with international projects since the late 1980s in Mae Hong Son province have not convinced local farmers in the area to adopt these measures in their own fields. The Sloping Agricultural Land Technology (SALT) model developed in the Philippines has been exported to Vietnam and promoted as a “best practice” approach (Peters 2001), although its uptake by upland farmers in the Philippines has also stagnated at a very low level. Upland farmers in Vietnam cited high demand for labor and competition with other crops for land and sunlight as the main reasons for the low rate of adoption (Friederichsen 1999; Peters 2001). Today, the classical hedgerow systems of the SALT model are primarily practiced by “model farmers” and found mostly in areas where farmers received subsidies for their establishment (Thai Thi Minh 2010; Saint-Macary *et al.* 2010).

In the early 1990s several authors have already cited the major reasons why farmers do not adopt technical innovations that intend to improve ecological sustainability of upland agriculture, the most prominent among them being (1) farmers practice is equal or better than the proposed innovation, (2) the innovation is technically not feasible, (3) the innovation is too costly and too time-consuming, and (4) social, institutional and cultural factors (e.g. Fujisaka 1994). These factors, however, tend to be ignored by the agricultural research and extension systems which continue to deliver supply-driven “best practices” developed under controlled conditions that rarely stand the test in farmers’ fields.

II-2 *Focusing on the Economic Dimension of Sustainability Only: The Market-Driven Approach*

As opposed to the state-paradigm in forest protection and resource conservation, agricultural crops in the uplands of Southeast Asia have been largely left to market forces. In Thailand, for instance, price stabilization measures by the government have focused nearly exclusively on typical lowland crops, such as paddy rice and longan, while farm-gate prices for classical upland crops, i.e. cabbage, litchi and coffee, are formed by demand and supply mechanism and the negotiation power of middlemen. In Vietnam, the booming animal feed industry has become a major driving force for the introduction of high-yielding varieties of corn and the rapid expansion of corn cultivation in the northwestern uplands. Commune extension workers increasingly supplement their low salaries by working under contracts of private seed suppliers (Nguyen Duy Linh *et al.* 2006;

Friederichsen 2009), thus favoring the more commercial farmers and drawing the public extension service into the market domain, at the expense of the more marginal groups of farmers. In Lao PDR, the influence of Chinese investors has increased dramatically in recent years as exemplified by the expansion of rubber plantations on sloping land (Thongmanivong *et al.* 2009; Friederichsen and Neef 2010). Rubber is regarded by the Laotian government as a viable alternative to shifting cultivation which it vowed to eliminate by 2010. However, the short- and long-term consequences of the rubber boom on food security of the upland poor remain unclear. In Bokeo province, for instance, there are already strong indications that the more entrepreneurial ethnic minority groups, such as the Hmong—partly backed by remittances from relatives in the United States—will be the main winners of this new trend, while the food security and rural livelihoods of recently relocated forest-dwelling groups like the Khmu may be seriously compromised due to a rather slow economic adaptation and a lack of lowland paddy areas, making these groups more dependent on food crops from swidden fields (Friederichsen and Neef 2010). Rubber plantations and their adverse effect on plant biodiversity are also likely to dramatically diminish the availability of non-timber forest products, such as paper mulberry or bamboo shoots, which are important sources of food and cash income at times when food from field crops is not available and households suffer from a lack of liquidity, particularly in the dry season and the beginning of the rainy season (e.g. Neef *et al.* 2010). Ecologists have also issued warnings against the potentially negative hydrological impacts of rubber expansion (e.g. Ziegler *et al.* 2009).

The one-sided emphasis on market-driven agricultural development has induced typical boom-and-bust cycles in many upland regions of Southeast Asia. In the northern Thai highlands, for instance, opium poppy cultivation was gradually substituted by successions of coffee, corn, litchi, cabbage and—more recently—by sweet pepper, tangerine and cut-flower production. Apart from compromising the resilience of farm households towards price fluctuations and sudden market slumps, the sole focus on market forces as drivers of upland development makes attempts to establish ecologically sustainable cropping systems extremely difficult. In the northern Thai hillsides many farmers have recently switched from fruit-based agroforestry systems to erosion-prone vegetables or to pesticide-intensive production of cut-flowers which currently yield much higher prices than fresh fruits. The Free Trade Agreement for fruits and vegetables concluded between Thailand and China in October 2004 has caused an influx of temperate and subtropical fruits, such as apples and tangerines, from Southwest China which—along with the expansion of domestic fruit orchards—has drastically reduced prices for locally produced fruits (Neef *et al.* 2006). In northwestern Vietnam, plum production has been affected by a similar boom-and-bust cycle, causing many farmers to replace them by more profitable

and more flexible hybrid corn cultivation with adverse effects on soil erosion and ecological sustainability (Friederichsen and Neef 2010).

The boom-and-bust cycles are characterized by a situation where large and innovative farmers are able to adopt a new crop or a new technology first. Risk-averse smallholders, in contrast, often join the boom period too late, at a time when prices have already peaked and start to decrease due to the oversupply in the market. Thus, the major beneficiaries of the new technology are the larger producers, who are able to capture the windfall profit, while small farmers are increasingly trapped in the price squeeze: they have to spend more on input supply and labor, while suffering from already declining prices. As a consequence, their profit margins may not be sufficient to repay their loans, and they will find themselves caught in a downward spiral of indebtedness and declining incomes. This phenomenon—which has been described by some scholars as the “agricultural treadmill” (e.g. Röling 2003)—has become increasingly prevalent in the Southeast Asian uplands, particularly in areas where new technologies have gone along with high initial investments of labor and capital, such as planting of rubber trees in Laos or establishment of greenhouses in Thailand. Hence, what may be regarded as a huge success in terms of adoption of new crops and related technologies often has a differential economic and social impact on adopters. An additional flipside of the Southeast Asian crop booms has been the dramatic increase in land values and the associated rise of large-scale land acquisitions since the mid-2000s in many places (e.g. Hall 2011).

II-3 *(Over-)emphasizing the Social Dimension of Sustainability: The Community-Driven Approach*

The apparent failure of both state and market mechanisms to enhance sustainable natural resource management in the Southeast Asian uplands has stimulated movements towards community-based resource management. The major argument put forward in support of such institutional arrangements as community forestry and community-based water management is that “people who live close to a resource and whose livelihoods directly depend upon it have more interest in sustainable use and management than state authorities or distant corporations” (Li 2002, 265). The comparative advantage of communities is seen in the conservation of common-property resources, such as forest, grazing land and water that are essential for community members’ livelihoods and in the provision of social safety nets for disadvantaged members in times of crisis, e.g. natural catastrophes (cf. Scott 1976). While the *state* is regarded as an organization that forces people to adjust their resource allocations through command and control mechanisms and the *market* is seen as an institution coordinating profit-seeking individuals through competition, the *community* is described as the organization that “guides community members to volun-

tary cooperation based on close personal ties and mutual trust" (Hayami 2004, 3).

While there are numerous examples of successful community-based resource management in the Southeast Asian uplands (e.g. Prasert 1997; Tyler 2006) and scholars have described in much detail the necessary prerequisites for collective action in support of resource conservation (e.g. Ostrom 1990; 2001; Agrawal 2001), critics have warned the advocates of purely community-based natural resource management of being overly naïve about human nature and about existing power relations within local communities. Guijt and Shah (1998, 1) state that the "mythical notion of community cohesion" continues to permeate many development and natural resource management projects that try to follow a participatory ethic and build on the community as the sole organization in support of a more sustainable resource management. It is more realistic to see the community as "the site of both solidarity and conflict, shifting alliances, power and social structures" and of "exclusion as well as inclusion" (Cleaver 2001, 45). The perception of communities as homogeneous, peaceful and equitable entities tends to pay insufficient attention to internal differentiation by gender, ethnic origin, age, and social position and to conflicting interests among the various subgroups. For instance, in a study of the *damar* forest gardens in Krui, Sumatra (Indonesia), Djalins (2011) finds that the revival of the *adat* institution—a customary law governing community-based resource management—actually empowered traditional local elites, while sidelining the common *damar* farmers and weakening their social position in the community. Similarly, Doolittle (2011) highlights the varying—and often conflicting—strategies of community members in securing their access to land and other natural resources in a study in Sabah, Malaysia.

It is also important to take into account that the "village community" is not always the most important reference group of individuals in rural areas. As Francis (2001, 79) holds "collectivities above and below the community level (such as individual, household, lineage, work-group, occupational association) are frequently the critical units for decision-making and action." For the Hmong, an ethnic group living in South China, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, membership of a clan is much more important than membership of a village community. Only recently, cooperation across clan (and even ethnic) boundaries has become more frequent, for example in managing small-scale upland irrigation systems (Neef *et al.* 2005; Badenoch 2009). In some villages in northwestern Vietnam, composed of different ethnic groups due to spontaneous migration and government-driven resettlement, each village group may have an individual "community" leader. In some areas of northern Laos many village communities have been disrupted by continuous resettlements in recent years which have shattered their potential for collective action and community-based management. In the uplands of the Philippines and Indonesia, indigenous people and migrant groups are often forming heterogeneous communi-

ties, competing for the same resources and making community-based efforts to protect forest resources difficult if not elusive (e.g. Cronkleton *et al.* 2010). These are only some examples of the complexity of social structures and processes in rural areas that challenge the overly simplistic view of “village communities.” In response to the criticism of oversimplified notions of community and community-based natural resource management, scholars have developed more diverse and flexible concepts of how communities are “constructed,” encompassing both locality-based and network-oriented approaches to community (Vandergeest 2006). Such differentiations are important contributions that open new pathways towards newly evolving concepts in integrated watershed management, such as co-management and multi-stakeholder partnerships discussed in the following section.

III Towards Incentive-Based Policies and Partnerships in Mountainous Watersheds of Southeast Asia

Drawing on a review of recent literature and lessons from initiatives developed in the framework of a long-term collaborative research program in Thailand (The Uplands Program), this section presents a comprehensive approach for devising incentive-based policies and establishing multi-stakeholder partnerships that can bridge the ecological, economic and social dimensions of sustainable watershed management in the Southeast Asian uplands. The major elements of this approach are collaborative natural resource governance, payments for environmental services (PES), and rural processing and marketing networks as depicted in the triangle of Fig. 2.

III-1 *Collaborative Natural Resource Governance: Bridging the Ecological and Social Dimensions of Sustainability*

While community-based institutions have a potential for enhancing sustainable resource management in a certain locality if the social cohesion within local communities remains intact and elected local authorities can be held accountable for their actions, the interconnectedness of communities and stakeholders in a watershed context calls for approaches that extend beyond the scale of village territories. Collaborative forms of resource governance or co-management arrangements have recently been discussed as alternative approaches towards integrated watershed management (e.g. Persoon *et al.* 2003; Cronkleton *et al.* 2010). Such institutional arrangements are based on the realization that leaving common-pool resources to be owned, managed and protected by one single agency or institution is rarely efficient taking into account the multiple services and

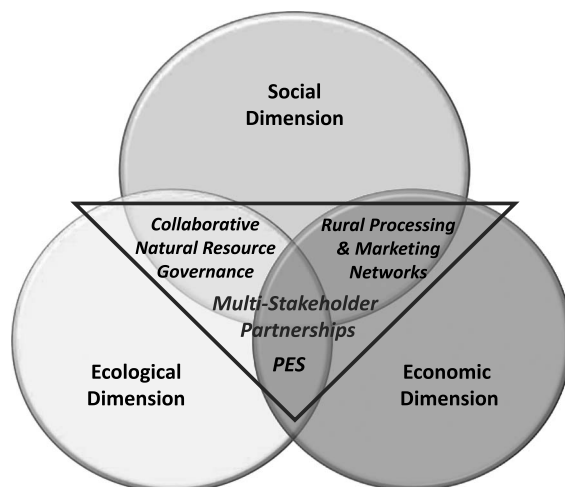


Fig. 2 Approaches to Bridge the Social, Ecological and Economic Dimensions of Sustainable Watershed Management

functions of natural resources for individuals and communities. Collaborative resource governance calls for a holistic approach in agricultural and environmental policies. In Southeast Asian countries, however, agencies responsible for agricultural development, water resource departments and forest agencies traditionally tend to work independently of each other, often being assigned to different ministries; cooperation is rare or even non-existing (e.g. Heyd and Neef 2006). Agricultural policies and allocation of agricultural land are mostly shaped distinctly from forest legislation and forest allocation. Only if these policies are made more consistent and transparent can they provide a basis for the design and establishment of co-management and a more sustainable use of agricultural land, water, trees and forests by multiple users. An important prerequisite for the success of collaborative governance is that policy-makers and officials of the various government line agencies abandon their dual skepticism against the management capacity of local communities in general and, in particular, the potential of marginal ethnic minority groups to conserve natural resources when provided with the right incentives, e.g. in the form of rewards for environmental services, as discussed in the next subsection, and appropriate institutional arrangements, such as more pluralistic governance structures and tenure regimes.

Understanding the motivations of individuals and groups to participate in conservation and protection of common-pool resources is crucial for the success of such co-management arrangements. The problem with most co-management arrangements is that the state with its various agencies often remains the most powerful actor, setting

the rules of the game. In Thailand, this has become evident in the process of establishing river basin and watershed committees, where stakeholder representation has remained somewhat arbitrary and agendas are still dominated by central government agencies (Neef 2008). Hence, an important question in establishing such co-management arrangements is the degree of devolution of natural resource management to local actors, i.e. to what extent are powerful political actors, such as forest agencies and irrigation departments, willing to release authority, power, and control of resources to less powerful actors at the local or regional level (cf. Agrawal and Ostrom 1999). Enhancing local control of and legal access to natural resources under collaborative governance regimes is also an important prerequisite for the second element of sustainable watershed management in Southeast Asian uplands, i.e. payments for environmental services (PES).

III-2 *Payments for Environmental Services: Bringing the Ecological and Economic Dimensions of Sustainability Together*

Mountain ecosystems are increasingly recognized as public goods, implying that public support for conservation programs and for direct payments for land managers providing environmental services is justified (Heidhues *et al.* 2006). Payments for environmental services (PES), an approach that tries to overcome market failures in managing environmental externalities, is increasingly discussed as a promising conservation policy measure in the Southeast Asian uplands (e.g. Rosales 2003; Suyanto *et al.* 2005; Lebel and Rajesh 2009; Neef and Thomas 2009; Chapika *et al.* 2009). The central argument is that watershed and forest protection creates ecological services, such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity, erosion and flood control, clean drinking water, or landscape beauty, for which providers should be compensated. PES has been defined as a voluntary transaction of one or more well-defined environmental services (or land uses that are likely to provide such services) that are “bought” by at least one service buyer from at least one service provider if the latter secures the provision of such environmental services (Wunder 2005).

The crucial question is how to design such compensation schemes and how to combine them with broader development efforts. In reviewing several studies on PES pilot schemes in various Southeast Asian countries, Neef and Thomas (2009) extracted the following sets of prerequisites for functioning PES “markets”:

- *Identification of the PES market:* Before a PES scheme can be implemented, three basic components need to be identified: the specific environmental service(s) that are “traded,” the potential providers, i.e. “sellers,” of the service(s) and the potential “buyers” of the service(s) that need to have a long-term commitment.

- *PES processes and relationships*: After the identification of the PES market components, several key processes and relationships need to be developed in close collaboration with stakeholders. The type of rewards to be provided must be agreed upon, as well as the specific rules for deciding under which conditions rewards will be allotted or denied.
- *Institutional environment of PES*: This third set refers to the various parameters that characterize the broader institutional context in which a PES scheme is embedded. Trustworthy intermediaries, appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks and secure resource rights have proven particularly important in pilot projects (*ibid.*).

A cross-country comparative study by Leimona *et al.* (2009) in the context of the long-term research program “Rewarding Upland Poor for Environmental Services—RUPES” in several Asian countries recommended four important attributes of successful PES schemes, namely (1) realistic, (2) conditional, (3) voluntary, and (4) pro-poor. Yet the authors also found that cash payments in the projects studied were often too insignificant to have a broader impact on poverty alleviation and to provide sufficient incentives for land use changes (*ibid.*; see also Ahlheim and Neef 2006; Munawir and Vermeulen 2007; Milder *et al.* 2010). These findings have two major implications: first, financial payments for ecosystem services need to be complemented by in-kind rewards, such as allocation of long-term resource rights, human capacity development and/or strengthening of partnerships with forest agencies, which underscores the strong connection between PES and collaborative natural resource governance. Second, PES is not a sufficient means to alleviate rural poverty in upland watersheds and thus needs to be complemented by other remunerative activities. This brings us to the third strategic element of sustainable development of mountain watersheds, the strengthening of rural processing and marketing networks.

III-3 *Rural Processing and Marketing Networks: Integrating the Social and Economic Dimensions of Sustainability*

The future development of the agricultural sector in Southeast Asia is likely to be driven by dynamic economic developments in urban centers bringing about an increase in the demand for high-value agricultural products, like fruits and livestock products. In the uplands of Southeast Asia such commodities with higher productivity in terms of land and labor and competitive product quality will have the best chance of ensuring food security for farm families, even on small farms, by providing adequate agricultural incomes.

Upland farmers in Southeast Asia have a long history of simply providing raw mate-

rials to lowland areas and urban centers and traditionally depend on middle(women) as the main links in the supply chain, leading to patron-client relationships where farmers have virtually no bargaining power with regard to prices. In a recent study of paper mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) value chains in northern Laos, we found that 100% of this non-timber forest product (NTFP) was traded via middlemen and less than 5% of the farmers knew what kind of final products were manufactured from the paper mulberry bark (Neef *et al.* 2010). Most smallholder fruit production in the uplands of northern Thailand and northern Vietnam is traded via market intermediaries that often also play an important role in credit supply and provision with agro-chemicals. Processing and retailing of fruit products have been largely confined to medium- or large-sized companies in peri-urban areas and lowland cooperatives run by the majority ethnic groups (Thai and Kinh respectively).

The rapid expansion of supermarkets in Southeast Asia and the emergence of niche markets in the field of organic and fair trade food products both domestically and internationally provide opportunities for upland farming communities to engage in new partnerships with the commercial sector, but individual farmers are often not able to supply sufficient quantities and are ill-prepared in coping with higher quality, i.e. food safety, standards. They are also in a weak position to negotiate higher prices, given the power differentials between smallholders and large retailers. While contract farming arrangements have become popular in the more accessible parts of the Southeast Asian uplands,²⁾ few studies and even fewer development efforts have paid attention to the possible role that village cooperatives and inter-village networks could play in negotiating better terms of trade for small farmers in Southeast Asian upland watersheds. Vermeulen *et al.* (2008) hold that small-scale farmers need to be integrated into modern value chains by more inclusive and transparent multi-stakeholder processes. Ideally, upland farmers would need to build on and strengthen their social capital, form processing cooperatives and marketing alliances, and engage in new economic networks and partnerships with public and private actors. In setting up such multi-stakeholder partnerships, the provision of services and investments that help upland people overcome isolation and get access to information, innovations and output markets are of crucial importance.

2) Studies on the impact of contract farming on Southeast Asian smallholders' livelihoods are inconclusive. In a study on sweet pepper contract farming in a northern Thai watershed, Schipmann and Qaim (2011, 676) find, for instance, that "contract marketing channels are associated with higher net incomes." Yet the study could not determine any statistically significant gross margin differences between company and village trader contract suppliers. Their findings also suggest that farmers generally prefer non-contract marketing options. This result is supported by a study on contract farming of fruit and vegetable in Peninsular Malaysia (Man and Nawi 2010).

As in the case of the other two elements of the sustainable watershed management approach—i.e. collaborative natural resource governance and payments for environmental services (PES), described in subsections III-1 and III-2—effective collective action mechanisms and trustworthy intermediaries³⁾ are crucial prerequisites for success of such multi-stakeholder networks. In the following subsection, I provide empirical evidence of how multi-stakeholder partnerships towards sustainable watershed management can work in practice by combining the three strategic elements in a comprehensive approach and by attempting to balance the interests and capacities of actors whose relationships have traditionally been characterized by strong power differentials. The case study does not claim, however, that such multi-stakeholder partnerships are a panacea for solving all problems related to upland watershed management. Rather than presenting an idealized and one-size-fits-all framework, the case intends to illustrate the principles of a more integrated approach to watershed management in the Southeast Asian uplands that does justice to the heterogeneity of actors and the ecological, social and economic challenges facing these areas.

III-4 *Making Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships toward Sustainable Watershed Governance Work: The Case of Ban Mae Sa Mai and Ban Mae Sa Noi in Chiang Mai Province, Northern Thailand*

Ban Mae Sa Mai and Ban Mae Sa Noi are two Hmong villages located at around 1,200 m above sea level in Mae Rim district about 35 km northwest of Chiang Mai city. Although administratively divided into two villages since the mid-2000s, the more than 200 families have a history of forming a single settlement. Being within the boundaries of the Doi Suthep-Pui National Park (Fig. 3), villagers have virtually no secure land titles, but are allowed to practice agriculture to a certain extent, as they had settled in their present location before the establishment of the park in 1981. After opium cultivation was phased out in the 1970s, farmers mostly have grown litchi trees⁴⁾ and various kinds of vegetables as cash crops.

3) In the case of contract farming, trust between suppliers and buyers is also deemed indispensable (cf. Schipmann and Qaim 2011). Yet the issue of trust becomes even more important when the number of actors in the socio-economic network increases, which calls for neutral and trustworthy intermediaries that help aligning actors' expectations and leveling power differentials among them.

4) Litchi trees were regarded as a more sustainable land management practice by national park authorities and other government officials and they therefore equipped villagers with some form of tenure security in the absence of legal ownership rights.

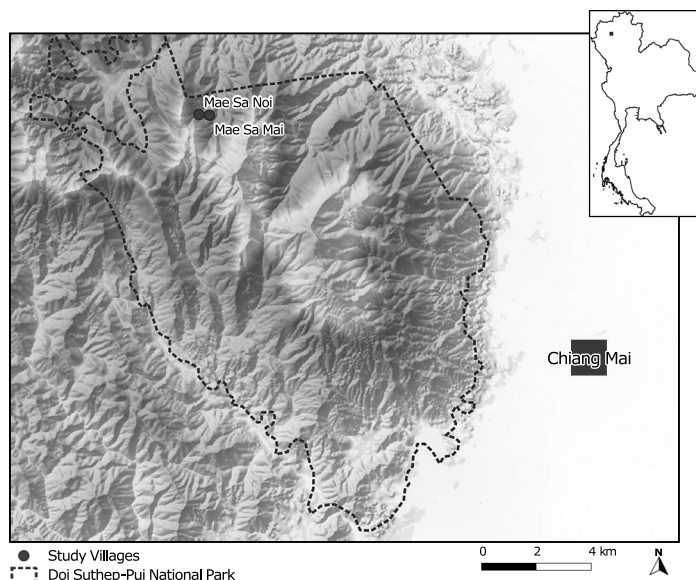


Fig. 3 Location of the Study Villages in the Doi Suthep-Pui National Park, Northern Thailand
Source: Map by Peter Elstner (The Uplands Program)

Networking for Collaborative Forest Management and Payments for Environmental Services

Despite their reputation of being notorious shifting cultivators and forest destroyers, the two Hmong villages have a 25-year-long history of forest conservation in close collaboration with both state and non-state actors. Their ancestors have practiced the *ntoo xeeb* (pronounced as “dong seng”) ceremony for 200 years. This ceremony is dedicated to the guardian spirit of the village, believed to reside in the tallest tree on the hill above the settlement. In 1985, the shaman responsible for the ceremony together with local leaders declared an area of about 16 ha surrounding the *ntoo xeeb* to be a ritual forest, where villagers are not allowed to cut any trees. In the early 1990s several village members established the “Natural Resource and Environment Conservation Club,” an organization that encouraged fellow villagers to use forest resources in a more sustainable way. The protected area around the *ntoo xeeb* was subsequently expanded to nearly 400 ha and various forest rules and penalties for trespassers were drafted (Prasit 2004). The annual *ntoo xeeb* ceremony was widely publicized and promoted among district and sub-district administrators and representatives of various government line agencies. The traditional ceremony of worshipping the village guardian spirit was thus redefined into a manifestation of local people’s determination and ability to live in harmony with nature and protect

forest resources.

In cooperation with National Park authorities, firebreaks were established to protect both the state-managed forests and the communally protected forest areas. Fire protection activities have been carried out annually from January to May since the late 1990s. In 1997, members of the “Natural Resource and Environment Conservation Club” got acquainted with the Forest Restoration Research Unit (FORRU), an international NGO affiliated with Chiang Mai University. The NGO supported the establishment of a community-based tree nursery to produce tree seedlings from local species for reforestation purposes. Between 1998 and 2006, over 65,000 trees were planted on more than 20 ha of former swidden cultivation land (FORRU 2009). The World Wildlife Fund Thailand, the PATT Foundation and several private companies have since sponsored a number of forest restoration activities, including the establishment of a “Nursery and Education Centre” in 2007 and annual tree planting days. For instance, a local news magazine—*Citylife Chiang Mai*—has financially supported the planting of 0.56 ha of forest annually since 2007 (Chiang Mai News 2011). This area is capable of storing about 268 metric tonnes of carbon, thus offsetting the company’s annual carbon output. The case exemplifies that local payments for environmental services (PES) schemes can be realistic, conditional, voluntary and pro-poor as postulated by Leimona *et al.* (2009), particularly when a trustworthy organization—in this particular case an international NGO—acts as an intermediary partner. Conditionality and voluntariness on the side of both suppliers and buyers appear to work best in such a user-financed, localized PES scheme, in which the service buyers are the actual service users—as opposed to government- or donor-financed program where the service buyer is a third party.

The two Hmong communities were also part of an empirical study conducted by Chapika *et al.* (2009) that found that upstream farmers in the Mae Sa watershed (which partly overlaps with the boundaries of the Doi Suthep-Pui National Park) would be willing to change their farming systems to more sustainable and environment-friendly practices on parts of their land (e.g. by planting grass strips against soil erosion and by adopting bio-insecticides and water-saving irrigation techniques) if adequate financial compensation was provided. An interesting finding of this study was that the poorer groups among the upstream farmers were more likely to engage in PES schemes, because payments would provide a rather secure and regular benefit stream and the establishment of such schemes would enhance their tenure security in this protected watershed area. If such a PES scheme could be implemented in the Mae Sa watershed, farmers in Ban Mae Sa Mai and Ban Mae Sa Noi would benefit from an annual flow of PES funds for conservation-oriented agriculture, in addition to the payments supplied by private companies for their annual tree planting activities.

In sum, the integration of collaborative forest management and payment for ecosystem services in this multi-stakeholder partnership has provided the two ethnic minority communities with moderate financial and strong institutional support to enhance their livelihoods and build up a new reputation as forest guardians and environmental stewards, while contributing to an improvement of ecosystem services that are beneficial both for local residents and for downstream people and the wider society. The two elements covered by the FORRU-initiated partnership were complemented by another multi-stakeholder alliance—described in the following subsection—supported by an international research program and focusing on sustainable farming and agro-processing practices.

Establishing a Community-Based Litchi Processing and Marketing Network

Researchers of the University of Hohenheim's Uplands Program⁵⁾ together with Thai partner universities have worked with the same two Hmong ethnic minority villages (i.e. Ban Mae Sa Mai and Ban Mae Sa Noi) over a period of more than 10 years towards developing more environment-friendly agricultural production, with an emphasis on fruit-based agroforestry systems. However, litchi production systems in the area have faced a number of challenges in recent years, such as irregular yields, inadequate use of agro-chemicals and declining trends of farm-gate prices for fresh litchis. As a consequence, some farmers had already turned to growing vegetables, such as bell peppers in greenhouses and carrots, cabbages and lettuces on steep slopes, which—from an ecological point of view—are a much less sustainable alternative in erosion-prone hillsides of northern Thailand.

In 2007, several subprojects of the Uplands Program joined forces with Hmong villagers and various public and private actors to establish a network for community-based litchi processing and marketing in order to add more value to their fresh produce. Villagers from Ban Mae Sa Noi and Ban Mae Sa Mai were trained in litchi drying by the Faculty of Agro-Industry, Chiang Mai University. With support from the Uplands Program and its Thai partners the villagers have developed their own brand of dried litchi. Consumer acceptance studies have been carried out in order to analyze the market potential of such products. The added value is intended to help participating villagers to sustain their fruit production systems. The cooperative—which started with six house-

5) The Uplands Program is a Thai-Vietnamese-German collaborative research program that has conducted research into sustainable land use and rural development in mountainous regions of northern Thailand and northern Vietnam since July 2000. The interdisciplinary program comprises more than 10 subprojects, spanning from agro-ecology, horticulture and fruit processing to economics, development policy and rural sociology.

holds in 2007—expanded to 32 members in 2009, 25 of them being women who are known to be traditionally marginalized in the patriarchal Hmong society. In 2008, the cooperative became one of 10 finalists among 383 applicants in a global competition for the so-called SEED award, an initiative of the United Nations' Commission for Sustainable Development, supporting promising local, multi-stakeholder initiatives towards sustainable development. In the 2010/2011 season, sales of dried litchi have generated revenues of around 30,000 Thai Baht (~US\$950). In 2011, a researcher from the Uplands Program has brokered negotiations with a large European fair trade company that wants to include dried litchi from the cooperative in their product portfolio. This initiative is likely to further boost the cooperative's success and may lay the foundation for an expansion to other villages. Yet a key constraint remains the uncertain legal status of the two communities which poses difficulties of registering the drying business under the Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) certification scheme needed for sales in most retail outlets. The Uplands Program together with its Thai partners has lobbied for a confirmation from the National Park authorities that the two communities have the right to permanently settle in their present location.

In order to improve prices for fresh litchi, the Uplands Program also initiated collaboration with a large hypermarket chain that aims to buy directly from growers, thus bypassing the middlemen and guaranteeing higher prices. The prospect of higher financial benefits has motivated farmers from several Hmong communities to comply with Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) guidelines monitored by the officials from the Department of Agriculture. They have organized themselves as an inter-village litchi growers' network and adapted their cultivation methods and post-harvest practices to the buyer's standards. By the end of the 2009 season, more than 100 litchi growers had formally registered for GAP certification. Due to their greater bargaining power as a coordinated group, Hmong growers received fairer and more transparent prices and gradually gained social recognition as a reliable partner in marketing ventures with large supermarket chains (Tremblay and Neef 2009). In 2010 the network traded more than 100 tonnes of fresh litchi via this new marketing channel, generating revenues of over 2 million Thai Baht (~US\$62,500) for its members. A welcome side effect for the hypermarket chain was that it could advertise this new partnership with smallholder litchi growers on its website to improve its corporate image.

With support from the Uplands Program and its Thai partners, first contacts have also been established to connect Hmong litchi growers with European importers of eco-friendly fruit products. In 2010, the project started—in cooperation with a Thai export company—to promote GlobalGAP-certified fruit production for export to further enhance profitability and ecological sustainability of litchi farming. Initial setbacks—a first ship-

ment of certified fresh litchi was rejected by the importer because one farmer did not comply with the strict agrochemical regulations—could be overcome by enhancing personal contacts between representatives of the export company and the farmer group and by working more closely with a reduced number of farmers in the subsequent season.⁶⁾ A Thai partner of the Uplands Program also introduced farmers to the technique of litchi wrapping with reusable paper bags during the ripening stage in order to protect the fruits from insect damage and to reduce the need for insecticide application. This innovation is a major step towards enhancing further fresh litchi exports to the European Union with its strict food safety standards.

Over a period of four years, this multi-stakeholder partnership among ethnic minority farmers, researchers, private companies and various Thai government agencies has initiated a number of technical and socio-organizational innovations that have contributed (1) to reducing the use of hazardous agrochemicals (e.g. by wrapping of litchi fruits against major pest insects), (2) to adding value to agricultural raw material (by cooperative drying), and (3) to empowering upland farmers and strengthening their socio-economic status (by helping to diversify their marketing channels and to negotiate better terms of trade). In sum, fostering these processing and marketing networks for high-value agricultural products has equipped marginalized ethnic minority farmers with new skills and more entrepreneurial attitudes and—at the same time—built social capital and fostered new forms of collective action. This has motivated the upland communities to shift to environmentally friendly agricultural practices on sloping lands, while complying with national and international food quality standards, thus contributing to land conservation in fragile mountain ecosystems. In one of their regular network meetings, key farmers have recently expressed their determination to carry on their collaborative activities beyond the Uplands Program's funding period.

IV Discussion and Conclusion

The empirical evidence provided in subsection III-4 suggests that multi-stakeholder partnerships can be successfully established with the aim of combining the various dimensions of sustainable conservation and development of upland watersheds. Such partnerships have the potential to induce a socially, institutionally and ecologically sustainable mix of agricultural production, ecological services and rural livelihood opportunities, if

6) It is expected that the number of exporting litchi growers will increase again in the future, when the exporters have regained their trust in the farmers' network. International demand for fresh, GlobalGAP-certified litchi from Thailand exceeds the current supply.

they lead to durable forms of cooperation based on increased social trust and converging expectations among the actors. These multi-stakeholder networks require more poly-centric and deliberative forms of governance (cf. Neef 2009), shared decision-making processes and a supportive legal framework.

The experience of the multi-stakeholder partnerships in the two Hmong communities in northern Thailand underscores the crucial role of voluntary, non-profit-seeking intermediary actors (an international NGO in the first case, an international research program in the second) that are accepted as trustworthy mediators by all stakeholders and can help align the various actors' expectations from the partnership and reduce power differentials among them. Such intermediaries are also essential for ensuring transparency, accountability and trust in the relations among the stakeholders. Conflicts of interests and occasional setbacks may be inevitable, particularly in the formative stages of such multi-stakeholder partnerships, but they may also motivate actors to adjust their strategies and/or diversify their relationships in the network.

Questions of transferability and sustainability of such multi-stakeholder partnerships certainly remain. To date, such alliances have depended strongly on support from international actors: in the empirical case studies, FORRU and the Uplands Program have functioned as the most important nodes in the networks. While both programs have gradually reduced the influence of foreign staff members and "handed over the stick" to local stakeholders, the networks still appear somewhat vulnerable if external assistance is entirely withdrawn. Yet local researchers and national NGO staff are likely to take on the function of intermediaries, and funding could be provided by national research and development organizations.

Another major challenge is the issue of scaling up such initiatives, i.e. how to combine the quality and depth of localized multi-stakeholder partnerships towards integrated watershed management with the need to reach higher levels of decision-making and address wider regional problems. This would require, first, that policy-makers at the national level and technocrats in the various government line agencies acknowledge the multi-functional character of mountain watersheds, providing not only ecosystem services for downstream residents, but also important rural livelihood opportunities, food security and social services for its inhabitants. Second, officials from the various government agencies would need to be motivated to minimize interagency competition and develop more comprehensive policies and plans—together with local administration, the private sector and upland communities—that are aimed at overcoming the (perceived) antagonism between conservation and development in upland areas of Southeast Asia. Third, the governments of Southeast Asian countries would need to relinquish at least some control over natural resources to local communities and provide codes of conduct

for public-private partnerships that ensure that uplanders can strengthen their engagement with the private sector in a “level playing field” (cf. Faysse 2006). Finally, upland communities need to be seen as skillful managers of diverse asset portfolios (private, collective, regional and even global assets) and thus as key partners in the search for finding sustainable solutions to the problems facing upland watersheds. Yet this acknowledgement would really require a “watershed change” in public thinking.

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Hidden Transcripts from “Below” in Rural Politics of the Philippines: Interpreting the Janus-facedness of Patron-Client Ties and *Tulong* (Help)

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This paper argues that ordinary people often contest rather than submit to the powerful elites to gain material interests and political favoritism. Ordinary people are both shrewd and critical in making judgments and evaluations on politicians as well as the (unequal) relation of powers. Based on fieldwork interviews in the Philippines, this paper identifies the perception of (local) politics from ordinary people’s point of view in a seemingly mundane political environment. If the political economic imperative of *tulong*, or help, is decoded to include its social meanings, functions, and cultural connotation, it reveals the Janus-facedness of patron-client ties that allows for a negotiation of power relations between clients and patrons.

Keywords: Janus-facedness, local politics, ordinary people, patron-client ties, Tanauan City, *tulong*

Introduction

A review of Philippine political studies reveals the researchers’ emphasis on the role of the powerful gentry—political and economic elites—and silencing of the powerless people’s voices to understand the structure of Philippine politics. The bases of the arguments emanate from facets of Philippine political culture such as kinship relations, *compadre* (godparents)-ism, *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), *hiya* (shame), and *walang hiya* (shameless), functioning under the rubric of patron-client ties (Agpalo 1969; Lande 1965; Hollnsteiner 1963), which allows for a hierarchical arrangement between the elites and the masses.¹⁾ According to traditional arguments, elites retain control over political offices and the economy, while the masses are passive, submissive, and dependent on their patrons. Hence, the elites dominate political change and development while the masses—either susceptible to material inducement or subscribing to guns, goons, and gold—are mere followers, inarticulate in political contestation.

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1) “Ordinary people,” “masses,” “the poor,” and “subordinates” will be used interchangeably in this paper.

This paper argues that the masses are indeed critical and do contest for social claims. The analysis of election results (electoral politics, political affiliations), relationships between patrons and clients through formal institutions (political factions, machine politics), or the political culture that ties two parties may not suffice to grasp how the masses “do” politics. This paper asserts that there are essential political features that require researchers to excavate the taken-for-granted political modalities and locate the “hidden” transcript (Scott 1990) of the masses outside the realm of formal political structures.

Furthermore, patron-client ties in rural areas are Janus-faced. To the rural folks, on one hand *pulitika* (loosely translated as “politics”) is “dirty”: patron-client ties function mostly during elections for manipulations such as vote-buying and -selling, and patron-client relations serve both actors’ vested interests. On the other hand, the masses do articulate responsible leadership, social justice, development, and so on. This latter discourse of “good” politics does not manifest in the realm of formal politics but is “hidden” in the realm of everyday politics.

A sociocultural and socio-political analysis on *tulong*, or help, may be a useful way to understand how and why the masses subscribe to patron-client ties and engage or challenge a set of “rules of conduct” in their own community. The concept of *tulong* is discussed because of its constant usage throughout the interviews. Even though there is no consistency or inclusive usage of “*tulong*” across all the interviews, the term’s nuances have somehow manifested in other social practices such as *magandang loob* (good inner being) in the realm of everyday politics.

This paper starts by clarifying several concepts and then outlines studies on Philippine politics, focusing on patron-client relations. Most political studies on the Philippines use the patron-client framework as a useful and convenient model to understand political changes and structures. From here, I identify two distinct groups of scholars. One advocates the patron-client framework as the building block of Philippine politics and then expands the framework to include the patrimonial character of the Philippine state, its “imperfect” democratization process, and its weak institutions. The other group of scholars critically disengages from the patron-client framework and uses more cultural, linguistic, sociological, and anthropological approaches to locate other political features in Philippine society. Following the second group of approaches, this paper will showcase other political mechanisms that are at work in a rural setup.

Clarification of Concepts

This research is a study of local people’s political perceptions. “Local” here means that

the main focus of the research is at the micro level—personal experiences, personal memories, fragmented actions within particular contexts. (This is the reason the paper gives paramount attention to the interviews as primary data.) In a limited sense, this paper takes the localization of knowledge as a way to understand the construction of politics using a bottom-up approach. This paper follows Benedict Kerkvliet’s (1991; 1995) definition of politics as everyday politics: “unorganized and informal discourse and activity of everyday politics where people come to terms with and/or contest norms and rules regarding authority, production, and the allocation of resources” (Kerkvliet 1995, 418). Kerkvliet argues that the patron-client framework is not sufficient to understand Philippine political structures. His own research in Nueva Ecija indicates that subordinated villagers are antagonistic toward their patrons—not in open confrontation but often in an “indirect, non-confrontational, and hidden” way (*ibid.*). Following Kerkvliet’s approach, this research introduces another possible framework for understanding clients’ political discourse by articulating the concept of *tulong* as a hidden transcript of the poor to claim for moral politics.

“Moral” here refers to an idea, i.e., *tulong*—or, to borrow Kerkvliet’s words, “rule of conduct” (Kerkvliet 1991, 10)—that is familiar to the people. In his study of peasant politics in Malaysia James C. Scott (1985) differentiates *tolong*, or help, into several categories to remind readers of the hidden transcript of peasants when receiving assistance from landlords. Scott argues that *tolong* entails the reciprocity of the provider with the receiver and vice versa. If *tolong* turns into *sedekah* (alms), then the receiver forever becomes a debtor to the giver. This is different from *zakat* (an Islamic taxation practice), which is a form of rights. Many peasants, as far as possible, avoid receiving *tolong* as alms in order to escape being in the debtor position in the hierarchy of patron-client relations. As will be indicated below, *tulong* that functions in patron-client relations is Janus-faced: on one hand, the realm of formal politics (election campaigns) entails “dirty” politics; on the other hand, in the realm of everyday politics *tulong* that encompasses *loob* (inner being) is acceptable and is to be preserved and manifested. *Loob* shifts its validities from time to time in different contexts; it is not static or unbounded; and it is micro-oriented. In sum, “morality” as referred to in this paper embeds the nuance of compatibility of *loob* between the patron and the client, an internal equilibrium of a sort.

Accentuation of *Tulong*: Public Sphere, Culture, and “Soul Stuff”

Sociologically speaking, *tulong* is a functional social practice that exists anywhere and at any time and involves more than one individual to perform. In the *barangays* (loosely

translated as villages) in which this researcher resided, it was an exchange practice in a variety of social contexts such as funerals, weddings, elections, voluntary work, payment of hospital bills, religious ceremonies, and many more situations. The political modality of *tulong* cannot be taken exclusively as the political culture of the masses, nor does *tulong* serve as a political ideology for the masses to engage in a social movement for revolt. The tricky question that arises is, how does *tulong* as a social function in a *barangay* become a political discourse among the poor? To answer this, we need to categorize *tulong* as a sort of cultural system.

Studying political discourse in the cultural domain “entails probing the social meanings of the languages used by ordinary people, their cultural practices, their social symbols and ideas, and their religiosity” (Soon 2008). Stuart Hall (1997) indicates that culture serves as a system of representation that produces meaning. Such meaning is understood, constructed, and sometimes shared by different social classes of people in different public spheres through language to express thoughts and feelings or emotions (Kusaka 2009).

In the rural setup in Barangay Angeles,²⁾ *tulong* as a cultural system is taken as a “submission” by clients to patrons; the latter are seen as “men of prowess.” This is akin to O.W. Wolters’s (1999) definition of “men of prowess” as possessing the cultural element of “soul stuff” that attracts followers. Wolters’s definition of “soul stuff” includes the qualities of the leader that represent his high level of spiritual development and thus capacity for leadership. A “man of prowess” needs to constantly project this “soul stuff” to his followers so that the latter can recognize his spiritual endowment and then participate in it. The recognition of a man of prowess comes about “not only because his

2) Barangay Angeles (Note: This is a pseudonym for the *barangay*, to protect the privacy of residents) is 9 kilometers from Tanauan City (*poblacion* area). Originally, Angeles was part of the bigger Barangay Janopol, but in 1964 the latter was divided into two other *barangays*, resulting in three *barangays*: Barangay Janopol Oriental, Occidental, and Angeles. The population of Barangay Angeles is 1,853, consisting of 966 males and 887 females. They are gathered into 390 households with a total of 325 houses built; 264 households are *Katoliko* (Catholic), and 31 are Born Again (Christians).

The socioeconomic landscape of Angeles can be categorized into two major parts. Purok (precincts) I to VI is considered to be a relatively well-to-do residential area, while Purok VII is a relatively poor area. However, this does not mean that Angeles is a *barangay* full of landowners, big businesspeople, or the like. On the contrary, the majority of *barangay* folks in Angeles are poor. The majority of households have at least one person in the family working abroad as an OFW (Overseas Filipino Worker): either as a domestic helper or as a seaman. Others are farmers or fishermen, though the majority of the younger generations, especially females, work in a factory after graduating from high school. There are two types of residents: the Tagalogs and the Bicolanos. The former are those who were born in Tanauan City, while the latter are those who migrated from the Bicol region and married locals. (In Tanauan City Tagalogs comprise 113,438 or 97.18 per cent of residents, while Bicolanos comprise 1,272 or 1.09 per cent.)

entourage could expect to enjoy material rewards but also . . . because their own spiritual substance, for everyone possessed it in some measure, would participate in his, thereby leading to rapport and personal satisfaction” (*ibid.*, 19).

Quite similar to Wolters’s analysis of men of prowess and the spiritual (not just material) relationship they build with their followers, this paper will indicate that ordinary people in the *barangay* can—and do—view *tulong* from the politicians as some kind of “spiritual merit” coming from the *loob*. In other words, clients seek an equal status with their patrons, a quest that is manifested in the feeling (i.e., good inner being or *magandang loob*) that the latter are consistently exercising respect and justice when providing *tulong* to the needy. This enables clients to reconstruct relations of hierarchy into a more equalized customary relationship. People’s “submission” to become part of the elite’s “entourage” can be traced to their understanding of “soul stuff,” which in the context of *tulong* in the Tagalog language is analogous to the power built up in the *loob*.

That is to say, viewed from the perspectives mentioned above, when *tulong* is taken as a cultural system of representation among the poor, ordinary people’s discourses are hidden in the realm of everyday politics. To locate this political discourse in the realm of conventional political institutions, one can only identify the common perception of the poor, which is not fully representative of their desired values and ideas. When put in the public sphere, social practices of *tulong* become *pulitika* that function under patron-client ties. Deriving from “bad” politics, the patron-client relationship turns into a discourse that is constantly being challenged, evaluated, and reaffirmed of its meaning and value. The critical acceptance or rejection of *tulong* among the masses shifts its realm of contestation between election time and everyday life to articulate the masses’ desires and visions in a nonconfrontational manner that is critical to patrons.

Studies on Patron-Client Ties

There are a number of publications that discuss Philippine political change, development, and structures by looking through the lens of the patron-client ties framework. In general, there are two approaches. According to one approach, patron-client ties perpetuate underdeveloped Philippine institutions due to the oligarchic and patrimonial structure of Philippine society. The other approach notes that there are other important political factors—such as ideology, issues, development, and emotional pursuits (such as the *loob*)—that are at play between the subordinated and superordinate and argues that the ties are antagonistic and manifest another political discourse of their own from the bottom up.

Several publications subscribe to the view that modern Philippine politics began with the United States' introduction of political institutions (Steinberg 1972; Cushner 1976; Phelan 1976; Fegan 1982; Larkin 1993; Cullinane 2003; McCoy and de Jesus 2001).³⁾ Benedict Anderson (1996) observes that in the first decade of the twentieth century, the United States brought in its model of a political system that it deemed essential to liberate its colony. The linguistic, property, and literacy qualifications were set so high that only 14 per cent of the adult population was entitled to vote (*ibid.*). Thus, a group of political elites emerged from the mid-nineteenth century who gained their wealth during the Spanish period through the control of land for the production of export crops (Steinberg 1972; Cushner 1976; Phelan 1976; Fegan 1982; Larkin 1993; May 1993; Cullinane 2003; McCoy and de Jesus 2001).

Earlier political scientists such as Carl H. Lande (1965) and other scholars (Hollnsteiner 1963; c.f. Grossholtz 1964; Agpalo 1969; Wurfel 1988)⁴⁾ began to illustrate the polity in the Philippines as constructed through patron-client relationships, kinship networks that formed the basic units of factions that served as the building blocks of political organizations. Clients were dependent on patrons, and their survival was secured through their performance of a "debt of gratitude" or *utang na loob* and shame or *hiya*. Such a relationship—reciprocity and "debt of gratitude"—allowed patrons to attract their own followers, through maneuvering if not manipulation, who subsequently transformed into factions during election time to engage in power struggles. In essence, Philippine political structures remained in the hands of the elites to manipulate electoral institutions for political interests with no genuine political participation, ideology, or representation.

3) One of the most comprehensive studies on the history of the emergence of Philippine elites during the Spanish and American periods, and the involvement and changing relationship of the economic landlords with political elites, is Alfred McCoy and Ed. C. de Jesus, *Philippine Social History: Global Trade and Local Transformations* (2001). More specific case studies on the history of political elites are Michael Cullinane's *Ilustrado Politics: Filipino Elite Responses to American Rule, 1898–1908* (2003) in Manila and Cebu, and John A. Larkin's *The Pampangans: Colonial Society in a Philippine Province* (1993).

4) Hollnsteiner's work is very similar to Lande's in that both contend that Philippine social structures with the characteristics of kinship system, *compadre*, *utang na loob*, and reciprocity behavior manage to construct a smooth relationship between the elites and the masses. Hollnsteiner's study focuses on the elites' perspective on how they construct a relationship with the masses through kinship networks and a *compadres* system within the Hulo society in the province of Bulacan, whether it is during elections or within community associations. Using a slightly different approach, Jean Grossholtz views the following as components of the Philippine political culture and system: bargaining power or quid pro quo, fear of *hiya* (shame) and *gaba* (curse), respect for elders, personalism, a strong family system, superordinate-subordinate relationships, and *pakiusap* (an act of request as a means of communication), or a means of communication—via saints—between God and men.

In a slightly different light, separating themselves from the above assumptions on the elites, who were mainly from the landed class, modernization theorists such as K. G. Machado (1971; 1974a; 1974b; c.f. Kimura 1997; Kawanaka 1998) argue that Philippine politics has taken a shift from personal and kinship networks to political machinery. Due to socioeconomic and organizational changes, increasingly intense national political competition in rural communities, and growing mass participation, politics is no longer confined to traditionally wealthy families but also run by politically skilled leaders or “new men” from less wealthy and less well known family backgrounds (Machado 1974b, 524). The emergence of a new leadership is among middle-class men from *barrio* (district or neighborhood) families who are more likely to respond to demands from national and provincial politicians (*ibid.*, 525). To compete for votes, the political machinery plays a vital role through the provision of immediate material rewards and inducements such as pork barrel programs.

Discussions of factors that have contributed to changes in Philippine politics have taken another shift toward looking at Philippine politics as an “elite democracy.” To Benedict Anderson (1988), Amando Doronila (1985), and Paul D. Hutchcroft (2000), the Philippines remains “underdeveloped” due to the proliferation of “oligarchic elites” or—a term coined by John T. Sidel (1999; c.f. McCoy 2002)—“local bosses” who use guns, goons, and gold and have total control over the weak democratic state both in *Malacañang* and in the provinces. Other scholars, such as Nathan Quimpo (2009), observe that the Philippines has become a predatory regime rather than a predatory state in which political families with business networks continue to plunder the nation. The existence of such a regime, accompanied by the unchanged nature of patron-client ties within society, allows the functioning of informal institutions (Putzel 1999) and contributes to the weak nature of Philippine democratic institutions (Case 1999); the latter are susceptible to constant electoral fraud, corruption, and rampant vote-buying and -selling at the local and provincial levels (c.f. Coronel 2007).

The “elite democracy” approach takes into account the role of violence, coercion, intimidation, and monetary inducements that enable the elites to manipulate formal democratic procedures to suit their personal political interests. Elections are instruments used by political elites to obtain public office and a way for the elites to make the masses feel “incorporated” within their “tutelage.” Such “incorporation” is practiced through intimidating voters, employing violent tactics, and using the Philippine constabulary, army, police forces, political leaders (and patrons) or entrepreneurs, and other institutions to obtain positions in public office.

The study of Philippine politics in the aftermath of the 1986 People Power Revolution, such as the above, focused much attention on the community of elites, the patrimo-

nial state, and the latter's relations with Philippine society. The study of the president as an institution to dominate politics, especially during Marcos's regime (Thompson 1996; Youngblood 1993), once again came to the fore. Slightly different from the patron-client ties framework but elite-oriented nonetheless, politics has been integrated at the national level, or more specifically in the hands of the president.

A few studies have attempted to explain the phenomenon of Joseph Estrada, who was the president of the Philippines from 1998 to 2001. One explanation for his popularity is the populist leaders' thesis, which looks at a combination of factors such as the failure of neoliberal economies, Estrada's popularity through his movies as "saviour of the poor" (c.f. Rosario 2004), his pro-poor programs, and his image as belonging to the "other" elites from the oligarchs (Rocamora 2009; c.f. Polo 2002). The other reason for his popularity, according to Abinales and Amoroso's (2005) argument, is the decline of nongovernmental organizations' reputation as the voice of the public, their inefficient management, and the failure of the left to provide an alternative political discourse, which gave the people reasons to pin their hopes on different yet popular leaders. Estrada was popular despite the allegations of corruption in his administration, his incompetence, and so on.

When Estrada was convicted for corruption, Vice President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (GMA) took up the job. She was reelected as president in 2004. Various studies have categorized GMA's administration as the most corrupt, most autocratic, and most undemocratic since Ferdinand Marcos's regime (Coronel 2007; Abinales 2008; 2010; Thompson 2010). Abinales's article "The Philippines: Weak State, Resilient President" (2008) describes Philippine politics as having unchanged weak institutions, such as the Commission of Elections (COMELEC), that subscribe to electoral fraud under a strong and powerful presidential influence. GMA's influence over the COMELEC was evident in the 2004 general election, when she stood against another popular leader, Fernando Poe Jr. Her control over the army, police, national economic agencies, and judiciary helped her crush her enemies, such as journalists, the left, and the Muslim South (*ibid.*). In Abinales's view, GMA's main political control did not derive from central Manila, where the voices of the opposition were loud. It was at the periphery, namely at the provincial and local government levels, that GMA's presidency was sustained. Political control in the Philippines is still predominantly in the hands of the political elites, only now it is located not at the centre but in the periphery. All politics is "local" (*ibid.*, 302).

Another group of scholars ranging from historians and political scientists to anthropologists and sociologists provide a different perspective on patron-client ties, and some have gone beyond the framework to provide alternative approaches to viewing Philippine politics.

The historian Reynaldo C. Ileto (1999a) argues that Philippine social structures and values have been reduced to patron-client ties: vertical, oppressive, manipulative, repressive power in a top-down fashion. He points out that the “orientalization” of “Philippine social values” has resulted in a dichotomized concept of “the masses” and “the elites.” The “masses” are seen as passive, ignorant, submissive to negative “Filipino social values” and dominated by the “elites” who are capable of manipulating such values and control of offices. In his critical overview on the literature of Philippine politics and society, Ileto concludes that there is an overlooking of the realities “in which power flows from the bottom up, as well, and in which indebtedness is not simply a one-way, oppressive, relationship but rather a reciprocal one” (*ibid.*, 49). In citing Mojares’s work on the Osmeña political family in Cebu City, Ileto agrees that *pulitika* (or politics) is “constantly changing in scope and meaning . . . also *made* by the community” (*ibid.*, 62). More importantly, the theater of politics is constructed not merely by the orators but by the crowds (Ileto 1999b).

Kerkvliet offers another critical review on patron-client ties (1991; 1995; 1996; 2000). He states that Philippine politics emanates from “below” and that politics is embedded in the realm of everyday life experiences. He argues that the patron-client framework is not sufficient to understand Philippine political structures and that clients are indeed critical, antagonistic, and demanding. Relationships between clients and patrons are not smooth and are always in contestation. However, such resistance and contestation do not manifest openly and can hardly be traced in the realm of formal political institutions such as electoral politics—rather, the subaltern’s politics is “indirect, non-confrontational, and hidden” (Kerkvliet 1991).

The works by Michael Pinches (1991) and Benedict Kerkvliet (1991) on subordinated groups in Quezon City, Manila, and the peasantry in Talavera, Nueva Ecija Province, respectively demonstrate that subordinated groups’ claims are not limited to subsistence needs (such as minimum wage, food, or shelter for survival) but also revolve around issues of dignity, respect, and quality of life as human beings. Both works bring to light other ways of interpreting patron-client ties to go beyond material inducements or politics of fear and instead hinge upon a politics of respect and dignity and the masses’ articulated desire for politicians who are issue-oriented and struggle for democracy. Subordinated groups do maintain ties with patrons for material survival, but at the same time they are critical of the social hierarchy and the ways that patrons treat them.

In quite a similar trajectory, Mark Turner’s (1991, 19) study of Zamboanga City argues that politicians also engage in a politics of moral order—moral standing and integrity—that goes beyond the patronage politics of the patron-client ties framework. Employing cultural, linguistic, and anthropological approaches, Resil Mojares’s (2002)

study of the Osmeña family of Cebu indicates that politics should not be seen as “rulers, leaders, and big men” and the “subordination of issues to particularistic concerns,” because of its constant change in scope and meaning. The Osmeñas’ electoral campaigns define politics in terms of “crusades,” which use “primordial symbols of democracy, autonomy, and progress” (*ibid.*, 336).

In contrast to traditional patron-client models, the historical, political-anthropological, cultural, and sociological approaches look at the perspective of the masses, locating politics beyond the formal electoral system and political offices. While recognizing patronage politics and elite dominance, they also indicate the nonmaterial elements of politics, particularly language and culture, that “patrons” use in connection with issues pertaining to development and democracy so as to manifest a rhetoric that is acceptable to their “clients.”

From the above tour of Philippine political studies, we can summarize that the political economy and modernization approaches place politics in the formal institutional realm—such as elections and presidential dominance—and the Philippine state remains weak and vulnerable to elite manipulation while voters or “clients” are susceptible to monetary inducement at the hands of political elites. At the same time, when politics is analyzed as everyday politics, relations between patrons and clients are not cordial. Philippine politics, especially viewed from the bottom-up approach, is issue-oriented and is about social justice, free and fair elections, respect, and dignity. “Clients” are indeed critical and do articulate grievances and their vision for a better society.

The focus of this paper is to expand further the second group of approaches to include other features that underpin values such as equality, responsiveness, and caring at the village level. My field research in *barangays*—one village and one town—indicates that the meaning of politics can be identified in two contesting aspects, which makes the patron-client relationship Janus-faced. When one is talking about politics in the institutional realm—such as elections—patron-client ties are subject to “dirty” politics, including vote-buying, electoral fraud, and elite manipulation, which according to the villagers’ interpretation stands as *pulitika*. The other contested meaning of politics (thus patron-client ties) includes social justice, responsibility, and caring in the realm of everyday politics.

The Janus-facedness of Patron-Client Ties:

The Discourse of *Tulong* as Hidden Transcripts from “Below”

Patron-client ties are Janus-faced. To understand this phenomenon, one is required to understand the language used by the masses and differentiate nuances in different con-

texts. When politicians provide help to the people or simply perform the act of *gawa* (action, works) in the context of *pulitika*, *tulong* is at the “dirty” end of politics. Conversely, when *tulong* is integrated with the sentiment of *loob*, the patron is seen as the provider of genuine *tulong*. When the Janus-facedness of patron-client relations is deconstructed, we are able to comprehend the masses’ rationale in supporting politicians.

*Pagkikilatis/Kalkulasyon through Gawa/Pangako*⁵⁾

Ate May: Abe, makikita mo . . . katulad ko, ako minsan kinikilatis ko rin tao kung siya ay magagawa. Kilala mo naman sa atin, sa mga mukha. Kilala mo ang may magagawa, kilala mo rin ang wala. Iyon ang aking na laang ano. Dahil mahirap din namang manghula. Mahirap din ang ikaw ay kuwan./Katulad ng mga mayor, iyan, katulad ni Corona, kilala mo na siya ay mabait. Sa pagmumukha niya, kilala mo. Marami siyang maa-attract sa kanya na siya ay iboto. Kung siya ay sa paglapit niya ay siya ay masungit, hindi siya iboboto. Pero marami pa ring bumoto sa kanya. Nanalo eh. Dahil alam mo, pagka ang isang, ang isang mga kuwan ay minsan mangangako at wala namang nagagawa, sa susunod, hindi na uli maiboboto.⁶⁾

[You will see . . . like me, I scrutinize a candidate to see if he/she can do something good. You know [from] their faces. You know if someone can do something or not. It’s difficult to guess./ Like Corona, you know that he is a good man. You know it in his face. If, when you approach him and he’s hot-tempered, no one will vote for him. But a lot of people did. He won. If a candidate promises to do something but doesn’t keep those promises, no one will vote for that candidate again.]

Tito Catapang: Maraming mapagkunwari eh. Kung tutuusin pag nagpangita kayo akala mo talagang totoo-totoo. Syempre, nahahalata mo naman ang sino dito ang talagang magaling na tao at hindi./ Parang babatayan mo sa klase ng, iyon nga, ng mga galaw nila.⁷⁾

[There are many fakes. Sometimes when you meet them, you think they’re sincere. Of course, you will be able to see which one is a good person and which is not./You will base it on the kind of actions they do.]

Alberto: Sa gawa makikita ang isang kuwan. Huwag kang maniniwala sa pangako dahil iyong pangako wala iyon. Pag nasabi iyon sa ngayon, bukas wala na iyon. Parang pinangakuang pag-ibig, makahalik lang, ano? Sabi sa dalaga mahal na mahal kita ngayon lang araw na ito, bukas hindi na. Ano, di ba ganon ang nanliligaw, ano?⁸⁾

5) The transcriptions in this section are verbatim and do not follow the proper grammatical structure of the Tagalog language system, so as to preserve the originality of the interviews. The author would like to thank Ms. Charmaine for her assistance with translations and transcriptions. The names of the interviewees, the *barangays*, and precinct are pseudonyms.

6) Ate May (former canteen owner). Interview by author, February 18, 2005, Barangay Angeles, Tanauan City.

7) Tito Catapang (former vendor). Interview by author, February 24, 2005, Barangay Angeles, Tanauan City.

8) Alberto (farmer). Interview by author, April 18, 2005, Barangay Angeles, Tanauan City.

[You can see it in their actions. Don't believe in promises, because they mean nothing. If a promise is made today, it'll be gone tomorrow. It's like a promise of love just to get a kiss in return, right? The man says to the woman, "I love you very much" today—just today, but not tomorrow. Isn't that how you court someone?]

The interviews with Ate May, Tito Catapang, and Alberto refer to the campaign period, when there was a possibility that promises made by a candidate would not be kept and also that promises were uncertain for they were merely ad hoc strategies by politicians to gain support. Arguably, a politician can enhance his/her image by making *pangako* (promises). However, people know that politicians' *pangako* may be made to simply "court" voters. This is indicated in Alberto's metaphor that giving promises is similar to courting a woman: promises are mere rhetoric.

As we can see from the above statements, *kilatis* (scrutiny) and *kalkulasyon* (calculation) serve as the twin bases for discerning and judging the moral fabric of a leader—in this case, the mayor. Ordinary people's calculations are not made irrationally or in a sloppy fashion, but are arrived at through *gawa* (work, an action, or a result of work, task, duty) that can be seen (*kita*) and *pangako* (promises) that can be heard. Judgments about the intentions of superordinates are made concrete by reading their bodily gestures and facial expressions (*pagmumukha*). The scrutiny is directed toward the leader's *loob* (inner being) and is expressed in the description of the qualities of a human being—whether he is a good person (*mabait/magaling na tao*), hot-tempered (*masungit*), or a fake (*mapagkunwari*).

In order for *gawa*—mostly related to local development projects such as agrarian funding, provision of pesticides, school building, *barangay* basketball courts, health care, scholarships, jobs, and so on—to be appreciated or felt, a leader is required to have a sincere *loob*. The mayor's *gawa*, as indicated in the interview above, is appreciated only when the *loob* of the person is scrutinized: whether he or she is a good person, a hot-tempered person, or a fake/deceiver. A *gawa* that is without the element of *loob* is just a mechanical action, occurring in the realm of formal politics, i.e., public life and local development. It remains an emotionless *gawa* that can only be seen (*kita*) but not felt, which potentially can be used against voters during election time. To appreciate the *gawa*, it has to be scrutinized according to whether or not there is an association of *loob*. When this connection is achieved, then *gawa* becomes *real*, the public activity becomes linked to the state of a person's *loob*, i.e., whether it is *mabait*, *masungit*, *mapagkunwari*, or *talagang totoong-totoo* (true, sincere).

Hence, making a decision based on a politician's *pangako* is never sufficient in ordinary people's perception. As indicated above, rather than relying on a politician's *pangako*, people judge the politician through the *gawa*. *Gawa* will not be appreciated if the politi-

cian’s *loob* is tainted with insincerity. One person’s ability to scrutinize another person’s *loob* through *gawa* can be reached only when both their *loob* correspond with each other or, in ordinary people’s language, when they “feel” (*nararamdaman*) the *loob*.

Utang and Loob vis-à-vis Utang na Loob

When discussing patron-client ties, we cannot run away from the values of *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude). In conventional political studies, the concept of *loob* (inner being) has always been linked to the social practice of *utang* (debt). A dyadic relationship is maintained wherein *utang na loob* is a hierarchical exchange of gifts between a landlord and a tenant, a superordinate and a subordinate. Failure to reciprocate invites *hiya* (shame), or the stigma of being *walang hiya* (no shame). Subordinates can never really be discharged from their debt to the superordinates, and therefore choices are made in accordance with the former’s own powerlessness that creates scope for manipulation by superordinates.

There is more to *utang na loob* than is presented in conventional political studies, however. This section demonstrates how ordinary people interpret *utang na loob*, seen as a sociocultural practice in multifaceted ways in relation to the practices of *tulong*. The interview below showcases precisely the aforementioned “sincere” criteria in an ideal *utang na loob* relationship, as gleaned from the conversation I had with Kuya Bong on the 2004 elections:

*Eh syempre, hindi naman natin, hindi nating maaaring sabihin na si Sonia kaya hindi nanalo masamang tao. Hindi naman. Syempre iyong, komo ang kilala namin na sapul ay si Corona, syempre, unang-una eh kami’y nakinabang na noong una niyang term. Eh syempre, mayroon na kaming konting utang na loob sa kanya. Sa bagay, kay Sonia, ganon din dahil itong, halimbawa, may anak ako na nagtatrabaho, halimbawa, sa Yazaki. May utang na loob din ako, pero iba, iba naman ang klaseng utang na loob ko doon kay Torres dahil iyong aking anak kung nagtatrabaho man doon, nakikinabang sila, ano? Hindi katulad ng kay Corona na siya ay aming ibinoto na ang kapalit naman ng kay Corona ay iyong buong puso naman niya na ibinibigay sa amin na wala namang kapalit. Syempre, saan ka naman lalagay? . . . Ayan, katulad ng mga lambat na iyan; marami kami dito binigyan, walang siningil kahit singko. Ang hinihiling nga niya pag may miting, kinakailangan eh lahat naroon para maunawaan, para malaman. . . .*⁹⁾

[Of course, we can’t say that the reason why Sonia (Sonia Torres Aquino, Mayor Corona’s rival in the 2004 election) lost is because she’s a bad person. It’s just that we knew Corona from the very beginning because we’ve been able to benefit from his first term. Of course, we have a debt of gratitude to him. I have a child who works in Yazaki. I also have a debt of gratitude to Sonia, but

9) Kuya Bong (fisherman). Interview by author, March 16, 2005, Barangay Angeles, Tanauan City.

it's a different kind of debt because as my child works there, she [also] benefits from it, right? In the case of Corona, we voted for him because he gives wholeheartedly without expecting anything in return. Of course, there's never any doubt that we would support him. We would support Corona because he doesn't ask for anything in return. . . . Like those [fishing] nets there, there are a lot of us here who were given those, and he never asked for anything in return. He only asks that we attend meetings so that we all know and understand. . . .]

The use of *utang na loob* in this interview reveals the multilayered meanings of *utang* and *loob*. The importance of *utang*, and the appreciation of *loob*, are given different weights and judged at different levels. At one level, we note that the provision of employment to Kuya Bong's daughter by Sonia Torres Aquino simultaneously benefited (*nakikinabang*) the employer (the company owned by Sonia's brother). Furthermore, Kuya Bong's support of Corona is determined according to whether or not the latter is doing (*gawa*) his tasks well as a politician. In such cases, *utang na loob* does not connote gratitude, as is usually assumed. In the first instance, even if a job is provided, the "debt" (*utang*) has already been repaid in the form of labor services where both parties eventually benefit. In the second instance there is the recognition on the part of the "debtor" that it is the obligation of a politician to perform (*gawa*) his/her responsibilities as a civil servant to the people. There is an exchange of gifts involved—an act of reciprocity based on the payment and repayment of *utang*—in this case fishing nets. However, the *loob* of Kuya Bong appears not to be compromised at all. Kuya Bong has assessed the "gratitude" or *loob* side of the material help, the *tulong*, by recognizing in it the sentiment of moral duty on the part of his superordinate, that is, the mayor (Corona), who does not ask for anything in return except attendance at meetings. Kuya Bong is weighing the qualitative return between Sonia and Corona. Both provide help but of different types. Sonia's help consists of a mutually beneficial calculation of interests written into her job description, while Corona's help contains the moral duty of a civil servant to the people.

In the previous section, we discussed how *gawa* becomes *tulong* when it is accompanied by a sentiment from the *loob*. Let us extend the discussion of *gawa* further in the context of *tulong* and *utang na loob*. The *gawa* and the *tulong* carry different connotations. On one hand, we have the *gawa*: the material aspect of an activity that can be seen or touched, or the physical reality of the politician's performance as a public servant. Therefore, the *gawa* can be regarded as mere *utang* that can be repaid through, for instance, labor services. *Tulong*, on the other hand, is the nonmaterial dimension of help that resides in the feeling (*pakiramdam*) of one's inner being—the *loob*—being manifested in the physical reality. Therefore, *tulong* is associated with *loob* and cannot be measured in terms of material repayment. In the context of *utang na loob*, when support is given to

a leader, it is the mutual respect of each other’s *loob*, not the *utang*, that is being recognized and reciprocated.

Deriving from Kuya Bong’s experiences of *gawa* with Corona and Sonia, the *utang* in terms of economic beneficence is not omnipotent. The goodness of a leader is not significantly measured by the economic advantage or “survival of means of production” that results from an exchange of gifts. Ordinary people negotiate and reciprocate their support to a politician through their appreciation of the *loob* of the person (*tao*) or leader. Yielding to the *loob* of a leader comes about, however, only after scrutiny based on a sustained observation of that person’s deeds. It is the moral sentiment of the *loob* manifested in the act of *gawa*, such as not asking for anything in return—*walang kapalit* (no return) or *walang kabayaran* (no payment)—that people look for and appreciate. This serves as a gauge for the sense of humanity (*pagkatao*) in a politician that can be felt (*maramdaman*) by constituents. When the workings of a leader’s *loob* can be “felt,” then *gawa* becomes genuine *tulong*. Speaking of *utang na loob*, it was Corona’s *tulong*, rather than Sonia’s *gawa*, that Kuya Bong was referring to. Kuya Bong’s *utang na loob* came about as a response to Corona’s *mabait/magandang loob* (kindheartedness/good inner being) that he appreciated and therefore reciprocated in terms of *loob* (through his support to Corona), more than the obligation to repay the economic component of the debt or the fear of the social stigma of *hiya* (shame).

“*Utang*,” in fact, becomes a modifier when connected by the ligature “*na*” to “*loob*”: it becomes the adjective “*utang na loob*,” illustrating the noneconomic nature of the currency of the *utang*. The *utang na loob* in Kuya Bong’s language of reciprocity underlies the modified “*loob*” within the act of *tulong* manifested by a person (*tao*)—whether a politician or non-politician—thereby making the economic *utang*, the modifier, meaningful to ordinary people. Therefore, to understand why ordinary people appreciate help from a politician in the context of *utang na loob*, one has to differentiate between the *gawa*, which produces a mechanical exchange of debt, and the *tulong*, which manifests the “emotional,” immaterial, and much more important side of *utang*.

The analysis above indicates that *loob* serves as an emotional platform for ordinary people to scrutinize their leaders beneath their surface acts. The social practices of *pagkikilatis/kalkulasyon* (scrutinization/calculation) in *gawa* and *pangako* prove to be fundamental concepts in understanding how ordinary people negotiate political relationships with their leaders. Deriving from *utang na loob*, especially of the *loob* that lies within and informs the *utang*, ordinary people are looking for a “harmonization” of *loob* that can be felt (*maramdaman*). When this is reached, ordinary people see politics, which operates in everyday politics, as being about *magandang loob* (goodwill), *mabait* (goodness), justice, respect, and genuineness.

Through our previous discussion of the bases for scrutiny from the perspective of ordinary people, we can appreciate the local concepts that enable us to understand ordinary people's distaste for conventional politics and how the field of meaningful politics can be different from that of *pulitika*, which is seen as dominated by the elites, especially at election time. More important is that the masses' understanding of patron-client ties is Janus-faced, a view that conventional political studies would subscribe to: factional contests, the culture of indebtedness, playing out of ambitions, and power struggles. We now turn to the discussion of *pulitika* as interpreted by the masses.

The Interpretation of *Pulitika*

The masses, or "clients," are indeed a critical component of patron-client ties. The masses do realize the consequences of receiving help from patrons and the consequences during election time. In the context of *pulitika*, the Janus-facedness of patron-client ties is in the realm of "bad" politics. The analysis of concepts such as *gawa* versus *pangako* helps us to understand the meaning and nuances of politics from the perspective of ordinary people. This manifestation of politics among the masses is not seen in the realm of formal politics or in front of politicians. The way I understand it, the public transcript that the masses manifest at the level of *pulitika* is "games" played with politicians; the masses tread cautiously so as not to reveal their intention (in this context their preferred candidate) and at the same time exploit the election campaign for short-term interests.

The conversation below pertains to how *pulitiko* (politicians) behave in the context of *pulitika*. This conversation was held when electoral candidates came to meet people (specifically women's groups) during the campaign period. Through the help of *liders* (leaders), meetings were organized and political messages were slipped into the meeting agendas to court for votes.

Ate Jul: *Oo, mga sinasabi sa mga member, o, dalin natin si ganito. Kasi may lider kami, o, ang dadalin natin si ganito. May sasabihin sa iyong dala. Eh pero, kami syempre, hindi ka naman pwedeng sumagot na aba'y hindi. Hindi pwede. Kaya lang ang tinatanong namin iyong puso namin. Kahit pa ba kami utusan mo, syempre, tango ka lang dyan nang tango. Pulitika din ang gagamitin mo dyan eh! Hindi ka pwedeng, ayaw ko sa kanya. Baka mamaya . . .*

[Yes, they tell their members to support a particular candidate. Of course, you can't say no. We just ask our hearts. Even if you order us, of course, we just say: "We also use politics!" You can't explicitly say you don't like the candidate. Maybe next time . . .]

Ate Liz: *Pagdating ng araw na—*
[When the time comes—]

Ate Jul: *Ito lang ang tatanungin mo, ang ballpen kasi ikaw naman ang magsusulat. Ikaw ang magsusulat, eh di ang, kahit pa ba sabihin sa iyo, kung hindi mo gusto iyong ano, eh di isulat mo iyong kursunada mo.*

[You’ll be the one to write, not your ball pen. So no matter what they tell you, you just vote for whomever you want.]

Ate Liz: *Pag magkakaharap, sige ho. Pagdating ng araw . . .*

[If you’re faced with each other, OK. But when the time comes . . .]

Ate Jul: *Pag hindi ka kasi naging matalino, wala eh. Kasi kung umayon din lang naman tayo nang umayon tapos wala din, wala din namang naitutulong, nakakasama lang ng loob eh. Ay, di mabuti pang iboto mo iyong kursunada mo. Kahit walang maitulong, kahit papano hindi sasama ang loob mo dahil ikaw ang bumoto ng kursunada mo. Ay, mahirap kasi iyong patuturo ka sa pagboto tapos, syempre, pangako iyan nang pangako. Aasa ka doon sa mga pangako. Tapos ang ibinoto mo pagdating ng oras na nakiusap ka eh hihindian ka, wala. Sasama lang ang loob mo.*

[If you’re not smart, nothing will become of you. If we only say yes and not think about it, and in the long run the candidates we hastily voted for don’t really help us, we’ll just feel bad. So it’s better to vote for whomever you like. Even if that person isn’t able to help you, you won’t feel bad because you only have yourself to blame. It’s hard to be carried away by promises. Of course, you will get your hopes up for the promises. Then the person you voted for will turn you away when you ask for help. You’ll just feel bad.]

Ate Liz: *Mahirap nang sumama sa agos.*¹⁰⁾

[It’s hard to get carried by the tide.]

Pulitika, as an English loanword, literally means “politics” but connotes a nuance that does not involve the scope of politics, i.e., consensual democracy and civic life. From the conversation above, *pulitika* is equated with false promises. In *pulitika*, favors and material incentives are given by a candidate to court for votes. Similar to our discussion on the difference between *pangako* and *gawa*, a candidate usually gives promises only to influence voters. Favors, help, and promises that are provided during election time are not similar to the *tulong* (help) that is extended in everyday life. In the local expression, *pulitika* is similar to someone who is seen crawling under the cover of night and slipping bribe money under the door: “*Ang iba pa nga dyan nagbibigay ng pera, ang tinatawag na gapang sa gabi, abot sa pinto* (Some others give money; it’s what is called crawling in the night, until the door).”¹¹⁾

Ate Jul is cautiously aware of the promises and favors given during election time. She is also aware of the consequences of being open and honest with leaders on her choice

10) Conversation between Ate Liz (sari-sari store owner) and Ate Jul (farmer). Interview by author, April 14, 2005, Barangay Angeles, Tanauan City.

11) Tatay Bending (canteen helper). Interview by author, March 4, 2005, Barangay 1, Tanauan City.

of candidates. To her, these are mere strategies within *pulitika* that do not bring guarantees or security to the people after election. In her perception, *pulitika* is deceitful and does not ensure security. Thus, one is required to be *matalino* (smart) in order not to be disappointed after elections. The help given in the context of *pulitika* does not involve the *loob*, as we have discussed in previous sections—i.e., it does not manifest *magandang loob*. It is merely a pure political stratagem to win votes. And interestingly, Ate Jul is also playing political games.

The ideal way of “doing” politics is to vote for someone according to one’s scrutiny of the politician and their inner being/self (*loob*): “*Kaya lang ang tinatanong namin iyong puso namin* (We just ask our hearts).” The reference to the *loob* expressed in *puso* highlights how ordinary people’s “feelings” operate in politics (not *pulitika*), such as, for example, their assessment of politicians through the feeling of their distance (*malayo*) or closeness (*malapit*) in order not to be disappointed and to be able to ask for *tulong* later on. When someone says, quoting from the interviews above, “You’ll be the one to write, not your ball pen. So no matter what they tell you, you just vote for whomever you want” or “Even if that person isn’t able to help you, you won’t feel bad because you only have yourself to blame,” this indicates that one has the ability to scrutinize whoever is considered to be a *mabait na tao* (good person) and it is important to vote for someone who is trustworthy. If *tulong* is not provided, at least the *loob* or the self (*sarili*) will not be tainted by guilt and disappointment.

In this regard, the kind of voting behavior that is based on the blind acceptance of blank promises and receiving favors as unscrupulous “clients” during elections pollutes people’s *loob*, and the consequence will be the negligence of the welfare of people; in short, a sinister *pulitika* is at work, which leads to future disappointment, and so we must try to avoid being pulled in.

Another dimension of *pulitika* is the employment of tactics and strategies. The relationship between a candidate and a voter is based on a cautious calculation of strategies to avoid being stigmatized as *walang hiya* (shameless) in trying to secure future benefits. This is also expressed in the abovementioned conversation between Ate Liz and Ate Jul. We can see Ate Liz’s calculation of the possibility of future consequences—“*Pagdating ng araw na . . .* (When the time comes . . .)” —which means that even though she does not like a candidate, she will still reserve a space for negotiating a future relationship with that politician, which means having to avoid making negative comments explicitly to a candidate. In *pulitika*, both parties (candidate and constituent) are playing strategic games with their requisite tactics: “*Kahit pa ba kami utusan mo, syempre, tango ka lang dyan nang tango. Pulitika din ang gagamitin mo dyan eh* (Even when we are being given orders, of course, we just nod and nod [in assent]. We also use politics in that case!)”

Finally, *pulitika* is perceived as a game that politicians introduce and which people play along with. Like children they form camps and go with one or the other leader, but after the game is over the losers disappear. In other words, *pulitika* is not a serious undertaking by the community at large. But if it is just a game, who ultimately benefits from it?

Tatay Bending: *Iyon ang mga nakakaintindi sa pulitika. Dito sa bayan eh ang pulitika eh parang ano laang, iyong parang laro laang ng mga bata, kanya-kanyang bata. O, bata ko iyan. O, bata ko ito. Sama ka sa amin. Eh di hati tayo. Ganyan lang iyan eh. Pagkatapos naman ng botohan eh matatalo iyong isa. O, ano? Saan ang bata?* [Laughs]

[They (the candidates) understand politics. Here in town, politics is like a **game for children**—each with his/her own children to support. That’s my kid. That one’s my kid. Come with us. We share. That’s the way it is. After the elections and one loses, what now? Where’s your kid? [Laughs]]

Tatay Bending: *Noong una, mayroon. Eh sa ngayon, eh ang mga ano naman ngayon, kumbaga sa ano eh botohan, hindi pantay, hindi patas ang laro.*

[At first, it (politics) could make a difference. But now, voting isn’t equal. The **game** isn’t played on an equal footing.]¹²⁾

The perception of *pulitika* as a game of politicians that temporarily draws in ordinary people is more vividly shown in the dialogue below on Tatay Bending’s experiences with politicians.

Woman: *Hindi kasi naboto si tiyo eh.*

[Uncle does not vote.]

Tatay Bending: *Nadala ako. Dahil sa aking anak, dahil sa aking anak na napagbintangan ng marijuana. Kaya ako’y nagalit eh dahil sa nagkasakit na ang aking anak eh kinuha pa. Noong kinuha, nailabas naman ng kapitan dyan sa barangay dos. Naiuwi, eh di nagkasakit. Naggawa ng bahay doon sa ilog na para hindi siya maligalig. Ngayon eh ____ sa paa, nagkasakit, kinukuha na ulit ng pulis. Sabi namin eh huwag muna, magpapagaling muna. Hindi ika, sandali laang, kakausapin laang. Eh mahina na, wala nang boses. Aba, eh ikinulong! Hindi man lang, pupunta sa center eh. Hindi na makalakad, hindi na makahakbang, ganyan. Eh pagka ganyan, nauupo, nagpapahinga. May posas pa. Paano kang matutuwa noon? Lalagyan pa ng posas eh ang lapit-lapit naman ng center. Bago sasabihin ng pulis eh iyon daw eh kanilang _____. Kalokohan iyan! Hindi na nga makalakad, lalagyan mo pa ng posas.*

[I learned my lesson. It’s because of my son who was accused of (possessing) marijuana. I got so angry because they took my son away even though he was sick. When he was taken, the captain of the *barangay* bailed him out. He was brought home, and he got sick. There was a house there

12) Tatay Bending (canteen helper). Interview by author with a woman and Tatay Bending, March 4, 2005, Barangay 1, Tanauan City.

near the river, which was built so he wouldn't cause trouble. Now ____ (mis-recording), when he was sick, the police took him away again. We told them (the police) to wait until my son was better. They said they'd take him for just a little while, only to talk. My son was so weak, he didn't even have a voice (he couldn't talk). He was jailed! He wasn't even allowed to go to the (health) center. He couldn't walk, couldn't take a step on his own. When he climbed a stair, he had to sit down and rest. He was even handcuffed. How can you be happy with that? They handcuffed him when the (health) center was just so near. Then the police said ____ (mis-recording). That's foolishness! He couldn't even walk, and they handcuffed him.]

Woman: *So karamihan talaga ang bawal na gamot talaga hindi mo, laganap na talaga. Hindi na masugpo eh. Ni-raid ang Maruha noon. Damay iyong anak ni tiyo. Binata, ikinulong, namayat, namatay. Hindi nagawan ng paraan ni mayor.*

[Drugs are really prevalent now. It can't be solved. Maruha (a precinct in Barangay 1) was raided then. Uncle's (Tatay Bending's) son got involved. He was unmarried, and he was jailed, got thin, and died. The mayor wasn't able to do anything.]

Tatay Bending: *Di nagawan gawa ng dadalin sa Batangas eh. Aayaw-ayaw. Naghihingalo na eh, dala ang ambulansya, kagkag, ay hindi na nakarating ng Batangas. Bumalik na. Wala nang pag-asa eh. Paano ka matutuwa niyan? Tumutulong ka sa kanila eh, tapos ngayon eh wala ring nangyari. O, di tapos na.*

[They were supposed to bring him to Batangas (City). When he was on the verge of death, they put him in an ambulance and rushed him to Batangas, but they weren't able to get there. They came back. It was hopeless. How can you be happy with that? You help them (the politicians), but nothing happened. There, it's finished.]

Woman: *Nadala na si tiyong bumoto.*

[Uncle learned his lesson about voting.]

Tatay Bending: *Pagka ako'y pinipilit, eh di kayo na ang bumoto. Huwag mo na akong isasali dyan. May pera eh. Matatapakan ka.*¹³⁾

[When I'm being forced, I tell them to go ahead and vote. Don't involve me there. They have money. They will step on you.]

One perspective on the above narrative would be that the incident was an exceptional case as it involved death, and therefore the resentment was at a more personal level of emotional assertion, not necessarily a spelling out of ordinary people's understanding of *pulitika*. Nevertheless, the fact that Tatay Bending had been turned away from help at a particularly critical time is connected by him with the meaning of *pulitika* in general. The incident has taught him to stop voting, i.e., to abandon that system of politics altogether. *Pulitika* connotes a negative domain that cannot guarantee one's

13) A woman and Tatay Bending (both canteen helpers). Interview by author, March 4, 2005, Barangay 1, Tanauan City.

(especially the poor’s) welfare, similar to *pangako* seen as rhetoric during election time. Elections are just a temporary space for politicians to court for votes and fulfill their desire for power. In *pulitika*, the ultimate consequence is oppression, i.e., *matatapakan* (to step or suppress), blank promises, and the absence of compassion toward others (i.e., no help was given in a time of need to save Tatay Bending’s son). Thus, *pulitika* is just like a game for children—“*parang laro laang ng mga bata*”—that perhaps benefits the rich (*mayaman*) and the politicians (*pulitiko*), but not the poor (*mahirap*).

To sum up this session, the patron-client ties that function in the *pulitika* context pertain to “bad” politics that serve the vested interests of both parties, but predominantly on the patron side. With the cultivation of ties between the two parties, interests become loyalty and loyalty becomes “culture.” Patron-client ties take the form of “bad” politics at the expense of people’s welfare, responsive governance, and democracy. In Iletto’s (1999b, 160) definition:

Pulitika is the perception of politics as a process of bargaining, with implicit self or factional interests involved. The interaction between colonial power and its native words was *pulitika*. At another level, it refers to the practices by which leaders cultivate ties of personal loyalty and indebtedness to them, or simply attract votes.

According to Resil Mojares (2002, 338) *pulitika* “. . . is imaged in terms of elite factional competition (*inilungay sa katungdanan*), manipulation (*maneobra*), spectacle, and dissimulation.”

Both definitions of *pulitika* above reverberate with the perceptions of ordinary people in the *barangay* regarding *pulitika*—that it is a game dominated by the elites, the *mayaman*, and the *pulitiko*, introduced during election times to involve the people in politics and to employ various stratagems with which to court for votes. In sum, to study popular politics, we are required to extend the scope of politics to include *pulitika* but to go beyond it as well. To understand what politics really means to the people, we need to incorporate the politics of emotion in their everyday lives and realign our analytical sights to the all-important idiom of *loob*, expressed in various social concepts such as *magandang loob*, *mabait*, and *utang na loob* as previously shown.

Concluding Remarks

Tulong (help), whether it is studied through the political economist, culturalist, or structuralist approach, has always been a convenient concept to describe the ties between patrons and clients, disguised in material rewards or personal services, which are simply

seen as *gawa*. This paper uses the approaches that stress an analysis of the lexicon of language and sociocultural context and argues that to understand ordinary people's politics, it is essential to decode and interpret the "hidden" political behavior of the masses and their interpretation of *tulong* not merely from a political economic aspect, but more importantly from a sociological and cultural aspect. What is lacking is the taken-for-granted Janus-facedness of patron-client ties, especially the interpretation of the clients' side, their "submission" into the *tulong* provided by the patron—in other words, their acceptance of *tulong*.

Ordinary people's contestations cannot be seen as a claim for power and pragmatic interests. Rather, they are ways of asserting the people's views of what an ideal, or at least better, society should be. In ordinary people's reckoning, the attachment to the "soul stuff" of a leader is actually the act of justifying, scrutinizing, and claiming for respect and dignity, equality, and justice that is without discrimination and is free of corruption. Such reckoning is manifested at the level of everyday politics.

Kerkvliet (1991; 1995) rightly points out that politics or political activities can be identified at two levels. One is the level of formalized political institutions such as election campaigns, deliberation of legislations, public policies, governance, and so on. However, to comprehend the politics of the masses or the subordinates, another level of politicking is useful. Kerkvliet's concept of everyday politics—defined as an "unorganized and informal discourse and activity of everyday politics where people come to terms with and/or contest norms and rules regarding authority, production, and the allocation of resources" (1995, 418)—is the realm of the subalterns' political activities. The subalterns' "hidden" political behavior is intended not to jeopardize their connection with the patrons, whom they see as essential for their survival. This is similar to Scott's *Hidden Transcripts* (1990), which captures the behind-the-scenes political discourse in this manner. Scott's (1985) other works in rural Malaysia indicate the way in which peasants do contest and resist but their practices of contestation are hidden from the superordinate; they are nonrevolutionary and yet antagonistic to their unequal relationship with the patrons. What is significant in Scott's and Kerkvliet's works is that they recognize the everyday politics of the masses and understand that it is antagonistic to the patrons in a subtle manner. The subalterns do speak and contest. *Tulong* in the rural Philippines is one such discourse that helps to understand peasants' demands and articulations.

In rural areas of the Philippines, *tulong* has always been practiced and connotes different meaning in different contexts. It can be in the form of votes, financial aid, services, and so on. When *tulong* is put in the context of elections, such as in the form of promises for local development, it becomes something that is "dirty," manipulative, and selfish.

To the masses, this is *pulitika* and the *tulong* (or *gawa*) is a mere stratagem of the patrons to court for votes. *Tulong* in the *pulitika* context subscribes to the patron-client ties of hierarchy, favoritism, debt of gratitude, and manipulation. In this context, *tulong* is seen as *gawa*, which refers to the context of development. *Gawa* does not connote “bad” politics as in the case of *pulitika*. It is more the responsibility of the government to the people, but it potentially can be used against clients in the *pulitika* context when it comes to elections. However, patron-client ties are not static, nor do they remain at the “dirty” end of politics. When *gawa* turns into *tulong* to include the sentiment of *loob*, the Janus-facedness of patron-client ties is evident in the shift toward “good” politics.

This paper does not intend to dismiss the patron-client ties framework or to constitute another theoretical framework for understanding Philippine politics. While recognizing the patron-client ties at work in Philippine society, the paper also argues that there are other political features in play—whether to construct a more responsive government or to sustain patronage politics at the expense of democracy. Unfortunately, as has been showcased by many incidents and events, Philippine politics remains underdeveloped—judging from the country’s political instability, such as in the southern part of the archipelago; insignificant if not stagnating economic growth; and social problems, especially the nation’s unresolved poverty.

Some researchers might question the significance of studying the masses’ interpretation of *tulong*, since there is a persistence of “bad” politics in the Philippines, especially in rural areas where patron-client ties are prevalent and customary. It is difficult to identify precisely where the political deficiency lies—with the patrons or with the voters. It is also difficult to determine whether the voters are selling their votes for short-term advantages and are thus disrespectful of democratic institutions. Thus far, I am only able to provide the discourse of politics in which the people share their stories and views about politicians. Whether these contested views will translate into votes for change is difficult to determine. Providing answers to these issues requires a more thorough analysis and deeper research. I am merely providing alternative ways to explain the rationale of the masses in the realm of everyday politics, which I believe is essential to understanding the masses’ political activities and interpreting their relationship with politicians.

However, my preliminary observation tends to support the hypothesis that the reason the masses continue to engage in patron-client ties is because formal institutions have failed them. What is available in the realm of formal politics is government officials such as politicians, and relationships with them need to be cultivated. The masses know very well that if they hope to gain from the institutional setup, the game needs to be played well and cautiously. The Philippine masses are not passive or submissive to “dirty” politics. Nor do they blindly submit to the patrons due to vested interests. Their

political activities extend beyond this. The masses also look for responsive leadership in the realm of everyday politics. To turn such “politics” into another institution requires much more than this analysis can discern. Equally important, we should attempt to understand the “politicking” of the masses and to recognize that the masses are not ignorant, uneducated, or simply vying for material rewards and money, especially during election time. Their socioeconomic conditions, social relational dynamics with politicians, encounters with fellow *barangay* folks, and ideas of morality shape the way they “do” politics. However, this does not mean that all things are static and bounded within a given cultural setting or standard rules of conduct. By understanding the multifaceted political behaviors and constant shifts of social hierarchy, we might be able to appreciate the nonlinearity of the historical construct and complexities of a community such as in Barangay Angeles.

Lastly, I remember during my field research when a nonpolitical figure was helping the community, he or she would be “pushed” to become a politician, for that personality had desirable qualities according to the people in the community. Unfortunately, when a person became a political official, the desirable qualities were usually not sustained and the politician fell prey to corruption and money politics. I shall conclude this paper by quoting from an interview I conducted with a farmer to indicate his distaste for Philippine society, which fits in with my description of people’s view against regarding *pulitiko* as beacons of hope to help the community.

*Mga tao dito may konsyensya dahil lahat naman maka-Diyos ang tao eh. Problema laang pag nasingitan ng pera. Kasi ang Diyos ng tao dalawa eh. Sabi noong iba, devil. Hindi, pera. . . . Pera, pera ang nagiging dahilan ng kasamaan.*¹⁴⁾

[People here have a conscience, because everyone is religious. The problem starts when money comes into the picture. People worship two gods. Others say it’s the devil. Isn’t it? **It’s money.** . . . **You wouldn’t be evil if not for money.**]

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Singapore's Prescription for Successful Control of Transnational Emerging Infectious Diseases*

Minako Jen Yoshikawa**

Severe acute respiratory syndrome, a previously unknown emerging infectious disease, spread to multiple locations across continents in 2003 without being initially identified as a life-threatening infectious disease. The Republic of Singapore, in Southeast Asia, was one of the countries/areas affected by the global outbreak. With almost no existing procedures on how to deal with an emerging epidemic of such severity and rapid transmission, the country managed to formulate and implement policies to support countermeasures against this infectious disease. The interventions by the Singapore government covered of social and economic issues beyond the scope of public health, and promoted the involvement of governmental bodies and the general public. This example set by Singapore has been well recognized by international communities as the employment of successful containment measures. By scrutinizing public health measures deployed by the country, this paper identifies a political will that was embodied in a total governmental approach toward the emerging infectious disease in 2003; analyzes the origin of governmental intervention in health matters in the Republic; and shows why this country must choose to fiercely fight against health threats.

Keywords: Singapore, SARS, emerging infectious disease, Global City, transnational, political will, total governmental approach

I Introduction

In 2003, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) emerged as a serious threat to

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worldwide health, resulting in 8,096 cases of infection and claiming 774 lives in 29 countries and areas.¹⁾ Singapore fell prey to SARS between March and May 2003, reporting 238 infected people and 33 deaths. Hidden from human eyes, the entirely unknown emerging infectious disease (EID) of “the age of globalization” imposed political, economic, and social threats in addition to medical challenges (World Health Organization (WHO) 2006, viii).²⁾ The spread of SARS in urban, developed, and modern healthcare settings raised concerns globally. At the same time, the social attention to strict countermeasures imposed by governments also increased.³⁾ The primary purpose of this paper is to analyze factors contributing to the success. I will, in particular, evaluate the influential role of the Singapore government in implementing infectious disease intervention. The government gained recognition for its effective containment of the spread of SARS. The secondary purpose is to elucidate motives behind the proactive public health management in the Republic, which have existed since the inception of the young nation.

Before I proceed further, it is helpful to review two misconceptions pertaining to infectious diseases in developed economies such as modern Singapore. The first misconception is that infectious diseases no longer threaten the developed world, due likely to the perceived association between poverty and disease burden. In reality, developed nations are not free from serious threats of infectious diseases. In 1996, an enterohemorrhagic *Escherichia coli* O157 outbreak affected 9,451 patients and caused 12 deaths in Japan, then the second largest economy in the world. The O157 serotype caused morbidity numbering in the thousands in subsequent years in Japan (Machida 2005, 113–117).⁴⁾ In 2007, media reports on methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* infection caused fear in the United States.⁵⁾ In 2009, the pandemic H1N1 influenza quickly spread beyond national and other territorial borders to affect both developed and developing areas globally.

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- 1) The figure represents 21 percent of healthcare workers; 95 percent of cases were concentrated in 12 countries/areas of the Western Pacific Region of the WHO (WHO 2006, 185). The “Spanish flu” is believed to have claimed 20 million–100 million lives.
 - 2) An emerging infectious disease refers to a disease “of infectious origin whose incidence in humans has increased within the recent past or threatens to increase in the near future,” including one that has emerged “in new geographic areas or increased abruptly” (WHO 2005, 1).
 - 3) This paper will define a government as a governing body consisting of politicians and public servants engaged in the service of the supreme authority.
 - 4) Morbidity is the condition of illness or abnormality, the rate at which an illness occurs in a particular population or area.
 - 5) A report on the fatality in Virginia and outbreaks in schools across several states in the country was aired on October 16 and 18, 2007, as “the country is on the heels of the national crisis,” by the NBC Nightly News; “silent killer in hospitals, schools and day care centers that are often discovered when it is too late” was aired by the CBS Evening News on October 18, 2007.

The second misconception is that developed countries can easily control disease outbreaks. While superior healthcare facilities, laboratory capacities, and qualified professionals can contribute to effective responses *vis-à-vis* infectious diseases, engaging in active infectious disease management is largely at the discretion of individual governments. Governments might, therefore, choose to direct their full attention to other political agendas despite the new International Health Regulation 2005 requiring each member state to fulfill its responsibility. Additionally, high-quality healthcare is not synonymous with an ability to easily overcome infectious diseases. This is because the primary focus of modern clinical medicine has shifted from preventive public health intervention in infectious diseases to the cure and care of chronic diseases, cancers, organ transplants, and other high-tech medicine.⁶⁾

The People's Action Party (PAP), the *de facto* Singapore government, has governed Singapore uninterruptedly since 1959, when Singapore attained self-rule. Singapore became an independent state in 1965. At the end of the 20th century, a report published by the WHO ranked Singapore 6th among 191 members under the category of "Health system performance in all Members States, WHO Indexes, estimates for 1997" (WHO 2000, 200). Key health indicators in 2009 were indeed impressive: Singapore's infant mortality rate of 2.2 per 1,000 live births was one of the lowest in the world, and life expectancy at birth (male/female) stood at 79/83.7. The high economic development of Singapore today as well as its small land size (712.4 km² as of 2010)—equivalent to that of Bahrain or Amamiyoshima of Japan—are often used to explain Singapore's achievements in general.

The view that Singapore's economic development and small size account for the country's success in infectious disease management is too simplistic. Singapore has an environment suitable for the propagation of most pathogens. First, the island state is located 137 km north of the equator, and its tropical climate is characterized by high temperature and high humidity in addition to abundant rainfall. While Singapore is generally spared from natural disasters like earthquakes and tropical cyclones, it is the only industrialized nation situated in a tropical climate zone where infectious diseases are prevalent. Thus, Singapore faces far more health challenges than other developed societies. Second, the urban city-state faces further increase in population density. According to the Ministry of Trade & Industry, the total population was 1.9 million in 1965. The number increased to 5.08 million by the end of June 2010, composed of citizens (64 percent), permanent residents (11 percent), and others (25 percent).⁷⁾ Whereas the overall population density was 7,022 persons per km² in 2009, the central business district in

6) Although its definition varies, public health is concerned with population health.

7) The ethnic composition of the majority of the population (citizens and permanent residents) was Chinese (74.1 percent), Malays (13.4 percent), Indians (9.2 percent), and others (3.3 percent).

the south central part of the main island is even more densely populated. More than 85 percent of the main island is already built up with residential, commercial, and industrial zones. Third, Singapore, identified as the financial, medical, and industrial hub in the region,⁸⁾ experiences frequent movements of population. Although rural migration to urban areas within the country—typically seen in other urbanized areas in Southeast Asia—is absent, the movements of people in Singapore include not only students, tourists, business visitors, and foreign executives but also foreign migrant workers. These inherent conditions should not be underestimated.

As a result of frequent interactions between humans and pathogens in overcrowded urban areas, infectious diseases can be transmitted much easier in this tropical urban city-state than in less-populated rural areas. As long as Singapore desires to keep its national borders open to the global economy, importation of infectious diseases is inevitable. Referring to the period of the SARS outbreak, the then minister for national development stated that Singapore could not close its borders because of its role as “an international air hub and a major financial and business center” (Ministry of National Development 2003).

Focusing on etiology and clinical management, abundant scientific and medical research, e.g. by WHO (2003), has furthered the understanding of the new global health threat. The WHO (2006) not only provides details of the epidemiology, but also evaluates governmental responses of several countries and areas including Singapore. In the WHO’s 2006 publication, the Singapore government received good recognition: “Early cooperation from Singapore provided essential information that helped the global control of the SARS outbreak” (*ibid.*, 106).

An objective evaluation of Singapore’s SARS containment measures from a political perspective is provided by Khai Leong Ho (2003) in an analysis of six Asian governments. Ho notes that others referred to Singapore’s policies and concludes that the country’s “right steps in the right directions” could stem from its “authoritarian” political environment, compact geographical size, and timeliness of actions. Chorh-Chuan Tan (2006) reviews achievements and shortcomings of Singapore’s measures and attributes the outbreak containment to “strong political leadership and effective command, control and coordination of responses.” On the other hand, Kai Khiun Liew (2006) blames the ruling party for “framing the containment of SARS in militaristic terms rather than as a public health issue” to “reinforce” political legitimacy. However, this condemnation can be challenged since words such as beat, defeat, and fight are commonly used when referring

8) Besides port businesses generating movements of goods and people, Changi Airport in Singapore handled in excess of 35 million passengers and 214,000 aircraft in 2006, servicing 183 cities in 57 countries (De Koninck *et al.* 2008, 60).

to actions to overcome diseases.

As for health policy formulation, Peggy Teo *et al.* (2005) present a compelling argument that decisions relying heavily on biomedical research alone could misplace social perspectives, pointing out possible “overpolicing” even among the historically compliant Singapore citizens. In contrast, legal implications of infectious disease management in Singapore are documented by Catherine Tay (2003), giving a good argument to support the legality of strict enforcement of public health measures.

Mui Hoong Chua (2004) expands the scope to observe the implementation and effects of Singapore's measures in such areas as national cohesion, state actions, community reaction, and individual effort. A household survey in May 2003 revealed that more than 80 percent of respondents approved of official information and “authorities’ openness to communication” had a positive effect on compliance with preventive measures (Quah and Lee 2004). Another community survey conducted by Gabriel Leung *et al.* (2004) toward the end of the outbreaks found that Singapore respondents showed lower anxiety than residents in Hong Kong (HK).

Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) (2004) contributed its perspective on healthcare professionals and modern healthcare institutions in Singapore, recounting hardships during the SARS outbreak. Stronger evidence of the burden is reported by Kang Sim *et al.* (2004) and David Koh *et al.* (2005), revealing sufficient SARS-related psychiatric and posttraumatic morbidity based on surveys conducted in healthcare settings in Singapore in July and mid-May to mid-July 2003, respectively.⁹⁾

Regarding overall public health measures, Kee Tai Goh *et al.* (2006) discuss initial weaknesses and improvements that were subsequently made, analyzing the epidemiology in hospitals, a laboratory, and communities in Singapore. Kee Tai Goh and Suok Kai Chew (2006) call for attention to EIDs by providing comprehensive accounts of the SARS transmissions, details of painstaking public health prevention and control measures, and the “framework” of SARS response in Singapore.

However, the existing scholarly research has not fully examined in detail the mechanism allowing the tiny nation to perform such a massive-scale infectious disease control nor explained why infectious diseases are recognized as important issues in the city-state. I will, therefore, analyze the emergency response of policy makers, public health policy implementation by health authorities, and involvement of local people. This analysis will involve public health perspectives and political, economic, and social issues. The result indicates that Singapore's SARS management reflects the influence of political leaders.

9) Interestingly, D. H. Phua *et al.* (2005) report less psychiatric morbidity among healthcare providers in the emergency department of a hospital in Singapore, pointing out a couple of explanations including unique ties among the staff.

I will then show that this political will was present much earlier by tracing Singapore's public health efforts to the first two decades immediately after the inception of the nation in 1965, when the country was susceptible to frequent outbreaks of classical infectious diseases. The measures implemented as national strategy earlier will reveal Singapore's political determination to continue controlling infectious diseases. My hypothesis—that historically embedded political will ensures Singapore's active governmental intervention in infectious diseases such as SARS—can then be tested.

II Methods and Materials

An area studies approach adopted in the present research combined literature investigation and extensive fieldwork *in situ*. Preliminary fieldwork was carried out in September 2006, when the feasibility of collecting information through interviews with civil servants, academics, scientists, healthcare providers, and other resource persons was confirmed. Subsequently, six fieldwork trips were conducted, mostly in Singapore, in 2007 and 2008, as shown in Table 1.

The fieldwork allowed access to governmental documents and local newspaper

Table 1 Periods of Fieldwork, Major Organizations Visited, and Conferences Attended between 2006 and 2008

Periods of Fieldwork	Organizations Interviewed, Conferences Attended (Selected List)
Sept. 6–26, 2006	National University of Singapore Public Hospital A Private Hospital A
Feb. 3–Mar. 29, 2007	Ministry of Health Private Hospital B Regional Emerging Diseases Intervention Center National Environment Agency, Head Office
Aug. 17–31, 2007	Private Hospital C Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy Health Promotion Board World Health Organization, Western Pacific Regional Office* Asian Development Bank*
Oct. 2–6, 2007	Environment Health Institute
Mar. 15–25, 2008	Tan Tock Seng Hospital (reference public hospital for SARS) Ministry of Health Singapore Medical Council
May 1–10, 2008	Health Promotion Board
Sept. 1–15, 2008	Capacity Building in the Prevention of Contagious Diseases Training Course (organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore and Japan International Cooperation Agency) Communicable Disease Centre Public Hospital B Public Hospital C

Note: * These are located in Manila, the Republic of the Philippines, while all others are in Singapore.

articles containing information from the 1960s to the 1980s. Interviews with health authorities at the Ministry of Health (MOH), its related organizations, and healthcare professionals displayed their hands-on approach in responding to the SARS outbreak and frequent references to the past struggle with infectious diseases. Furthermore, the fieldwork in Singapore generated favorable circumstances, i.e., direct observation and interaction with resource persons and other residents to evaluate how policies are actually implemented. It was beneficial to learn the views of international organizations toward the SARS threat and Singapore's contribution in Manila in 2007. In addition, the author visited Singapore eight times between March 2009 and June 2011 (not listed in Table 1) for another research project, which provided opportunities to follow up this research. All field trips were funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and this author.

III Results: Singapore's Anti-SARS Response

III-1 *Being "UNIQUELY Singapore"*¹⁰⁾ against SARS

"Atypical pneumonia" was the initial description of the disease that turned out later to be an extremely dangerous new infection. Most cases were caused by direct contact with infectious materials like respiratory secretions from a person with the disease; the incubation period ranged from 2 to 10 days. The etiological agent was subsequently identified as a new strain of coronavirus (CoV), and the microorganism was later named SARS-CoV. The EID was first imported into the city-state from HK by a Singaporean tourist who stayed at the Metropole Hotel, where the "super spreader" from the People's Republic of China checked in on February 21, 2003, the beginning of *annus horribilis*. Literally one overnight stay of the symptomatic individual was enough for the lethal virus to infect as many as 16 hotel guests and one visitor.¹¹⁾ From here, the virus rapidly traveled to Canada, Vietnam, and Singapore along air routes. Patients initially complained of general symptoms like fever and cough, and SARS managed to deceive even experienced healthcare workers before developing into full-blown outbreaks at modern hospitals in

10) An expression used by the Singapore Tourism Board for brand promotion of the city-state.

11) HK Department of Health learned of the index case on February 24, but the linkage to the hotel failed to attract initial attention. The warning pointing to the hotel, arrived from Singapore on March 13 and then the federal health authority Health Canada on March 18. "Only then did the Department of Health start reviewing all its files on reported cases of severe community-acquired pneumonia" (WHO 2006, 142). HK authorities may have an alternative explanation, as detailed in "SARS in Hong Kong: from Experience to Action," report, <http://www.sars-expertcom.gov.hk/english/reports/reports.html>, accessed August 9, 2011.

urban cities like HK, Singapore, and Toronto, “bringing some public-health systems to their knees” (WHO 2006, vii).¹²⁾ Soon, international trade stalled, tourism suffered, and stock markets plunged.

The prime minister of the Republic of Singapore at the time, Goh Chok Tong, took a very proactive role in the battle against SARS. On April 19, he conveyed the firm stance of the Singapore government to the people and asked for social responsibility from all Singaporeans at a media conference. This was followed by a parliamentary speech delivered on April 24 by the current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who was then the deputy prime minister and finance minister. He spoke about the three “battlefronts” that the government was determined to control: public health, economy, and society. He stressed the last as being the most “critical” and added: “Government is doing everything possible. But for these policies and measures to succeed, every Singaporean must play his part” (Chua 2004, 110). The political leaders uniquely pulled together politicians, civil servants, scientists,¹³⁾ medical professionals, and the general public during the SARS outbreak. Singapore’s efforts to control SARS were praised by the WHO, who described it as “a 21st-century model for epidemic control,” referring to the effective public health measures and the careful plans of the government to promote support from the community (WHO 2006, 245).

The following five sections will investigate each of the distinctive areas in the containment of SARS in Singapore and show that the influencing forces boil down to a single factor: political will, which called for a total governmental approach.¹⁴⁾

III-2 *Benefitting from the Rapid Response of Organizations and Groups*

One of the notable features of Singapore’s SARS management was the quick mobilization of human resources that was enabled by the country’s organizations. Table 2 presents the major organizations that handled SARS management in Singapore. The MOH organized a task force only two days after Singapore learned about the first global alert on atypical pneumonia from the WHO. The government modified or added organizations to enhance its ability in making speedy decisions and implementing policies.

This flexibility is criticized by Michael Barr and Zlatko Skrbiš (2008), who judge that the government was incapable of controlling the SARS outbreak and that the response

12) The nonspecific initial clinical features include fever ($>38^{\circ}\text{C}$), chills, headache, malaise, myalgia, and diarrhea. Consequently, 20–25 percent of patients required intensive care (WHO 2006, 178).

13) Local laboratory experts devoted to pursue the new SARS-CoV and development of early diagnostic tests (WHO 2006, 106).

14) Containment is reduction of morbidity and mortality to levels at which the disease is no longer considered to be a public health problem.

Table 2 Three Major Governmental Groups in Charge of SARS Management

	Executive Group	MOH SARS Task Force	Ministerial Committee on SARS*
Formed in/on	1973	March 15, 2003	April 7, 2003
Chaired by	Permanent Secretary of Home Affairs	Director of Medical Services, MOH	
Members	Permanent Secretaries (senior civil servants) of relevant ministries, such as the MOH, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, joined by other ministries depending on the nature of the national emergencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •CEOs (all hospitals) •Medical board chairpersons •Infectious disease physicians •Epidemiologists •Virologists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Ministers (Manpower, Health, National Development, Education) •Second Ministers (Finance, Defense) •Senior Ministers of State (Education and Trade and Industry, Transport and Information, Communications and the Arts) •Ministers of State (Health and Environment, Manpower and Education)
Mission	To coordinate and implement multi-agency issues in national emergencies	To formulate strategies to rapidly control the spread of SARS	To provide political guidance and strategic decisions for mitigation of the socio-economic damage caused by SARS

Note: * Details are in a press release dated April 7, 2003, at http://www.mha.gov.sg/news_details.aspx?nid=ODI4-PvfdQeVER4s%3D, accessed August 7, 2011.

was “ad hoc and reactive” (*ibid.*, 255). Being knowledgeable of Singapore’s health system but critical of the PAP’s rule, Barr dismisses Singapore’s SARS management as having been incapably stagnant for the first five weeks (Barr 2005, 168). This negative evaluation contradicts the findings by the majority of researchers, including those from the WHO, who have conducted numerous investigations into the microbiological, epidemiological and clinical features of SARS.

When problems went beyond the purview of medicine and the situation deteriorated globally, on April 7 Prime Ministry Goh Chok Tong established the Ministerial Committee on SARS, consisting of ministers (politicians) to strengthen the Executive Group of senior civil servants.¹⁵⁾ The prime minister gave the committee a mission to provide policy opinions and strategic arrangements. His decision was a resolute step because the SARS management demanded a prescription that was different from previously known infectious diseases. For the cross-ministry coordination, the MOH in turn formed the Inter-Ministry SARS Operations Committee chaired by the ministry’s senior director of operations.

15) Now known as the Homefront Crisis Executive Group, the group has been in existence since 1973. The group was activated in the past, for example in 1999 when the Nipah virus infection was imported from Malaysia.

Referring to the works of Barr, Rodney King (2008) notes that “responsibility for handling the crisis was taken from the Minister for Health and then given to two ministerial committees” (*ibid.*, 131). However, the health minister remained active in SARS management while non-clinical issues were coordinated by the committees. Singapore’s political leaders and public administration actually showed a unique concerted effort upon this pressing challenge.

The government effectively mobilized additional human resources in public services. An example was a flexible arrangement for the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) and the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) to assist the MOH with both physically labor-intensive and time-sensitive tasks requiring a strong chain of command.¹⁶⁾ An army brigadier-general was seconded to the MOH to play a directive role such as conversion of vacant flats into quarantine quarters and large-scale contact tracing tasks. A statutory board under the MINDEF,¹⁷⁾ the national authority on military technology and weapons known as the Defence Science & Technology Agency (DSTA), set up an IT system to trace diverse contacts. They ranged from healthcare providers, family members, visitors at healthcare institutions, school teachers, classmates, and workplace colleagues to commuters in close proximity to SARS cases (Goh *et al.* 2006, 302). Furthermore, the DSTA provided radio frequency identification tags for hospital infection control measures, which prevented accidental movements of healthcare providers beyond wards used for isolating SARS cases.

Another source enabling the dominant PAP to quickly mobilize resources was the People’s Association (PA). Established by the PAP in 1960, the PA is a statutory board chaired by the prime minister, and connects many grassroots organizations in Singapore with the government. Working with members of parliament, the PA functions to “strengthen racial harmony and social cohesion” and disseminates the government’s vision and common goals to the community.¹⁸⁾ During the SARS outbreak, PA volunteers fluent in various Chinese dialects supported the English-speaking health officials. When the Singapore Civil Defence Force provided language assistance to individuals requiring translation during the contact tracing operations, 66 PA volunteers supported the task (Chua 2004, 81).¹⁹⁾ Following the community outbreak at the Pasir Panjang wholesale vegetable center, the multilingual PA was mobilized jointly with the SAF and the police

16) On April 23, 250 army personnel were deployed to the MOH for two months (Goh *et al.* 2006, 302).

17) Established by the PAP, statutory boards are governmental organizations under relevant ministries.

18) Details are at <http://www.pa.gov.sg/home.html>, accessed August 8, 2011.

19) The PA volunteers included businessmen, members of educational, religious, and other institutions, senior citizens, and members of ladies clubs.

Table 3 Highlights of Actions, Events, and Outcome in SARS-affected Developed Areas

	Singapore	Hong Kong	Taipei, Taiwan	Toronto and Vancouver, Canada
Date of SARS onset	Feb. 25	Feb. 15	Feb. 25	Feb. 23
Isolation of probable cases	Mar. 6	Mar. 11	Mar. 15	Mar. 13
Making SARS notification mandatory	Mar. 17	Mar. 27	Mar. 27	Mar. 25
Home quarantine of close contacts of probable cases	Mar. 24	Apr. 10	Mar. 18	
Travel advisory from WHO	No	Apr. 2–May 23	May 8 (Taipei) May 21 (all)–June 17	Apr. 23–28 (Toronto)
Removal from list of affected areas by WHO	May 31 ¹⁾	June 23	July 5	July 2
Total population	4.3 million	6.9 million	2.6 million ²⁾	6.7 million ³⁾
Reported cases	238	1,755	346	251
Deaths	33	299	37	43

Source: Modified from WHO (2006; 2007).

Note: ¹⁾ Date of removal differs among literatures; some sources like Chua (2004) state it as May 30.

²⁾ (Taipei City Government 2005). Population of Taiwan was approximately 23 million.

³⁾ It consists of 4.7 million in Greater Toronto area and 2 million in Vancouver out of 32 million in Canada.

to rapidly cordon off the market. The PA volunteers administered fever checks in the community and distributed 1.1 million SARS kits consisting of thermometers, masks, and other items to every household (*ibid.*, 123). Since SARS required an unprecedented scale and speed of mobilization of human resources, those in public services, the private sector, NGOs, schoolchildren, and volunteers responded.

In contrast, overconfidence and “the lack of broad general views of risk management” (Tambyah and Leung 2006, xxiii) could have contributed to the slower response in HK. The situation was made even more complicated by a concern that the novel disease might be due to the feared human-to-human transmitting H5N1 influenza. Table 3 shows that Singapore preceded not only HK but also Taiwan and Canada in isolation of probable cases and amendment of the law to include SARS as a legally notifiable disease. Singapore designated a SARS-dedicated hospital on March 22 and HK on March 26.²⁰⁾ The quicker actions of Singapore could partially explain the remarkable differences in outcome; the WHO removed Singapore from the list of SARS-affected areas on May 31, ahead of other locations, based on the condition for removal requiring the absence of new locally acquired cases for 20 days (Table 3). Singapore, with two-thirds the population of HK but one-seventh the number of patients and one-ninth the number of deaths, had a

20) HK implemented the policy on March 29, 2003.

much smaller scale of spread. Following Vietnam, where foreigners initiated outbreak control, Singapore became the second country to contain the local transmission of SARS. The city-state “attracted a slew of very positive comments from even its most skeptical foreign critics” (Ho 2003, 196).

III-3 *Preserving Consistency and Accuracy in Information Disclosure*

As the Asian Development Bank recognized the magnitude of “isolation from the global community” of certain countries during the SARS period (Peralta and Hunt 2003, 79), a lack of transparency or insufficient information disclosure of health risks of global significance resulted in international condemnation. The People’s Republic of China was criticized for not having shared knowledge of new epidemic risks sooner, because the inaction delayed global awareness of the health peril. Although the government in China “was initially reluctant to disclose the gravity of the situation” (Fan and Chen 2007, 147), the newly sworn in President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao replaced the mayor of Beijing and the minister of health, and demonstrated a dramatically different approach in disclosing the epidemic situation (Abraham 2007, 103).

In contrast, Singapore maintained constant communication with international communities. The WHO recalls that occasional telephone conversations with Singapore’s health minister enabled the agency to judge Singapore’s situation as unlikely to threaten the public health of the global community. This assessment led the WHO not to issue a travel advisory for Singapore (WHO 2006, ix) but to issue advisories for HK, Guangdong, Beijing, Shanxi, Toronto, Tianjin, Inner Mongolia, Taipei, and Hubei.

In addition, Singapore’s proactive information disclosure was uncompromised even when the MOH—observing the first global health alert three days earlier—communicated to the WHO soon after finding out that a potentially SARS-infected Singaporean physician was on a flight to Frankfurt. Singapore’s timely information was praiseworthy, as delayed action would have resulted in serious outcomes not only in Germany but also in many other parts of the world.

Initiating regular press releases and conferences, Singapore provided complete and timely information. However, biased foreign media information circulated. In response, the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA) engaged relevant agencies in monitoring and investigating reports, tracking down rumors, and verifying information (Chua 2004, 112). The Ministry of Home Affairs refuted an erroneous report in the Malaysian press (MHA 2003).

Furthermore, Singapore succeeded in mobilizing the local mass media to alleviate the fears of the public by airing updated information and educational messages. In other words, the mass media became effective tools of risk communication. On May 21, 2003,

Singapore Press Holdings (a government-controlled press), Starhub (a telecommunications company), and Mediacorp (a media company) established the SARS TV channel, which streamlined SARS-related information by broadcasting programs in English, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil, and some Chinese dialects to capture as wide a viewership as possible (Chua 2004, 155–156).²¹⁾ The print media disseminated educational materials prepared by government agencies such as the Health Promotion Board under the MOH. By and large, it can be said that the efforts at information disclosure demonstrated by the Singapore government won the praise of international health organizations and Singapore residents alike (Chan 2006, 361).

III-4 *Rectifying Weaknesses of Healthcare Settings and Public Health Environment*

Upon the emergence of SARS, the national referral center in charge of treating infectious diseases known as the Communicable Disease Centre (CDC) could not cope due to insufficient space.²²⁾ The CDC added 40 isolation rooms by May 7 and another 40 by May 17, and a new national center—CDC2—with 39 isolation and 18 ICU beds was constructed. Thus, the authorities improved healthcare infrastructure and capability with remarkable speed and magnitude. Three containment strategies, i.e., closure, ring fencing, and concentration of cases, were implemented at hospitals (Goh and Chew 2006, 294). TTSH no longer accepted other patients but became the designated SARS healthcare institution. The decision to centralize all SARS cases appears sensible, as it mitigated the risk of transmission in other healthcare settings.²³⁾

The SARS-dedicated modern hospital suffered a few ill effects. The frequent transmission of the virus among healthcare professionals unveiled a gap in the use of N95 masks at TTSH (TTSH 2004, 24). The largest cluster of nosocomial, or hospital-acquired, transmission occurred among patients in the more crowded eight-bedded wards, reflecting cost pressure at modern hospitals. The SARS experience made the MOH stockpile up to six months' worth of personal protective equipment supplies in preparation for surges in demand; and all other hospitals enhanced contingency plans (Goh and Chew 2006, 300–301). TTSH reduced the number of beds per ward to allow adequate distance among patients. Moreover, Singapore implemented a color-coded alert system that

21) A MICA officer explained to me in a personal interview in March 2010 that the timing of the channel setup should have been much earlier to be more effective.

22) Since the CDC alone could not respond to the sudden surge in demand to isolate patients, TTSH—located opposite the CDC—used its general wards, which potentially resulted in more cases at the hospital (TTSH 2004, 24).

23) Triage functions were established at polyclinics to screen patients with fever, which reduced the burden on hospitals and facilitated early defecation.

defined three levels of local transmission of infectious diseases and response protocols (MOH 2004, 1–5). This framework was applied for a pandemic influenza preparedness plan in Singapore (Goh *et al.* 2006, 311). Hence, the country's competency in infectious disease management improved.²⁴⁾

The government also saw it necessary to provide a safer environment to protect healthy individuals from SARS. The National Environment Agency (NEA) under the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources promoted a campaign emphasizing personal hygiene and environmental cleanliness. The NEA escalated many regular public services, e.g., cleaning and disinfecting public areas, culling pests, checking on waste disposal and collection, and inspecting sewerage systems.

A much more direct public health intervention, however, became necessary to disrupt the route of infection of SARS, which was transmitted from human to human. "When SARS emerged in Singapore in 2003 and contacts started to come down with the disease, my Minister for Health asked what could be done to prevent transmission. I suggested home quarantine but cautioned that it would be very difficult to enforce," said Dr. Goh Kee Tai.²⁵⁾ After a few decades of absence of serious human-to-human transmissible infectious disease outbreaks, Singapore was not ready to implement the isolation procedure. Goh recalls the struggle: "we had to learn from scratch the operational problems of quarantining thousands of contacts during the outbreak."²⁶⁾ In fact, the implementation of quarantine measures generated problems requiring active social management, which the next section will explain.

III-5 *Addressing Social Issues with a Carrot-and-Stick Policy*

The Environmental Public Health Act, which made littering or spitting in public places an offense, was already in effect before SARS struck Singapore. During the SARS outbreak, these offensive and irresponsible acts were considered anti-social due to their role in the spreading of germs (Tay 2003, 20). The MOH invoked the Infectious Diseases Act on March 24 and empowered health officers to carry out investigation, surveillance, and isolation. The mandatory Home Quarantine Order (HQO) was implemented by

24) Rapid identification and isolation as the precautionary measures implemented during the March–May period may have worked to prevent further transmission when a 27-year-old Chinese Singaporean contracted SARS through accidental contamination in a microbiology laboratory in September 2003 (WHO 2006, 46).

25) Personal communication (an e-mail from Dr. Goh Kee Tai, received on October 26, 2007).

26) Personal communication (an e-mail from Dr. Goh Kee Tai, received on October 26, 2007). Goh was the head of the Quarantine and Epidemiology Department, Ministry of the Environment, from 1978 to 2003, and was involved in the revision of the infectious disease legislation in 1976.

ministerial cooperation with the PA. The HQO required each person identified as having been in close contact with a SARS patient to stay at home for 10 days. The MOH hired officers (uniformed like police officers) from the government-linked security agency CISCO; the officers delivered HQOs and installed electronic surveillance cameras at the residences of quarantined individuals. Then, home surveillance personnel would telephone these individuals at random intervals daily to ask them to turn on and stand in front of the cameras. Offenders who violated the HQOs were monitored with electronic tags to make sure they stayed at home.²⁷⁾

On top of strict laws and active persuasion by political leaders to ask residents to cooperate, the government provided social support to assist the individuals under the HQOs. The MOH sent nurses to provide medical advice. In addition, alternative premises were arranged for those who preferred to minimize disruption to other family members. An excursion to Jurong Bird Park, an aviary park, was arranged to cheer up families under quarantine. The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports and the National Council of Social Service mobilized five welfare organizations to provide elderly care arrangements and counseling. PA volunteers delivered food to quarantined people. The government swiftly appointed Community Development Councils to administer an allowance scheme, which provided financial aid to those who had lost income due to HQOs.²⁸⁾ In total, more than 8,000 HQOs were issued (Tan 2006, 347). Although negative reaction to this intrusion of privacy was natural, a survey in Singapore showed as many as 93 percent of sampled individuals indicating a willingness to observe quarantine measures (Teo *et al.* 2005, 287).

However, a serious social problem soon surfaced. The quarantined individuals became feared as sources of infection. Lee Hsien Loong spoke against the discrimination and stigma on May 1, 2003; “[p]eople on HQOs are not dangerous, neither have they done anything wrong. It is just sheer bad luck that they came into contact with a SARS case. . . . They should not be feared or stigmatized” (MOH 2003).

Similarly, the general public came to avoid healthcare institutions and workers, potentially triggered by the approximately 76 percent of nosocomial cases in Singapore

27) The Infectious Diseases Act was further amended to ensure compliance with the HQO. According to section 65, offenders could be jailed for up to 6 months and/or fined S\$10,000 upon conviction for the first offense, and imprisoned for a term not exceeding 12 months and/or fined S\$20,000 for the second and subsequent offenses (Chua 2004, 124–127; Tay 2003, 50). Even the high-profile Madam Kwa Geok Choo, the wife of then Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, was quarantined at home after having undergone an ultrasound scan examination at a hospital where a SARS case was reported.

28) The scheme provided self-employed people with S\$70 a day and employed people with an amount equal to their daily salary, up to a maximum of S\$70 a day, during the quarantine period (Chua 2004, 123).

(WHO 2006, 189).²⁹⁾ “Being a TTSH nurse had quickly become a stigma in the public eye,” and some landlords asked nurses who worked for the hospital to move out (TTSH 2004, 116). The government soon responded: a hotline service for healthcare workers was established, and political leaders actively tried to influence the opinions of the people. Politicians delivered speeches urging the general public to show appreciation and express backing to healthcare professionals.

Soon, the Caring for SARS Caregivers project was initiated with the support of the Red Cross. Many healthcare workers in Singapore even volunteered to work in SARS wards. In contrast, wages had to be raised in Canada to retain staff, and 25 healthcare workers in Taiwan walked out in reaction to ring fencing of an affected hospital (Chua 2004, 186). A potential explanation for the outstanding dedication and professionalism displayed by healthcare workers in Singapore came from the former president of the Singapore Nurses Association: leadership-led elevation of healthcare professionals through media glorified their roles; social support provided by the government, such as accommodation arrangements, helped them concentrate and focus on their duties; and the younger nurses were especially motivated to overcome their fears and show courage.³⁰⁾

III-6 *Stimulating Economy by the Mobilization of Financial Resources*

Despite the best efforts of the Singapore government, the epidemic still had a devastating economic impact. SARS inflicted damage on Singapore’s image as an attractive business and tourist destination. Although Singapore disclosed risk information and the WHO did not issue a travel advisory for the city-state, average hotel occupancy rates fell to 40 percent; inbound visitor arrivals dropped sharply, and retail, including restaurant sales, declined by the second quarter (Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) 2003, 10).³¹⁾ Table 4 gives details of the S\$230 million urgent financial relief package announced on April 17 by the government to rescue severely impacted industries such as the airline, cruise, hotel, and restaurant industries as well as affected individuals in taxi services and travel agents. As restoration of confidence in tourism was deemed necessary, the government set up an international image task force. Reportedly, foreign tour organizers were invited to Singapore to observe the tight control measures implemented at Changi International

29) Other sources report slightly different percentages. Certain medical procedures such as aerosolization of respiratory secretions (e.g., intubation: the use of nebulizers, suction, or assisted ventilation) may have caused the transmission in healthcare settings.

30) Personal interview with Tan Wee King in Singapore on August 25, 2007. Her view supports findings by D. H. Phua *et al.* (2005).

31) Visitor arrivals fell by nearly 100 percent on a seasonally adjusted annualized rate basis (MAS 2003, 10).

Table 4 S\$230 Million SARS Relief Package

Items	S\$million
Tourism-related industries	
1 Additional property tax rebates for commercial properties	56
2 Higher property tax rebates for gazetted tourist hotels ¹⁾	8
3 50% reduction in Foreign Worker Levy for unskilled workers in gazetted tourist hotels	2
4 100% rebate of TV license fees for gazetted tourist hotels	2
5 Cess (indirect tax) rebate and waiver of cess security deposit	20
6 Bridging Loan Program for tourism-related small-medium enterprises	10
7 Enhanced training grant for certain approved tourism-related courses	57
Transport sector	
8 Diesel tax rebates for taxis	25
9 Waiver of taxi operator license fees	3
10 Road tax rebates and flexible laying-up procedures for buses	0.3
11 Relief measures for the aviation industry	45
12 50% reduction in port dues for cruise ships	0.2
Funds for SARS victims, grants to families, and awards to healthcare workers	
13 S\$1 million up-front contribution to Courage Fund	1
14 Matching grant to Courage Fund ²⁾	–
Total	230

Source: Modified from MAS (2003, 15).

Note: ¹⁾ Gazetted tourist hotels are premises declared under the Singapore Tourism Act.

²⁾ Other measures except for this item ended by December 31, 2003.

Airport. The decisiveness of the policy may have saved the macro economy from a much larger and more prolonged downturn.

IV Discussion

The previous section described examples of challenges faced and measures implemented by the Singapore government in response to SARS. Singapore's massive and wide range of reactions to SARS prompts the question as to why the city-state takes such an aggressive stance in defending against EIDs. In addition to SARS, the Singapore government is also active and persistent in fighting against mosquito-borne infectious diseases such as dengue virus infection and chikungunya fever.³²⁾ In this section, I will discuss the

32) Dengue virus infection re-emerged in Singapore in the late 1990s, and Singapore scaled up its national control program, especially after the regional outbreak in 2005 (Yoshikawa 2010, 66–67). Singapore controlled the first local outbreak of chikungunya fever quickly and enhanced control measures to deal with the subsequent outbreaks in 2008 (Yoshikawa *et al.* 2010, 41–42).

motivation behind the Singapore government's desire to control infectious diseases and show that this political will has been exercised over decades. It appears that the seemingly overreactive measures have their roots in the core values or strategies selected by the first generation of political leaders at the birth of the nation, when controlling infectious diseases was not an option but a necessity.

IV-1 *Singapore's Aim to Become a Global City*

"History teaches that the improvement of human health at the population level is largely determined by good policies . . ." (Peralta and Hunt 2003, 1).

Singapore's encounter with infectious diseases dates back to the days when the territory was a former British colonial trading port. During the colonization, migrant workers especially suffered from a wide range of diseases. Singapore saw smallpox, plague, diphtheria, cholera, and malaria in the early 20th century; typhoid in the 1930s; polio in the 1940s and 1958; and Asian influenza in 1957 (Chan and Ting 2007, 8–10).

Singapore joined the Federation of Malaysia on August 31, 1963, and was expelled from the federation two years later. The Republic of Singapore was born on August 9, 1965. The loss of an important hinterland presented new challenges, and the young nation was required to alter policies. The new country was full of people to feed but had few natural resources, insufficient agricultural products, a sluggish economy, and no particular industry.³³⁾ Under the backdrop of 10 percent unemployment in Singapore in the 1960s (Trocki 2006, 148),³⁴⁾ President Sukarno's Confrontation Policy in Indonesia, and the need to keep a distance from the communist-ruled People's Republic of China, three issues haunted Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's prime minister from 1959 to 1990. These issues were international recognition, defense, and the economy (Lee 2000, 22–23). The overnight S\$157 million loss due to the devaluation of the sterling pound in November 1967 (Tan 2007, 137),³⁵⁾ and the British withdrawal from Singapore, deprived the new nation of 70,000 service jobs (Lee 2000, 69). Chong-Yah Lee calculated the impact as 15–16 percent of gross national product between 1968 and 1971 (Lee 1980, 4,

33) About a quarter of the territory produced poultry, pork, and half of the vegetables required in 1960 (De Koninck *et al.* 2008, 40). A midyear estimate of the population in 1965 was 1,864,900 (MOH 1968, 35).

34) Non-seasonally adjusted total unemployment rates for June 1957 and 1970 show 5 percent and 8.2 percent respectively (MTI 2007, 15), and 14 percent is reported right after independence (Lee 2000, 23) and for slightly earlier years (Tan 2007, 85).

35) Devaluation was from USD/GBP 2.80 to 2.40 and caused Singapore to lose 14.3 percent of its sterling reserves, according to Lee (2000, 57). However, Singapore's civil servant Ngiam Tong Dow said that the devaluation caused only moderate damage (Tay 2006, 45).

41). Thus, pessimism prevailed: "Economically and politically separate from Malaysia, militarily separate from the UK, not many would have predicted the economic success and political stability . . ." (Trocki 2006, 127).

Under these delicate geopolitical and challenging economic circumstances, PAP leaders like Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Keng Swee, "the architect of Singapore's economy," chose a strategy of inviting foreign direct investment (FDI) and multinational corporations (MNCs) to develop industries.³⁶⁾ The new government, with the assistance of the Economic Development Board (established in 1961 by the PAP), approached the United States, Japan, Europe, and the Commonwealth while keeping reasonably good relationships with the former suzerain (*ibid.*, 127–128).³⁷⁾ The newly independent state thus became destined to survive as a "Global City" by opening the country wide to the world.³⁸⁾

The Global City concept was introduced in 1972 by Sinnathamby Rajaratnam, who is best remembered as a minister for foreign affairs. He expected Singapore to become an advanced city, connected through cable, satellite, international financial networks, air, and sea, catering to both regional and global destinations. He conceptualized that Singapore's survival would benefit from "a relationship of interdependence in the rapidly expanding global economic system" (Kwa 2006, 165–179). Political will was exercised by the first generation of Singaporean leaders in choosing the national strategy of a Global City to feed the people, bring prosperity, and sustain the nation. Achieving the goal, however, required multiple tasks, i.e., governmental actions, in the newly born country.

Several components of Singapore's industrialization strategy are well understood, including its legal system, tax incentives, and wage management. However, the mechanisms of the vigilant control of infectious diseases—which have resulted in the improvement of population health—remain insufficiently understood.³⁹⁾ Population health is an important factor for MNCs when evaluating investment risks. While an acute "health

36) According to Amitav Acharya, the young country's strategy to invite MNCs actually ensured committed interests of the developed world in Singapore, which worked to provide the "foundation of its national security" (Acharya 2008, 25, 58).

37) In 1972, 46 percent of new foreign capital invested was from the United States, which became the second largest trade partner by 1973. Other capital providers were Western Europe, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Australia (Turnbull 1982, 308). The four top investors in 1980 were: 26.3 percent UK, 22.5 percent US, 11.7 percent Japan, and 1.9 percent the Netherlands (MTI 2007, 12).

38) According to Chong Guan Kwa, Singapore essentially counteracted the weaknesses and disadvantages of a tiny city-state reliant on neighbors for survival (Kwa 2002, 123).

39) N. Ganesan mentions health along with housing and education as areas that were given priority by the PAP in the first two decades (Ganesan 2002, 53).

shock” can quickly impact capital markets as seriously as a coup d’état or the assassination of an important politician, FDIs react more slowly. Nevertheless, these long-term investors are likely to link unhealthy citizens to system failure or the incapability of policy makers (Tandon 2005, 1–3). In other words, a government must first respond to problems of a public health nature. Japan is a good example of this concept: there is a popular belief that Japan’s economic progress led to the successful control of infectious diseases, but in fact, its GNP rose sharply only after roundworm prevalence was lowered from 60 to 5 percent and schistosomiasis from nearly 15 to 2 to 1 percent in the early 1960s (Takeuchi 2004, 177–179).

Since shortages in manpower in addition to scarcity of land could have been fatally disadvantageous for Singapore’s budding development, ensuring the health of the labor force became an essential prerequisite for the Singapore government, which required FDIs to build up industries, create jobs, and generate production. Leaders saw it as their responsibility to furnish citizens with a solid structure in which they could “learn, work hard, be productive and be rewarded accordingly” (Lee 1998, 132). Visualizing Singapore’s transformation into “the cleanest and healthiest state in Asia,”⁴⁰⁾ the Lee Administration began improving social services. As Kai Lok Chan (1985) notes, referring to the urban slum conditions in the mid-1960s (*ibid.*, 56),⁴¹⁾ a series of housing policies followed along with education and healthcare services. Chairman of the Housing Development Board (HDB) Lim Kim San, now popularly referred to as “Mr. HDB,” became minister for national development in 1963 and announced the Home Ownership Scheme in 1964. The board started providing low-cost public housing to the low-income segment of the population (Turnbull 1982, 316), amounting to 105,420 apartments between 1966 and 1975 alone, thus increasing the percentage of total population living in public units from 24 to 54.8 percent (Chan 1985, 57). The housing policy contributed to the improvement in living conditions of those who had previously lived in slums.⁴²⁾

Indeed, painstaking efforts were made to improve population health across the

40) NUS 1967–June 1969, 80 (*ST*, August 8, 1968).

41) Rodney King (2008) disagrees with the depiction of the vulnerable and poor conditions of the new nation in 1965, claiming the description as “one of Singapore’s most enduring myths” (*ibid.*, 7).

42) It is also known that strict quotas of Chinese, Malays, Indians, and others concurrently functioned as a solution to another English legacy: racial division. Although the English language was prioritized at school, given its neutrality and usefulness in business (Lee 2000, 173), the multiracial island-state adopted four official languages—English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil—in the process of fostering national cohesion. Since several dialects of Chinese were used, a common use of Mandarin Chinese was promoted in the “Speak Mandarin” campaign that started in 1978. Although the evaluation of Singapore’s education and language policy is beyond the scope of this paper, the government’s attention proved to be beneficial owing to the important role of languages in disseminating information relating to health.

nation.⁴³⁾ My data collection from the English language newspaper the *Straits Times* (ST) confirmed ample evidence of infectious diseases and the determination with which the Singapore government acted in the 1960s and 1970s. Table 5 shows examples of these actions, with the five-year plan announced by the minister of health in 1970 declaring “[g]overnment’s effort of providing a better and healthier environment for the people to live in.”⁴⁴⁾ The country had neither sufficient healthcare providers nor facilities.⁴⁵⁾ In response, the government encouraged the local medical education system to produce more Singaporean doctors while at the same time ensuring sufficient doctor numbers by recruiting foreign doctors. Five hospitals were built between 1960 and 1974; 13 outpatient dispensaries in 1959 was doubled to 26 in 1974 (Barr 2005, 148). As a result, there was one physician for every 1,404 people in 1971, an improvement from 1,968 people in 1966.⁴⁶⁾

Outbreaks of cholera and typhoid occurred almost every year in the early years. In the year of independence, less than 80 percent of about 50,000 street hawkers involved in food services were licensed and knowledgeable about public hygiene, and these hawkers consequently attracted flies and rats (National Archives of Singapore 2008, 27). Intensive investigations of food-borne infectious diseases indeed often traced the route of transmission to those engaged in food services at local hawker centers and schools (Singapore Government 1967, 308). In response, the Health Ministry occasionally issued warnings and introduced regulations to food handlers in the Hawkers Code in 1965.⁴⁷⁾ Table 6 summarizes public health-related laws. For example, The Environmental Public Health Act in 1969 made it illegal for premise occupiers not to “dispose of refuse or filth within 48 hours” and for anyone to litter in public places.

After its inauguration in September 1972, the new Ministry of the Environment took over the responsibility for environmental public health from the MOH, including vector control, food hygiene, and sanitation.⁴⁸⁾ In October 1973, both ministries formed the Joint Coordinating Committee on Epidemic Diseases, joined by the National University of

43) It is probable that altruism was not the only factor. Defense, too, was a consideration since the PAP government had implemented a conscription system, now known as the National Service, starting from 1970 in response to the British withdrawal (Lee 2000, 42).

44) NUS June 1969–1970, 153 (ST, August 5, 1970).

45) Although Edwin Lee (2008) notes that Singapore inherited civil services “in good working order” from the suzerain (*ibid.*, 266), the health services left behind by the British were vulnerable (Barr 2005, 147).

46) Speech by Lee Kuan Yew at the fourth National Medical Convention dinner of the Singapore Medical Association (NUS January–June 1972, 69–70 (ST, March 26, 1972)).

47) Licensing of all hawkers was implemented in 1966 (Singapore Government 1967, 310).

48) The ministry was established after Lee Kuan Yew set “an official national goal” to clean Singapore’s waterways (Dobbs 2003, 103), especially the Singapore River.

Table 5 Details of Health-related Governmental Actions from the *Straits Times* Press Cuttings

Years of Volume (Page)	Date of Article	Details
1957–1966 (136)	June 23, 1966	Establishment of the third general hospital of 700 beds under the Second Five-Year Development Plan
1967–June 1969 (2)	January 28, 1967	Rearrangement of cleansing services to clean up “polluted rivers and districts” to improve public health environment
1967–June 1969 (61)	April 21, 1968	House-to-house investigation and cleansing against flies in affected areas by the Public Health Inspectorate
1967–June 1969 (112)	December 17, 1968	Strict checking of swimming pools managed by hotels, clubs, associations, or other organizations
June 1969–1970 (153)	August 5, 1970	Announcement of a five-year plan by the MOH including relocation of 25,000 hawkers from the streets to hawker centers
1971 (60)	June 14, 1971	Issuance of 195 orders and summoning of eight occupiers of mosquito-breeding premises according to the Destruction of Disease-Bearing Insects Act
1971 (192)	November 24, 1971	Establishment of a college to provide general practitioners with continuing education for raising standards

Source: NUS (1957–66; 1967–June 1969; 1971).

Singapore, the MINDEF, and the Ministry of National Development. A series of public persuasion campaigns was used to change collective and individual habits like littering, spitting, and smoking to improve the public environment (Liew 2006, 374–375).⁴⁹⁾ In 1976, the Ministry of Education supported the MOH in promoting the National Health Campaign to fight against infectious diseases. The coordination across ministries and sectors in addition to campaign-based health education efforts characterizes Singapore’s infectious disease management even today.

In 1965, the infant mortality rate was 26.3 per 1,000 live births and life expectancy at birth was 64.5 years. These figures had improved to 7.6 and 73.9 respectively by 1985 (MTI 2007, 63). The city-state has so far attracted MNCs in various successful industries.⁵⁰⁾ The GDP increased from S\$2.1 billion in 1961 to S\$55.3 billion in 1989 (De

49) Minister of Health, Yong Nyuk Lin proclaimed the start of a campaign to inform people of their responsibility to keep the nation clean. The previous law was amended to apply “more punitive penalties for those littering public streets, drains and vacant sites on the island” (NUS 1967–June 1969, 18 (*ST*, May 25, 1967)). The anti-spitting campaigns in the 1960s cautioned the act would spread diseases like tuberculosis (Lee 2000, 199). A two-week “Great Singapore Smokeout” campaign was carried out in December 1980 (NUS 1979–1980, 328 (*ST*, December 16, 1980)).

50) These include oil-refining, petrochemicals, banking, tourism, semiconductors, telecommunications, electronics, and biomedicine. Today, the nation commands economic power that is disproportionate to the size of its territory and its total population of about five million.

Table 6 Laws to Control Infectious Diseases Introduced/Amended by the Government in the First 11 Years

Year	Name of Laws
1968	Destruction of Disease-Bearing Insects Act
1969	Environmental Public Health Act Environmental Public Health (Markets) Regulations Environmental Public Health (Hawkers) Regulations
1970	Environmental Public Health (Public Cleansing) Regulations
1973	Environmental Public Health (Food Establishment) Regulations Environmental Public Health (Food Handlers) Regulations
1974	Environmental Public Health (Manufacture and Sale of Ice Cream) Regulations
1976	Infectious Diseases Act

Source: Constructed from National Archives of Singapore (2008, 118) and Goh (1983).

Koninck *et al.* 2008, 42). It can be said that the strong political leadership and governmental efforts at the nascence of the state enabled a country with few natural resources to establish a good health system, which in part facilitated the investments from FDIs. While it is difficult to quantify, the health of Singaporean citizens may have contributed to the economic growth.⁵¹⁾

IV-2 *Singapore's Determination to Remain Open to the World*

By the 1980s, Singapore had achieved good control of general infectious diseases under the leadership of the first generation of political leaders. The baton was passed to the next-generation leader Goh Chok Tong and his administration.⁵²⁾ Under Lee Kuan Yew, Goh had already demonstrated his dedication to public health by introducing the National Health Plan in 1983, introducing medical savings accounts, and restructuring the government hospital program. He believed that his people must be “physically fit, mentally tough, healthy, skilled, well-educated and economically productive” (Goh 1982, 84). Indeed, Goh “viewed social investments in health, education and housing as prerequisites to happiness and progress” (Phua 2009, 253–264).

Singapore's inherent “optimal conditions” for pathogens (Goh 1983, ix) remain. These conditions are attributable to area-specific factors such as geographic location and an economy reliant on trade. In a pandemic situation, EIDs might reach trading hubs sooner (Lee *et al.* 2007, 1056). Since the 1990s, the Global City has seen Bengal cholera, multi-drug-resistant salmonellosis, norovirus gastroenteritis, Nipah virus infection,

51) Similarly, referring to colonial days, Phua notes that a study could have been attempted on the relationship between health and development or human capital investment for the mining and plantation industries if reliable details had been available (Phua 1989, 322).

52) Goh was minister for health (1981–82), second minister of health (1982–84), first deputy prime minister (1985–90), and prime minister (1990–2004).

meningococcal disease, and hand-foot-and-mouth disease (Goh *et al.* 2006, 301).⁵³⁾ SARS clearly tested the leadership skills of the second generation of political leaders in infectious disease management. We have seen Singapore's renewed determination to fight against the health threats not only nationally but also regionally. Singapore proposed that health ministers discuss regional cooperation to control SARS at the ASEAN Summit in Bangkok in April 2003 (Phua 2009, 262–263). In light of the transnational nature of EIDs, Prime Minister Goh agreed to jointly establish the Regional Emerging Diseases Intervention Center in Singapore with the United States.

To understand why public health management of EIDs is a problem of national importance in Singapore, it is important to stress that Singapore's compact geographical size does not guarantee successful containment of infectious diseases. The seemingly advantageous smallness could rather be a disadvantage; it exposes a large portion of the country at once when a deadly epidemic takes place, as there are few alternative spaces to relocate uninfected individuals. To make matters worse, the tiny population size suggests that high prevalence could easily cause dysfunction in the country's system. Hence, Singapore has little margin for error. The high population density and people's movements in Singapore point to serious consequences in population health, economy, and society if the country fails to control EIDs. Therefore, the government is aware of the very high cost of inaction. This conviction could result in governmental intervention in infectious diseases that may sometimes seem aggressive or draconian.

In August 2004, Goh was succeeded by Lee Hsien Loong, who had played a vital role under the Goh Cabinet during the SARS outbreak, as described earlier. Although public health intervention in the transmission of EIDs often requires forceful measures, it is becoming more difficult to impose intrusions of privacy, especially in developed areas today. In Singapore, there are at least two area-specific difficulties that the current leadership may face. The first difficulty refers to the election on May 7, 2011. The ruling PAP not only lost the Aljunied Group Representation Constituency to the Workers' Party but also suffered from a declined share of votes—from 66.6 percent in 2006 to 60.1 percent.⁵⁴⁾ The issues with which the general public has expressed unhappiness seem to include: styles of public decision-making, reduced interaction between the government and citizens, and the perceived socioeconomic class privilege of foreign executives.⁵⁵⁾ Singapore might be finding it difficult to cope with its own economic achievements, which

53) Bengal cholera is caused by a new cholera biotype, *Vibrio cholerae* O139.

54) Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong resigned from the cabinet as the minister mentor and the senior minister, respectively, after the election.

55) Singapore's Gini coefficient score—measuring income gap—stood at one of the world's highest, 0.425 in 2008 (Han *et al.* 2011, 143).

have been realized too fast. The second difficulty is the demography of populations. Only 64 percent of Singapore's population is composed of citizens, and there is a large influx of foreign workers and visitors. Securing sympathy toward the importance of public health intervention may become even more challenging for the government. Should there be any future serious threats to the city-state, implementation of strict infectious disease control and solicitation of public support could become a more challenging task for Singapore.

There are several limitations to this study. Historical reviews were largely concentrated in the first two decades of independence, and the relationship between healthy labor and FDI could not be quantified conclusively. The political will of the current administration to control EIDs has yet to be substantiated. However, we can see Singapore's increasing international contribution in EID management, especially after the SARS ordeal. For example, a week-long training program was jointly sponsored by Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Japan International Cooperation Agency in 2008. I personally observed experts in infectious disease control from Singapore enthusiastically explain the experiences of SARS and plans against H5N1 influenza to participants from seven ASEAN countries.⁵⁶⁾

V Conclusion

The previously unknown SARS suddenly required Singapore to prescribe a panacea. This paper scrutinized tools utilized by the city-state, and elucidated the important role of the Singapore government in promoting and supporting the public health measures. The determination of political leaders to control the SARS outbreak was demonstrated through the total governmental approach. It involved top political leaders, ministers, and public servants, and initiated public-private cooperation. The mechanism enabling the compact country to carry out grand and quick public health measures included government-linked Singapore-style grassroots organizations, which played vital roles in rapidly deploying the rather scarce human resources of the country. In addition, the government adhered to timely and accurate information disclosure. It also facilitated improvements of health-care settings and environmental health. To implement strict measures such as home quarantines, the government rapidly enacted or revised laws to enable the authorities to

56) In addition, anti-dengue events hosted by Singapore jointly with the WHO annually since 2008 are encouraging, as Singapore's comprehensive vector control has so far resulted in moderate prevalence of domestic transmission (Yoshikawa 2010, 59).

enforce the measure, supplied facilities within a short time, and provided necessary public health, social, and financial support to the quarantined people. Political leaders preempted socially destructive stigma against healthcare workers, patients, and quarantined individuals before it became out of control, and relieved the significant part of economic damage. All of these measures point to Singapore's uncompromising political will that enabled the formulation and implementation of strategies to control SARS. Hence, Singapore's prescription revealed one factor that was different from economic prosperity or compact territorial size.

This paper also argued that Singapore's past health policy, including vigilant infectious disease control, has promoted population health, which has in turn likely contributed to economic and trade activities in the two decades following the country's independence. Bringing health to citizens and transforming Singapore into an attractive place were prerequisites for the first generation of political leaders to invite FDIs, which subsequently contributed to securing survival and prosperity for Singapore. Therefore, it can be said that Singapore is a country that has realized the national importance of containing infectious diseases from early in its history.

The quick control of SARS in Singapore depicts the national stance of making it a priority to defend the nation's competitiveness in the international market. The mission to continue fighting against EIDs is never more applicable to any other countries than Singapore because the Republic is one of the most trade-dependent nations. Active governmental intervention in infectious disease control might depend on how high the respective government places the issue of EIDs in the agenda, i.e., whether or not leaders prioritize responsibilities in solving public health problems. The data presented in this paper are consistent with the hypothesis that active governmental intervention in the SARS outbreak was ensured by the historically embedded political will in the Republic of Singapore. The understanding of the fatal connection between the emergence of public health threats and damage to national viability prompted political leaders in Singapore to persuade the general public to work with the government and play a part in maintaining a good public health environment. This paper documented the country's irreversible commitment to drive away public health threats.

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List of Abbreviations

CDC	Communicable Disease Centre
CoV	coronavirus
DSTA	Defence Science & Technology Agency
EID	emerging infectious disease
FDI	foreign direct investment
HDB	Housing Development Board
HK	Hong Kong
HQO	Home Quarantine Order
MAS	Monetary Authority of Singapore
MHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MICA	Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts
MINDEF	Ministry of Defence
MNCs	multinational corporations
MOH	Ministry of Health
MTI	Ministry of Trade & Industry
NEA	National Environment Agency
NUS	National University of Singapore
PA	People's Association
PAP	People's Action Party
SAF	Singapore Armed Forces
SARS	severe acute respiratory syndrome
ST	<i>Straits Times</i>
TTSH	Tan Tock Seng Hospital
WHO	World Health Organization

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Buddhist Warfare

MICHAEL K. JERRYSON and MARK JUERGENSMEYER, eds.

New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 272 p.

In the opening lines of the introduction to this collection of eight essays (some written originally for a panel at an American Academy of Religion meeting) and the insightful concluding “after-thoughts” of Bernard Faure that add a cogent finishing touch, Michael Jerryson (p.3) offers that

[v]iolence is found in all religious traditions, and Buddhism is no exception. This may surprise those who think of Buddhism as a religion based solely on peace. Indeed, one of the principal reasons for producing this book was to address such a misconception.

While this is the clearly stated motivation for putting the book together, a myriad of other compelling issues also arise in the chapters that follow that make this publication, in general, a compelling read.

The eight essays that precede Faure’s summary reflections are methodologically diverse. Five essays are historical, the first consisting of a translation of Paul Demieville’s wide-ranging “Le bouddhisme et la guerre” (originally published in 1957 as an appendix to Gaston Renondeau’s history of medieval Japanese warrior-monks), which focuses primarily on instances of Chinese monastic participation in warfare that, as Demieville underlines, contradict doctrinal teachings against violence. Meticulously researched, the essay reads like a concordance of misguided monastic military play. In the other four historical studies: Derek Maher analyzes, with a salute to Foucault, the fifth Dalai Lama’s discourse in framing the necessity for religious violence in a seventeenth century text entitled *Song of the Queen of Spring*; Vesna Wallace extrapolates vividly from Mongolian sources, especially the *White History* and various legal texts, about extremely harsh and ostensibly cruel, but legalized forms of violence that constituted the types of punishments instituted by Buddhist khans beginning in the sixteenth century that apparently continued up to the early twentieth; Brian Victoria writes passionately from an insider’s engaged perspective (Soto Zen) in articulating a scathing critique, from an avowedly ethically Buddhist and apologetic perspective, of the “soldier-Zen” phenomena found in Japan just before and during the Second World War; and

Xue Yu provides a general historical resume of how Chinese Buddhists, in a bind to preserve for themselves a place in the early years of Mao's China, acted patriotically and practically (primarily by raising funds to donate a "Buddhist airplane") in support of the nascent communist government's effort to bolster their North Korean comrades against the "American aggression" of the early 1950s. In addition to these historical accounts, two of the other essays in the volume are ethnographically based and focused on contemporary contexts. The first is Daniel Kent's sensitive and well-researched essay on how Sinhala Theravada monks have attempted to temper, through stressing the benefits of wholesome intention (*cetana*) or "heart" (*hita*), the inevitable karmic concerns of Sri Lankan army recruits who commit, or are about to commit, violence within the context of battle. The second ethnographic essay is Jerryson's own account of the militarization of the *sangha* (the emergence of clandestine "soldier-monks") and sacred space (the stationing of soldiers and weapons within monastic *wats*) in southern Thailand amidst local Muslim majorities in a depressing and deteriorating socio-political context. Finally, Stephen Jenkins has examined the seemingly convoluted proposition of "compassionate violence" in a little known Indian Mahayana text. I confess that I had difficulty penetrating the terse and opaque writing style of this essay, and thereby had difficulty in understanding the specific contours of his arguments and allusions.

Like many collections of essays, this one is a bit uneven in the quality of its contributions (as I have just signaled above), and apart from the general theme of how Buddhists have engaged in warfare historically, or legitimated violence theoretically, lacks a consistently crisp and sustained focus. Yet, the book certainly succeeds as a whole in raising very important questions for discussion, some of which are expertly framed in Bernard Faure's lucid and provocative "afterthoughts." Faure points out, for instance, that another fruitful line of inquiry would be not just the documentation or representations of violence perpetrated by Buddhists, but rather the *causes* that have led Buddhists to act violently in the first place. He suggests:

[W]e need to know more about the causes—structural, sociopolitical, psychological—of violence before we pass judgment on Buddhist representations of violence.

When confronted with the complex relationships between Buddhism and violence, a more fundamental question arises: is violence contextual, parasitic, or intrinsic to Buddhism? (p. 219)

Faure goes on to note how several instances of violence represented in the essays of this book are, indeed, contextual and comments on how Buddhists have "gone beyond the call of duty, confusing the Buddhist dharma with the reasons of the State and with patriotism" (p. 220) while also rightly noting conversely that "[a]lthough the dharma often has had to bow to reasons of State, in some instances, it has also provided an ideology for counterforces, inspiring peasant revolts in the name of a millenarianism centering on the coming of the future Buddha, Maitreya" (p. 221). While these are instances in which Buddhists have acted violently because of political contexts, Faure presses his point, in conclusion, by raising again the possibility that Buddhist culture, particularly in its

ritual, mythic and symbolic forms of expression, is often laden with a semiotic of violence seen especially within various processes of demonization and subjugation, particularly in Tantric guises (pp.222–223). Finally, in addressing contemporary Buddhist culpability in acts of political violence, he wistfully adds: “now more than ever, the religious sphere is unable to exist outside of the political sphere. In Asia at least, Buddhism has become ancillary to nationalism” (p.223).

In reading this provocative set of essays, especially Faure’s, three additional lines of inquiry that might have been included in this book occurred to me. The first is one occasioned by omission. That is, including tracts on Buddhism and violence in Burma, Cambodia and Laos would have been especially pertinent, given the wrenching and ghastly instances of political violence that have occurred within those nominally Buddhist societies and cultures in recent decades. Second, by shifting the focus a bit, one might also entertain the related question of how Buddhists have not just perpetrated and legitimated violence, but how have they responded to it and coped with it? Kent’s essay on monks and soldiers is headed in this direction, but the trajectory is largely left unexamined in the rest of the essays. It would seem that that violence is an especially acute form of *dukkha* and, as such, Buddhists are potentially well equipped to respond ethically or compassionately, as well ritually, to assuage its deleterious impacts on the human condition. Finally, and perhaps more fundamental to the Jerryson’s stated rationale, a third line is an analysis of how Buddhism gained its reputation for being such a peaceful religion in the first place. Political historians of Asia and historians of religions are fully aware that Buddhists have been a part of the history of war and violence throughout South, Southeast and East Asian cultures and societies. It is also the case that Westerners, rather than Asians, are far more likely to hold the view that Buddhism is a religion exclusively related to peace. An essay that attempts to trace the rise and promulgation of Buddhism’s peaceful profile in the West would have nicely complemented, or set the table, for many of the other essays in the volume.

By taking the initiative to publish this collection of essays, Jerryson and Juergensmeyer have stimulated important dimensions of a discussion that is sure to garner much more attention from scholars of a variety of disciplinary perspectives in the future, as well as from thoughtful adherents of the Buddha’s dharma. It is a welcomed and timely addition.

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Governing the Other: Exploring the Discourse of Democracy in a Multiverse of Reason

AGUSTIN MARTIN RODRIGUEZ

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2009, 234 p.

Like other developing democracies in the Global South, the current state of electoral democracy in post-1986 Philippines is not an exception: it is mired in deep contradictions, insurmountable challenges, and long-standing instabilities. The view that Philippine electoral democracy is a brilliant achievement by itself for the Filipino people is an utter misnomer: This means that it is profoundly characterized by an unfortunate praxis of rigged electoral processes, a highly elitist capitalist society, a regrettably rotten bureaucracy, a pervasive national sense of cynicism towards matters pertaining to the country's *res publica*, and a cadre of politicians whose *amour de soi* overshadows the much-needed sense of public interest which is necessary for serving their respective constituencies. What is even more disturbing is that the return of electoral and liberal constitutional democracy in 1986 after two decades of the bloody crony authoritarianism of Ferdinand Marcos appears to have done nothing to rectify the extensive socio-economic inequities across the country, for which colonial history has much to be blamed: the Gini coefficient in 1985 or before the revolution was pegged at around 0.45, and this value has unsurprisingly remained until 2003, for which the current data (*Poverty in the Philippines: Income, Assets, and Access*, 2005) are available. At the ideational-discursive level, even the exercise of defining, operationalizing, and imagining what *democracy* means for the country, both in conceptual and praxeological terms, is a bitterly contested process; to a large extent, thinking about democracy stops at the level of electoral process, which merely functions as a cloak of legitimacy for elites to unjustly govern over their less fortunate, marginalized Others.

In this regard, *Governing the Other* aims to problematize the notion of "just governance" in the context of a country beset by a "multiplicity of communities with competing conceptions of the good" (p. 1). Agustin Rodriguez commences by positing the obvious: specifically, that Filipinos "are an anarchic people who are concerned merely with the individual, familial, and community needs" (p. 2). In other words, the central point of inquiry here is why Filipinos are *ungovernable*. The author argues that, contrary to *prima facie* understanding, the "fact" of Filipinos' "*ungovernability*" is *not* a clear manifestation of a "flawed national character"; it is, instead, attributable to how the Philippine nation-state remains "unjustified" to the citizenry. As such, Rodriguez focuses on the Filipino poor as the unit of analyses, referred in the book as the *Other*, thereby proffering a theoretical argument which traces the mode of "*ungovernability*" to the fundamental difference between the defining rationality that underlies the current governance structures, on the one hand, and the *Others'* alienated perspective, brought by their starkly contrastive life-world, on the other hand. By this problematique, the author proposes a solution for bridging this sharply defined divide

between the dominant rationality and the rationality of the *Others*: in particular, he calls for the establishment of a “discursive democracy” that, he hopes, will promote solidarity-building across the society by strengthening political participation and empowerment. Drawing largely on Jürgen Habermas’ concept of deliberative democracy, Rodriguez advocates that the last frontier of hope lies in reinvigorating local governance structures that encourage inclusive and vigilant political participation and active citizenship within a given constituency. In other words, reform towards a truly discursive politics in the Philippines, so to speak, can be achieved by buttressing the modalities of power in grassroots-based and inclusive participation by all relevant constituents.

Taking all these into account, *Governing the Other* is commendable for its noble aim of using the philosophical mode of analysis to analyze concrete praxeological and political problems of the developing world, particularly in the Philippines. But the book has some fundamental shortcomings. Particularly, the grave problem lies in its methodology. It claims that it employs the philosophical mode of analysis in order to address a concrete problem. Written as a philosophical reflection of concrete praxeological problems in the Philippines, *Governing the Other*,¹⁾ in my view, has an obvious shortcoming of relying too much on Habermas’ universalistic views on deliberative democracy, without providing a compelling argumentation of how the author’s “discursive democracy” will do the magic of bringing Philippine politics in its rightful place. To illustrate this, overreliance on “discursive/deliberative politics” amidst the systemic negligence of more pressing issues of systemic material socio-economic inequities can be truly disenfranchising for the masses, in fact, a step backward from the emancipatory goals of the kind of democratic politics that critical theory actually stands for. As such, it was only very recently that Jürgen Habermas acknowledged how the European integration project has failed with these words: “The European project can no longer continue in elite modus” (Diez 2011). In the same breath, an unjust Philippine political economy, already beset with deep material inequalities, is unlikely to undergo any transformation if married to an ever more disenfranchising mode of politics fueled by an unquestioned faith in the “deliberative mode”—a mode in which, more often than not, only the Filipino elites and the middle-class have the luxury of engaging.

More importantly, an apparent mismatch exists between the grave problem of Filipinos being “ungovernable” vis-à-vis the proposal of establishing “discursive democracy” in the country. There are two key problems here. First, from the vantage point of totality, the problem of governability must be understood on a much larger analytical scale. This means that the institutional shortcomings of contemporary socio-political infrastructures of policy-making in the Philippines are just

1) This reminds me of Bertrand Russell’s assertion against Karl Marx as a “philosopher”: “Considered purely as a philosopher, Marx has grave shortcomings. He is too practical, too much wrapped up in the problems of his time. His purview is confined to this planet, and, within this planet, to Man” (Russell 1995, 753).

symptomatic of the deeper problems endemic in the historically embedded governmental and social *structures* of injustice and disenfranchisement, as well as the political *agential* powers exerted by elites across the Philippine society. It is primarily through the lens of colonial and post-colonial history and the dominating material interests of the elites that one may see how discourse and deliberation alone can hardly address the lack of legitimacy of the state amongst the majority of the population, most particularly the poor. Second, given the strong inertia among the Filipino elites and the highly unequal class structures in the country that militate against radical reform, it is highly unlikely that a naïve reliance on *discursive*, or shall I say *deliberative democracy*, will bring about the eschatological salvation of a terminally ill democratic regime such as that in the Philippines. To push the argument further, I shall insist that post-1986 Philippine democracy is one of the most advanced deliberative democracies relative to other developing democracies in the Global South, with its highly diverse party-list system, an extremely vigilant and extensive grassroots-based civil society, and a very critical national and local media that is watchful and deliberative of issues that concern public interest. A more interesting line of inquiry, which Rodriguez should have addressed more in this work, is to what extent all of these apparent manifestations of deliberative democracy in the country are instrumentally being used to further elite interests—albeit in the Gramscian sense of cultural hegemony.

Finally, notwithstanding that the aims set forth in *Governing the Other* are modest, and that the philosophical reflections upon concrete Philippine political praxeological problems are quite illuminating, it appears that Rodriguez failed to realize that democracy is a *meta-regime*—it is an openly contested concept that entails transgressing the boundaries for critical and radical imagination in order to bring out a truly emancipatory politics. Unfortunately, a demand for more “discursive democracy” in the Philippines does not unleash the full emancipatory potential of democratic politics; instead, it may only serve to legitimize the even more pervasive entrenchment processes of elite domination—this, apparently, is the elephant in the room that no one is willing to recognize. Should the Filipino *intelligentsia* continue to focus on formalities such as deliberation at the expense of more substantive issues of extreme socio-economic inequities as the most important variable in the democratic politics of contestation, the disheveled Philippine state will remain illegitimate in the eyes of the majority.

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Reading Bangkok

ROSS KING

Singapore: NUS Press, 2011, 272 p.

Two long-standing issues in modern Thai history lie at the heart of *Reading Bangkok*: the country's independence and authoritarianism. "Was Thailand really independent?" is a question that has engaged numerous historians, as has why the country has struggled to attain democracy since the 1932 coup that ended the absolute monarchy. Architectural scholar Ross King uses these questions as a point of departure to unravel the contested cultural meanings of the built landscape of Bangkok, the capital city.

King uses the concept of "screens," which are ways in which colonization (of and by Thailand) and authoritarianism (rationalized by the state ideology, Nation, King, and Religion) are hidden and legitimized. The screens are placed over reality so that we see what Thai elites want us to see: Thailand's modernity, a policy that the Chakri kings had adopted since the nineteenth century. Screens distinguish between appearance and reality, but also create a suspicion that nothing in Bangkok is ever what it seems. The ontological blurring of the city is a result of King's method.

King does not think that Thailand was independent except in the limited political sense. But he complicates the issue by arguing that, while the country had been colonized by Western, Chinese and Indian capital, the Chakri kings had also colonized territories on the periphery of old Siam and adjacent to it. There is also a "reverse colonization" at work, where rural Thais brought to Bangkok to construct public works settled down in the city before participating in recent mass protests against the establishment. King's response to the second question is more straightforward. Thailand, he notes, remains in the grip of state ideology, although there are signs that its hidden status and hold are weakening due to the advent of new media and the centrifugal effects of globalization.

With these premises, King proceeds to deconstruct the built spaces of Bangkok, some historical, some well-known to outsiders, others less so, but all interesting. *Reading Bangkok* is divided into five chapters, which move spatially from the political center (Thonburi, the early capital founded in 1767 by King Taksin) to the intellectual periphery (the universities). In each chapter, King peels away screens to reveal what he calls "levels of colonization," showing a disjuncture between form and history, the diminishing of traditional life, the homogenizing work of state policies, and the impact of international capital.

In the first chapter, "Landscapes of Illusion," King unpacks the historic places of Thonburi,

Kudijeen and Rattanakosin. He ignores the rebirth meta-narrative (Siam rising from the sack of Ayutthaya by the Burmese in 1767) to emphasize the imperialist origins of modern Thailand. It was Taksin who seized the Emerald Buddha, an important symbol of kingship, from Vientiane in order to establish his divine right to rule, while the next king, Rama I, asserted Bangkok's suzerainty over Ayutthaya's former vassals. In addition, through a survey of architectural spaces in Thonburi and Rattanakosin, King views the mix of Thai, Portuguese, Khmer, Chinese, Catholic, and Muslim influences to be merely screens for the state's continuing pursuit of ethnic and cultural purity. The eclectic architecture is not, he emphasizes, instances of an organic hybridity.

From political matters the book moves to issues of economic domination. Chapter 2, "Landscapes of the Modern Age," explores Charoen Krung, Silom and Ratchadamnoen, parts of Bangkok that were developed as the early rulers sought to modernize Siam's economy in light of the threat of Western colonial aggression. On the one hand, King highlights examples of the power of Western, Chinese and Indian capital then and now. On the other, he traces the disappearance of traditional *khlong* (canal)-based social and economic life, as road and rail gained ascendancy in the capital.

Chapter 3, "Libidinal Landscapes," discusses Sukhumvit, well-known for its shopping and entertainment spaces but particularly for the sex tourism at Patpong. King discusses the subculture and discourse of cross-dressing in Thailand, which conflicts with the official policy of fixing gender distinctions. He also contrasts the wealth of Sukhumvit and the great slum of Khlong Toey on the eastern fringe. King paints the slum as a vast liminal world of low-wage and non-wage workers, beggars, prostitutes, and vendors, all controlled by syndicates.

Khlong Toey is further analyzed in part of the fourth chapter, "Landscapes of Ruin." King attempts to go beyond the frame of the dangerous slum by referring to its social vibrancy and its ability to resist unjust state policies and achieve a compromise with land-sharing. He then explores the ruins of Ratchadapisek, or more accurately, the unfinished skyscrapers following the flight of foreign capital during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.

The final chapter, "Landscapes of the Mind," takes issue with the failure of the Western intellectual tradition and prevalence of self-censorship in Thailand. Drawing upon his experiences with Thai architectural students, King laments the absence of a critical intellectual discourse.

Reading Bangkok is a good read in many ways. Although the use of theory and amount of local detail make reading a challenge, it is, nonetheless, delightful to uncover grim histories underneath bright façades. I enjoyed the unpacking of the Democracy Monument, whose ambivalent history in commemorating the elite-led coup of 1932 has not prevented its appropriation by pro-democracy activists as a rallying site in the protests of 1973, 1976 and 1992. The concept of reverse colonization also usefully problematizes the rural-urban distinction and helps explain the nature of recent street politics in Bangkok.

However, the book is not without its problems. King removes the screens but does not assess

their effectiveness, or how far Thais are aware of them. The book's main weakness is that it is written from an outsider's perspective, with very few insights into how the city is read by its residents. Disappointingly, King dismisses the slum as a screened world, where informality masks the organization and exploitation of poverty. Where he acknowledges social dynamism, it is through the eyes of activists, rather than dwellers. Yet, research on slums and informal settlements in Southeast Asia and beyond has shown how the residents are often able to contest official policies and chronic hazards on an everyday basis, albeit in passive ways (see Roy and AlSayyad 2004; Bankoff 2003; Guinness 2009; Akin 1975; Jellinek 1991). A social history of the slum—and, in more general terms, of Bangkok—is missing from the book. This paints the capital in an overly harsh, unflattering light. The same problem applies to King's conclusion that Thai intellectuals are steeped in self-censorship because they do not voice their opinions within classroom.

To be fair, King acknowledges the limitations of his sources and his position as a foreigner; he also concedes that Thais may express intellectual contention in different ways from Western students. *Reading Bangkok*, then, is also useful for how it raises unanswered questions and paves the way for future scholarship on the contested spaces of the city.

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Queer Bangkok: 21st Century Market, Media, and Rights

PETER A. JACKSON, ed.

Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011, xi+308 p.

The project of decentering Western experiences in theorizing the issues of gender and sexualities has led concerned scholars to consider and include the experiences of "Other," i.e., non-Western,

societies. Eve Sedgwick's dictum on the incompleteness of critical analysis of the "modern homo/heterosexual definition in Western culture" is often taken as the guiding assumption behind the impulse to understand how different the practices of gender construction in these societies may be. Thus, we have serious investigations through various interdisciplinary lens—based on historical sources, cultural practices, social norms, laws, literary texts, and media—of the ideological construction of gender and sexualities in the Asian and Pacific societies, African and Middle Eastern countries (the so-called "Islamic societies"), and the Latin America region. Within Asian societies, studies on homosexuality in China and Japan lead the pack.

By bringing non-Western experiences into focus, these studies build on the basic premise that these experiences are not only different from Western ones, but also necessitate the adoption of a polyvocal and multifocal perspective. Based on this premise, a number of proposals have been made on behalf of "homosexualities," as Stephen Murray (2003) argues in his encyclopedic account, or what Tom Boellstorff (2007) calls being "comparatively queer in Southeast Asia." While these studies have contributed to deepening our present understanding of the topic, it is worth revisiting the question of how much this critical project has really accomplished in its efforts to provide an alternative to Western experience based-theory. This rethinking is not meant to judge harshly any present and up-and-coming studies of non-Western societies, but rather, to remind scholars about the challenges they continue to face in their collective effort to contribute in a meaningful way to this new academic field of study.

Queer Bangkok consists of 13 articles. In the introduction, Peter Jackson, the editor, asserts that the collection of articles offers "future directions for research" on queer Bangkok (and Thailand, in general) in the twenty-first century. He does not explain, however, how the book's early twenty-first century descriptions and proposal to go "beyond twentieth century paradigms" can lead to a better understanding of homosexuality. It is worth keeping in mind an earlier collection that dealt with the "transformation of sex/gender order in twentieth-century Thailand" with the stated aim of "deconstructing Eurocentrism" (Cook and Jackson 1999). Both collections rely on postmodern vocabularies, but offer little explanation as to how words like "diversity," "dynamism" and "transformation" actually capture the changes taking place in the everyday lives of their subject in the last two decades. They also have relatively little to say about how different the twenty-first century is from the twentieth. The term "Asian century" (p. 10) resonates only for Australian readers as a description of the economic power of its Asian neighbors in the twenty-first century. But nowhere in the book is there any attempt to examine how the "Asian century" is experienced by those living in the region itself, except from the perspective of the consumption culture of its middle classes.

Peter Jackson contributes two articles—one on the phenomenon of "queer boom" and the other on "queer autonomy" in Bangkok. Both are compelling in their propositions but unfortunately, based on highly selective evidence. Jackson points out the power of the "purple Baht" as

the Thai economy enjoyed stable growth between 2005 and 2007 (see the table on p.21). However, this does not necessarily mean that Thais are getting richer nor that wealth is being evenly distributed across the classes (although consumer goods are, in fact, getting cheaper). Jackson does not explain the size of the middle classes in Bangkok—the main targets of the gay market. That working-class Thais are enjoying “queer autonomy” is based on their relative income—in a family setting, and against the unemployed (or earning less income) family members. However, this tells us little about how non-middle-class Thai gays define themselves, and how they constantly negotiate with whom, when, and for what purpose, when they present themselves as a gay in the public. In this context, “queer autonomy” is not something that already exists in society which any Thai, regardless of his or her class, can claim, enjoy, and benefit from. Much depends on their respective socio-economic locations and their ability to negotiate their subject positions within existing (and quite palpable) social divisions between the rich and the poor, and between Bangkok and the northeast and north provinces.

Stéphane Renneson's essay is on *kathoeys* Muay Thai boxers while Serhat Ünaldi offers a general survey of the representation of *kathoey*s and gay men in recent Thai movies. Bret Farmer's article focuses on one particular movie, *The Love of Siam*, and Ronnappom Samakkeekarom and Pimpawun Boonmongkon's article is on gay internet chat rooms of Camfrog. Aren Aizura discusses the nature of gender reassignment clinics in Bangkok. Although these authors are describing contemporary issues, the descriptions provided by each article are rather loose, and open to conflicting interpretations. In proposing “vernacular queerness,” Farmer's description, is ironically limited to the so-called “non-normative gender/sexual cultures” (p.87) and thus his analysis of *The Love of Siam* primarily concentrates on the movie's two (gay) main characters, Mew and Tong. It gives short shrift to their familial relationships, which are just as important as their individual identities in shaping the discourse of Thai queer culture. In their article on Camfrog, Samakkeekarom and Boonmongkon discuss the issue of “power structure” between room/server owner, DJs, and users/members/performers. They mention that “in general rooms who did not want to show their bodies and faces had the least power.” While it may be true that by not showing their bodies and faces, these members choose to have limited interaction with other members, it does not automatically mean that their power to negotiate for a meaningful conversation is any lesser than those who do otherwise. After all, power relations are socially flexible and, especially in the virtual world, constantly changing. In discussing biopolitics in gender reassignment surgery, Aizura touches on the issue of the “racialization” of hospital services, with a strong preference towards non-Thai white patients, but the article provides not much information on the background of the non-Thai patients (aside from two interviews with one Thai and one Vietnamese Australian trans-women). The article overlooks the presence of Japanese patients (whose numbers have increased over the years, and many of whom go to the Preecha Aesthetic Institute to have surgery) in the global marketing of this service.

Three articles offer reflections on changing notions of being “different” in a specific Thai context. Alex Au’s essay provides a story of the development of Singapore’s gay scene that owes its makeup to Bangkok. Megan Sinnott describes the production of discourse on sexuality as developed by feminist lesbian organizations in Thailand, and Sam Winter’s article is on *de-facto* social barriers transgender people often face in their daily life. Although enjoyable to read, these articles have little academic significance in capturing the undercurrent of the change itself. Sinnott’s discussion does not cover how the discourse is accepted within larger society outside the LGBT community, a limitation that may lead readers to conclude that changes in the discourse are solely limited to lesbian activists, a number of academics, and policy makers. The fact that most of the members of the feminist lesbian organizations she describes, Anjaree and Lesla, are urban middle class women shows the need for a critical survey of the silent majority to understand the latter’s sexual identities and the discourses they have developed. Winter’s descriptions are based on quotations from earlier studies (or, second hand reports), hardly a deep analysis of the cultural and intellectual roots of the social norms that give impetus to the exclusion of transgender people in Thailand.

Notwithstanding these problems, three articles (Nikos Dacanay on gay sauna in Bangkok, Ben Murtagh on Indonesian gay novel, and Douglas Sanders on the rainbow lobby in Thai politics) stand out in this collection by providing thick description that enables readers to imagine Bangkok’s queer culture. Their findings, however, do not place Bangkok in the center, as the title of the book would have it. In the cultural struggle to maintain the liberal image it has cultivated in the 1990s, Bangkok in fact is slowly losing its ground in competition with other metropolitan cities in East Asia region. An increase in the number of commercial gay venues in the city does not always indicate the rise of Bangkok as the “gay capital” of Southeast Asia. In this regards, Nikos Dacanay’s article can be read as a sober account of the (re)development of the city’s “pleasure space” (Askew 2002) for (primarily global and middle class) gay consumers. It discusses how market forces are shaping the development of commercial gay venues and makes a forceful argument for the fact that the consumption of desire is closely knitted with the vexing issue of class. Class based-preference for certain gay venues shows that the aspiration of middle-class gays for “cosmopolitanism” (in terms of appearances and life-style) is just too costly and unreasonable for the less well-off majority. This “diversity” of class backgrounds among gay men is not fairly represented in the public imagery of so-called “gay life,” which routinely affirms (and reproduces) middle-class assumptions and lifestyles as its model. Although there are some venues catering to working class gays, they reside in the margins and have yet to offer any form of alternative culture. In a developing country like Thailand, visibility is itself a class privilege, and Thai-language magazines are more often than not enthusiastic agents of this middle-class-image reproduction. Ben Murtagh’s article also attests to how the liberal image of Bangkok does not always correspond with reality, as it is often reinforced by global circuits and economies of desire. In the novel *Lelaki terindah*, Bangkok is idealized as a

touristy “gay heaven,” but the platonic relationship at the heart of the novel is used by the author (Andrei Aksana) to illuminate the constraints gay men often face in the author’s own hometown of Jakarta. Douglas Sander’s article on the rainbow lobby during the time of political transition is also an important piece that clearly shows how accommodating *kathoeys* legally has proven to be a Sisyphean task: despite the public’s relative acceptance of LGBT issues (at least, for economic reasons), the old guards are still busy enforcing “normative sexuality” among the larger society.

Discrepancies within the realities of Bangkok described in the articles; cookie-cutter analysis imposed by some of the authors onto their subjects; and the proposal put forward by the editor—all of these may indeed provide a way of understanding how and where the project of discovering the non-Western experiences is taking place. But ought non-Western experiences to be theorized in the same way as Western ones? What insights can these non-Western experiences yield for academic conceptualization without remaining parasitical on Western categories or frameworks of thought? If the development of queer theory in the West owes something to the fertile ideas from postmodern and feminist critical thought, how useful are they for understanding gender construction in non-Western societies, especially in the case of Thailand? Ramming postmodern concepts onto empirical descriptions of Thailand’s queer culture may have proven useful for Western scholars who can easily relate to their own theory while making sense of their objects of study in terms of their own metropolitan experiences and language. However, further scrutiny is needed to see if this is the best way to understand non-Western experiences, or even to represent them in ways that will be meaningful for non-Western audiences. It is not that *Queer Bangkok* overlooks the problematical nature of the theoretical framework in conceptualizing its project, but it seems that the editor and some of the authors have not yet found an alternative frame of reference. They are thus relying on postmodern vocabularies to complicate their studies based on a generally accepted social theory. In that respect, *Queer Bangkok* serves as a caveat on the necessity of careful bottom-up analysis rather than mere importation of metropolitan jargon into our research on gender and sexuality in Asia.

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The Floracrats: State-Sponsored Science and the Failure of the Enlightenment in Indonesia

ANDREW GOSS

Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011, 264 p.

In *The Floracrats: State-Sponsored Science and the Failure of the Enlightenment in Indonesia*, Andrew Goss examines in sharp and engaging detail the relationship between science, state and society in modern Indonesia. Goss follows the professional careers of state-sponsored naturalists or “Floracrats” as they sought to expand their scientific knowledge and authority and examines how their Enlightenment vision to achieve societal transformation through science became absorbed or “co-opted” by the colonial and postcolonial state. In carefully researched chapters spanning from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day, Goss argues that the integration of scientists into the state bureaucracy has characterized the enduring failure of the Enlightenment in Indonesia.

This book, while part of a blossoming literature on the history of science and technology in modern Southeast Asia, represents an important departure from existing work in its attempt to address the legacy of colonial science for postcolonial societies¹⁾ (Moon 2007; Mrázek 2002; Pols 2009). In contrast to recent studies that examine the political uses of science to reinforce authoritarian regimes or to fashion the self-identity of nationalists who protested against them, Goss instead focuses his work around the question of why science became so readily available for the colonial and postcolonial state’s use and how this relationship imposed critical limits on scientific innovation.²⁾ This work therefore serves as an important contribution not only to the history of science in Indonesia but to its social and political history as well.

Across a series of richly detailed episodes, Goss analyzes how science, particularly botany and natural history, developed into a tool of the Indonesian state. Most interesting are the chapters on the establishment of the Buitenzorg Gardens and their transformation into a scientific empire under the careful stewardship of naturalist Melchior Treub. Treub was tasked with the challenge of both promoting the international status of the Gardens and making the plant and animal collections at Buitenzorg “legible” to colonial bureaucrats who sought to affect more practical changes at home. In the chapter on “Quinine Science,” Goss explores the emergence of this notion that scientists prove their value to colonial capitalism by creating economically useful knowledge.

1) This focus on the history of science and technology is especially striking among recent scholarship on Indonesia. See References for more detail.

2) For example, see Warwick Anderson and Hans Pols (2012).

Recruited by the state to aid in the cultivation of cinchona trees for quinine, the first generation of Floracrats established an important precedent for science in the colony. Not only did the Floracrats prove the utility of their knowledge to the colonial state's program for increased quinine production; in making their knowledge of nature transparent to bureaucratic practices, they also demonstrated a unique capacity to manage the gap between the colonial bureaucracy and entrepreneurial Dutch planters. This would become the model for collaboration within which experts would be expected to carry out their science.

By the early twentieth century, the Dutch colonial state had steadily grown "adept at absorbing cultural innovations emerging from civil society" (p. 104). For instance, when "native floracrats" attempted to generate a popular Enlightenment and lift their countrymen into modernity through educational leadership, the Dutch state worked hard to promote their own brand of "official scientific nationalism." Native experts trained in state-run agricultural schools would instead be recruited into a functional elite to aid in the development of Indonesia and its peoples under Dutch control. In the last chapters of the book, Goss analyzes how this colonial legacy of bureaucratic science continues to shape the practices of professional biologists working in Indonesia today.

Throughout Goss underscores the failure of scientists to achieve their Enlightenment vision of creating useful knowledge that would allow professional biology to connect to and transform Indonesian society or culture. Instead the goals of scientists became regularly subsumed by the goal of the state to more effectively administer the biological diversity of Indonesia and its indigenous populations. Yet to claim a "failure" of the Enlightenment is to both presuppose a sincere, coherent vision of how science would transform Indonesian society and imply that scientists would otherwise have been able to meet their objectives. Neither seems at all clear. Using the trope of failure as a way to organize his narrative, Goss tends to stress continuities in the structure of scientific careers over time, obscuring real differences that could have been drawn out more explicitly. For example, Goss uses the term "apostles of the enlightenment" alternatively to describe Netherlands-trained scientists who sought to establish the reputation of Dutch civil society in Indonesia as "enlightened," colonial Floracrats who sought to establish the international authority of their work as "tropical" rather than "colonial" science, and native intellectual figures who sought popular empowerment through knowledge. Not enough is made of the contrasts between different "enlightenment" objectives for "useful science" held by these divergent groups of actors or how their political status as elites, rather than experts, shaped their investment in the colony's future and the meaning of failure.

This rubric of failure does not encourage a more careful mapping of how these different generations of scientists related to each other, nor does it capture Goss's more nuanced observations of the ways in which the Floracrats negotiated their role as both state bureaucrats and scientists. The reader is struck less by the zealotry of the Floracrats' mission to popularize their knowl-

edge than their ambitious endeavors to expand and consolidate scientific authority within the infrastructure of the state—an opportunity for power and prestige that many would not have enjoyed in the Netherlands, for example. The Floracrats were generally successful at winning key appointments and held significant influence over the direction and implementation of colonial policies. Yet in pursuing knowledge through the “tentacles of the colonial state,” which was at once paternalist and heavily bureaucratized, Goss reveals how the Floracrats were forced to ask questions of their research that exposed fundamental tensions over the role of science and scientists in Indonesian society.

Indeed the framing of the book around the failure of the Enlightenment elides what may be its most interesting and valuable contribution: the questions it raises about what it means to do science in the colonial context and how scientific knowledge comes to be defined, valued, and contested. Recurring debates over what counts as “useful” or “practical” science provides fascinating insight into how scientists and bureaucrats battled over the relative merits of “pure” and “applied” knowledge in shaping colonial policy.

To take one example, during the period of ethical policy reforms of the early 1900s, Melchior Treub advocated a vision of professional biology leading colonial agriculture, claiming that with science in charge, administration would become routine. He challenged the view of colonial bureaucrats who implied an opposition between science and practicality, suggesting that scientists would make for poor directors of agriculture being too distant from practical matters. In response, Treub leveled a critique at department leaders as inefficient and arbitrary users of science, claiming they do not “do scientific research, synthesize the desired knowledge or spread that knowledge in a practical way” (p. 89). Some scientists even challenged this emphasis on practicality, suggesting that the flavor for “applied” knowledge favored by the colonial state was “vulgar” and advocated the pursuit of “pure” knowledge that held no immediate economic benefit. These discussions reveal less about the failures of science to achieve social change than the ways in which colonial administrators and scientists debated the role of science in the future of Indonesian society.

Finally, Goss’s attention to the interplay of politics and scientific knowledge yields invaluable insights into the day-to-day running of the colonial and postcolonial state. Rather than focusing on the uses of colonial science to rationalize imperialist rule, or for the creation of a healthier, more productive society, Goss organizes his study around the careers of the “Floracrats” as professional experts and their role in the dramatic expansion of a colonial bureaucracy that characterized the Dutch administration’s broader political direction (p. 94). As Goss writes, “My own sense is that using technocracy as a category of analysis here is a distraction, as the state policies were not about creating technical solutions per se but about generating systems that could effectively administer” (p. 47). Goss does an excellent job of charting how these “systems” that used professionals and trained experts to rule were generated by the state even as they transcended it, providing key linkages between different political regimes.

By examining the origins of these technocratic ideals, and the political conditions that kept them alive, this work meticulously reconstructs a world of science shaped by administrative practices that at once expanded and limited its possibilities.

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Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development

DAROMIR RUDNYCKYJ

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010, 304 p.

Daromir Rudnyckyj's book casts spiritual reform as a specific intervention designed to address economic crisis in the late 1990s brought about by what some perceived as a blind faith in development. In line with a policy of developmental nationalism that permeated Indonesian history, an enthusiastic dose of religious fervor was subsequently injected into economic development. Spiritual reform, based on an ethic of individual accountability to God, was emphasized thereafter to mitigate economic decline. Through this process, religious piety was linked to economic productivity that stressed long-term survival over immediate personal gain. The secular workplace is therefore reconfigured as a site of religious piety through public slogans and emotionally-charged training sessions. Based on anthropological research conducted in Krakatau Steel, a state-owned steel enterprise in Banten in west Java, Indonesia, Rudnyckyj's rich study provides a window into these training sessions and the methods known as "Emotional and Spiritual Quotient" (ESQ), which were developed by spiritual reformers Ary Ginanjar and Rinaldi Agusyaana. Rather than divorcing economic development from religious precepts, as former Indonesian President Suharto had done, motivational speakers such as Ginanjar and Rinaldi ardently fused economic progress with spiritual reform. Ginanjar emphasized that the economic development and spiritual cleansing are in fact mutually reinforcing since the latter actually provides an ethical basis and

natural behavioral code for economic success.

Both argued that a separation between the economic and spiritual domains had only led to chronic corruption. Previously, hollowed out of proper correct motivation, i.e., religious values, workers were prone to stray from moral conduct. Rudnyckyj's thick description effectively describes how Ginanjar's training sessions channeled spiritual energies towards economic progress in life. Values such as hard work and honesty in the workplace would naturally spur workers to increase productivity and eventually, their personal wealth and happiness. By using the term "spiritual economy" to explain how economic reform was conceived of and enacted as a matter of religious piety and spiritual virtue, Rudnyckyj points to the effects of global religious resurgence during the last two decades of the twentieth century on the parallel phenomenon of economic globalization. He demonstrates how religious practices are designed to transform individuals into specific types of economies. In this particular case, spiritual economies absorbed capitalist tendencies to bring about rationalization of practice (p. 134). Capitalism thus acts through the individual subject by effecting practices and ethical dispositions. Muslims enmeshed in a spiritual economy look to religion as means to attain greater productivity, efficiency and transparency.

One of the strengths of Rudnyckyj's book lies in his nuanced take on the history of democratization in Indonesia with regards to pluralism, as discussed in the penultimate chapter. Rudnyckyj creatively demonstrates, through an episode involving the spiritual possession of an employee who was part-Chinese, how non-Muslim members of the Krakatau Steel Community have been affected by the explicit Islamic overtones in these training sessions, which threatened Indonesia's legacy of *pancasila* pluralism that forms the basis for nationalist developmentalism. The plight of non-Muslims, especially Christians, became evident when employees felt that their religious freedom was somewhat curtailed. The *pancasila* training that accommodated plural identities during the authoritarian Suharto regime was replaced by seminars which only resonated with Muslim employees. By contrast, plural identities had been carefully managed during Indonesia's period of authoritarian pluralism as the state cemented over religious and ethnic differences and emphasized unity in facilitating development. Previously constituted as Indonesians by the regime, they were now forced to confront, choose and subsequently assert their own religious and ethnic identities, aside from their national identity. Democratization, Rudnyckyj argues, enables new exclusions from the political community because one is compelled to choose, and highlight, other facets that underscore ethnic and religious differentiation in society which were formerly not that apparent. This is particularly manifest in the spiritual training sessions where introspection and constant self expression was aggressively encouraged. Hence, these sessions could potentially sideline minority ethnic and religious communities at the workplace.

In examining ESQ, Rudnyckyj spends more time analyzing the discourse adopted by Ginanjar and other similar reformers rather than the corporate institutional workings of Krakatau Steel. Relying on Foucault and Weber, he convincingly shows how Ginanjar's language supports the view

that economic success and spiritual development are mutually beneficial. It is clear that employers are manipulating employees' spiritual beliefs to achieve great productivity. However, the reader is left wondering how corporate structures within this huge industrial firm were conducive to Ginanjar's teachings based on Rudnyckyj's empirical research, what makes Krakatau Steel inherently suitable for ESQ strategy to achieve corporate success? Rudnyckyj's study is eager to address broad general questions regarding the repercussions of the spiritual guidance offered by ESQ, but remains silent on the specific impact on Krakatau Steel as a corporation.

Rudnyckyj also did not address the question of why ESQ trumped Sufism as the conduit for spirituality for Indonesian Muslims. What drew the Muslim employees to ESQ in the first place? Rudnyckyj's sensitivity to Ginanjar's discourse does not extend to his observations of the employees. In tracing religious trends within the community at Krakatau Steel, Rudnyckyj considers the entire plant as one entity with hardly any differentiation of its organizational parts (p. 56). Although Rudnyckyj singles out non-Muslims in his analysis, the nuances, unfortunately, stop here. The absence of a bar serving alcohol and the close proximity to a mosque are simplistically interpreted as signaling an increase in religiosity. Eager to locate signs of piety, Rudnyckyj rather hastily points to cultural aspects in Javanese life, such as sitting on the floor barefoot, as markers of Muslim religiosity. Moreover, there are other key absences in the book. Photographs found throughout the book only feature male workers in the company. Women are starkly absent in Rudnyckyj's narrative. What were the gender dynamics at these sessions? How did women view the messages propounded by spiritual reformers? What about less pious Muslims in Krakatau Steel? Did all Muslim employees inevitably fall in line with the teachings of spiritual reformers? If they did not, should they be cast as marginalized individuals? Surely, a narrative that privileges the viewpoint of ardent, attentive Muslims need not imply that non-practising Muslims are not part of the mainstream in Indonesian society.

The problem with Rudnyckyj's work is that individual human agency is minimized. By examining corporate strategies, he understandably highlights the fact that the measure of each individual was largely determined in terms of their productivity in the workplace, where even the human heart has been transformed into an object of management. Emotions were skillfully managed to increase productivity through affective transformation. But the reader is left wondering: how did the participants of spiritual development seminars themselves actually decide what strategies to adopt in the workplace? Such gaps in his narrative notwithstanding, Rudnyckyj has certainly provided us with a compelling and informed analysis of how religious faith has entered the secular site of the workplace. His work has done much to provoke discussions about the place of religion in Indonesia today.

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Contested Waterscapes in the Mekong Region: Hydropower, Livelihoods and Governance

FRANÇOIS MOLLE, TIRA FORAN and MIRA KÄKÖNEN, eds.

London: Earthscan Publications Ltd., 2009, xviii + 426 p.

One of the most important undertakings of this book is that it seeks to understand critical issues of livelihood, development, and governance in mainland Southeast Asia through a focus on *both* water and land resources, in relationship to one another and in their relationship to societies in the region. This de-centers what I would argue is a focus in a large amount of academic literature that, through an explicit focus on “land”—and to a lesser extent “water”—essentializes these categories as distinct resources rather than questioning their division and exploring their connections. The concept that draws this out and binds the book’s chapters together is the “waterscape”: “landscapes viewed through the lens of their water resources, taken as a defining element of both ecosystems and human life” (p. 2).

I believe the concept has been inspired by Erik Swyngedouw’s (1999) important work on the Spanish waterscape where the term is developed as a critique of long-standing academic scholarship that separated the social and natural elements of water (instead of seeing them as connected). However, the term also functions as a critique of the more traditional understanding of scale in water resources analysis by questioning the naturalized scale of the “water basin” or “watershed.” I would also argue that this innovative focus on waterscape owes much to the team of editors and authors that put *Contested Waterscapes* together. The authors are part of the Mekong Program on Water, Environment and Resilience, or M-POWER, network, which combines both activists and academics (and activist-academics) in the Mekong Region which includes Cambodia, Lao PDR, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam and China’s Yunnan Province. Rather than offer pessimistic conclusions, the authors “invite the reader to explore more thoroughly how waterscapes have been, and are being, transformed” (p. 13) through economic change, environmental uncertainty, and grassroots resistance.

Contested Waterscapes is divided into three parts, respectively focused on “Hydropower Expansion in the Mekong Region,” “Livelihoods and Development,” and “Institutions, Knowledge and Power.” Readers already familiar with hydropower development in the region may find the information in Part I increasingly dated in the three years that have elapsed since the book’s 2009 publication date.¹⁾ However, these chapters do provide essential historical background combined with informed analysis of local and region-wide hydropower development and governance issues. The final chapter of this section, by Darrin Magee and Shawn Kelley, provides an overview of

1) Additional resources published since 2009 include: articles in the journals *Water Alternatives* (in particular, the WCD+10 special issue) and *Water Policy* as well as the next book in this series by Lazarus *et al.* (2011).

hydropower development on the Salween River, which runs through China, Burma and Thailand, and which has received much less attention as compared to plans for development of the Mekong.

In Part I, there is also an important discussion of the Pak Mun dam in Chapter 3 (“Pak Mun Dam: Perpetually Contested?”) by Foran and Manarom, two individuals who have been following the issue for over a decade. The project, approved in 1989, has been the focus of much scholarly and activist literature (i.e., various issues of *Watershed: People’s Forum on Ecology* 1995–2008; Sneddon and Fox 2006; Foran 2007) and was one of the case studies chosen for analysis for the World Commission on Dams report issued in 2000. One issue that this chapter adds to previous discussions about Pak Mun is a critique of the way that fisheries livelihoods have been over-emphasized. Livelihoods have often been too narrowly defined, and studies and campaigns on Pak Mun that focused exclusively on fisheries impacts have neglected impacts on other activities, such as riverbank gardening, and have failed to account for the widespread necessity of undertaking several livelihood strategies simultaneously. A focus on fisheries has effectively resulted in “the nuances of smallholder livelihood strategies” being ignored (p. 75).

Parts II and III discuss some of the inter-related issues of water and land development, including an important chapter on the Mekong Delta (Chapter 8) by Biggs and colleagues which introduces the idea of the “Delta Machine” to illustrate how models of water management in the delta have materially (and permanently) transformed the landscape. The authors advise that decision-makers better incorporate both understandings of the history of the Delta’s making, and perspectives of local water users to attain more sustainable water management plans. Starting Part III, Chapter 10 offers a kind of critical genealogy of irrigation in Thailand’s northeast. Molle *et al.* illustrate the colonial connections to narratives that link large-scale irrigation development (the so-called “greening” of the northeast) to poverty alleviation, and question whether these narratives are actually a way to address poverty, or if they might more accurately be described as state building projects that generate wealth for elites. Also focusing on Thailand’s northeast, Chapter 7 by Blake *et al.* highlights the importance of the Songkhram wetlands as both land and water resources. Blake *et al.* also compare different ways of knowing about these diverse wetlands, comparing different approaches that have been used by environmental organizations.

One highlight for me is Chapter 13 by Kakonen and Hirsch which offers a critical discussion of the links between participation, knowledge and power, particularly regarding the institution many see as “responsible” for the Mekong River—the Mekong River Commission (MRC). The authors see the MRC playing a largely depoliticized role through the anti-politics of scientific knowledge production. Following Ferguson’s anti-politics analysis (1994) and Foucault’s governmentality analytic (1991[1978]), Kakonen and Hirsch explain that “Ironically . . . the participatory turn in mainstream institutions such as the MRC has another side to it. It is at constant risk of being far from a counterbalance to the expert knowledge . . . participation tends to mirror a type

of development-driven participation that can contribute to the de-politicization of knowledge in support of a particular governance agenda” (p.334). They raise two critical points: first, that participation is not always a productive move towards more democratic or equitable decision-making; and second, that increasing local participation also produces new forms of governance, providing a Southeast Asian echo of Agrawal’s (2005, 7) argument that de-centralizing decision-making is not about making less government, but about more and different government.

Some of the minor critiques that I can offer include the lack of a perspective on China, whether intentional or un-intentional. Dams constructed in China on the upper Mekong are mentioned as a critical challenge, and it would be useful to include a chapter on China’s place within the region’s evolving water politics and social hydrologies. Also, although the M-POWER network does aim to influence decision-making and foster democracy of water governance in the region, this is a book for specialists and is not necessarily accessible reading for non-experts or even for those who speak English as a second or third language. One strength of this collection is the detailed historical context provided for each case, which communicates the importance of historical specificity in each of the cases. Moreover, the analysis and details of case studies compiled together here are not found elsewhere in academic literature. I should also note that the next book available in this series, *Water Rights and Social Justice in the Mekong Region*, was published as of February last year (Lazarus *et al.* 2011).

Finally, with reports over the past year that hydropower is “enjoying something of a global resurgence” (Galbraith 2011), *Contested Waterscapes* is well positioned to be useful, thought-provoking reading for those who continue to address the challenges associated with hydropower development and the ways that waterscapes are being transformed worldwide.

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Population Policy and Reproduction in Singapore: Making Future Citizens

SHIRLEY HSIAO-LI SUN

London and New York: Routledge, 2011, 208 p.

There is growing awareness that persistent low fertility constitutes a significant threat to the future of developed societies. Birth rates well below replacement level are leading to declining populations and aging. That awareness is late in coming because so much attention has been focused for so long on the dangers of overpopulation. Ironically, some of today's lowest fertility rates are found in countries that only recently suffered from what was deemed to be excessively high birth rates. Singapore is one of those countries: three decades ago, the government of Singapore was still implementing policies aimed at depressing fertility. Yet today, Singapore suffers from lowest-low birth rates, with a total fertility rate of around 1.3.

What makes Singapore especially interesting and important as a case study is that it has been such a success story in terms of economic development—and that its success has been largely the result of activist policies followed by its government. There are many countries whose governments have followed a hands-off approach to population or have been faint-hearted in their approach, enacting legislation that is ineffective or not enforced. Singapore is not such a case. Its government has been interventionist in population policy just as it was in economic policy, but with far less success. Understanding the failure of Singapore's pronatalist policies is not only important for Singapore; it is important for other countries facing the same problem. This issue has been widely discussed before, but until now no one has done the kind of empirical research among concerned populations that can explain this policy failure. That's what makes Shirley Hsiao-Li Sun's book so important. Shirley Hsiao-Li Sun's work with women enables us to find out what they think about government policy and why they are not responding to it by having more children.

Over the course of several comprehensive and dense introductory chapters, Sun establishes the context: the causes for declining birth rates globally, the various strategies employed to reverse them, the policies employed in Singapore. That is followed by a discussion of the nature of economics and politics in Singapore. For Sun, Singapore's goal is to create a productivist economy in which the hard working are rewarded, as opposed to a social welfare state: "... the central concern that has shaped the Singaporean government's policies in social provisions and population policies have been molding 'productive' citizens; the ideal citizen in the eyes of the state is an 'economically' productive one" (p. 68).

Singapore provides primarily monetary incentives for parents. These include income tax relief and rebates, child care subsidies, a baby bonus, priority for public housing, paid maternity leave of 12 weeks, and six days paid child care leave. Public sector employees receive other benefits, notably the right for women to work part time after childbirth.

The heart of the book is a discussion of what Sun learns from interviews and focus groups with women and their families concerning the motivation behind their decision-making on having children, and their reaction to government incentives. Nothing is more compelling than hearing the words of the women themselves. Ironically, one reason for low birth rates in Singapore is that its citizens have learned to think the same way as the state: to make decisions about how many children they want based on economic calculations.

The benefits provided by the government do not come near the cost of raising children. For those who are not well off, these benefits constitute "too little of a good thing." Not much is free in Singapore; there are fees for secondary schools and extra programs, and child care is not inexpensive. Those who are better off want to "give their best" for their children, which usually means the kind of education that will maximize their chances for success in a competitive society. They do what many parents have done elsewhere and in the past; they invest all their resources in just one or two children.

Then again, Singapore is dominated by a work culture. Hours are long and fathers are unlikely to utilize parental leave. As one male informant said: "You're in Singapore. In Singapore, you need to work, you don't work you die. . . . Even if the government gives support, cool. What about the private sector? How are they going to react to it?" (p. 99) This is not a place where family life is easy. As one of the women interviewed said:

The government has this thing called "Eat with your Family Day," which I personally feel is so ridiculous because you promote that one day in the entire year, out of 365 days, to eat with your family . . . then what happens to the rest of the time? (p. 97)

One important point Sun makes is that current practice still reflects a eugenics mindset. In 1984, the government initiated policies to encourage well educated women to have more children. That policy proved a political liability and was quickly abandoned. But as Sun points out, income

tax relief only benefits fairly prosperous families. As one informant stated, “How much tax can be deducted from people of the middle class like us? Honestly speaking, they haven’t deducted a cent of tax for my employment of more than 10 years, because there is nothing for them to deduct” (p. 85). And because information about pronatalist programs is not effectively disseminated to the poorer citizens, only better educated citizens tend to be aware of them.

If pronatalist policies are not working, why hasn’t there been a shift in policy? The problem is that policy-making in Singapore is rather opaque. It would be nice to know what the government is thinking, but it is hard to find out. One hopes at least that the research embodied in this book will reach decision-makers. Of course, it may well be that the real policy of the government today is encouragement of immigration to maintain or even increase the size of the work force.

In her conclusion, Sun provides thoughtful and judicious recommendations for a set of pronatalist policies. But she points out that they cannot succeed if “access to education, health and housing is perceived or experienced to be increasingly limited and inequitable” (p. 137). The author argues that Singapore has the financial means to support a more generous approach—but would such policies be compatible with the governing Popular Action Party’s vision of a productivist state?

This is an indispensable book, not only for those seeking to understand population policy in Singapore but for anyone concerned about what kinds of policies can stem the decline of birth rates throughout the world. It displays a remarkable mastery of the field. Sun demonstrates the ability to ask the right questions, develop an effective and appropriate methodology and provide answers. One looks forward to Sun’s continued research in the field of population policy.

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* This review represents only the opinions of its author, and should not be construed as reflecting the opinions of the National Defense University, Department of Defense or U.S. Government.