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CONTENTS

Rommel A. Curaming

Postcolonial Criticism and Southeast Asian Studies:
Pitfalls, Retreat, and Unfulfilled Promises 3

Stephen L. Keck

Constructing Southeast Asia and the Middle East:
Two Corners of the “Victorian World” 27

Cristina Jayme Montiel

A Multidisciplinary Frame for Studying Democratic
Shifts in Southeast Asia: Mixing Politics, Sociology And
Psychology Across Historical Time 57

Meynardo P. Mendoza

The Khmer Rouge Genocide Trial and the Marcos
Human Rights Victims: the Quest for Justice and
Reparations 79

Niti Pawakapan

Emotions and Awareness of Rights among the Thais 105

Kyaw Minn Htin

The Marma from Bangladesh: A ‘de-Arakanized’
Community in Chittagong Hill Tracts 133

Nanda Hmun

Art and Sculpture of Bagan Period: Women in Bagan
Sculpture 155

Zaw Lynn Aung

Study on *Mahāsammata* Model of Kingship in
Mrauk U Period(1430-1784) 177

Appendix

Text and Manuscript Guideline 197

Articles



Postcolonial Criticism and Southeast Asian Studies: Pitfalls, Retreat, and Unfulfilled Promises



Rommel A. Curaming

[*Abstract*]

This paper reflects on the relationship between postcolonial criticism (PC) and Southeast Asian Studies. The emphasis is on the apparent premature retreat from PC as well as its unfulfilled promises and persistent pitfalls. I argue that it is premature to abandon PC because it remains relevant, even essential, in the context of the much ballyhooed age of “knowledge economy” or “information society.” There is a need to take another look at its promises and to work towards fulfilling them, but at the same time be conscious of its persistent problems.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Southeast Asian Studies, Postcolonial Studies

I . Introduction

It was about fifteen years ago when I first encountered Postcolonial

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Studies (PC hereafter) in a MA-level class at the National University of Singapore. To many of my classmates, I recall, the ideas of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, among others, were strange or hardly intelligible. To others who had grasped some of its key tenets, the sense of distrust or adverse reaction was palpable. Perhaps because of my long-standing fascination with alternative rationality espoused by a number of Asian philosophies such as Buddhism and Taoism, the fundamental ideas behind postcolonial theory readily appeared sensible to me. I remember having this feeling of wonderment: what took the supposedly superior minds of European philosophers so long to realize that? Wasn't it that Siddhartha Gautama and Lao Tze (or other Taoists, if Lao Tze was indeed mythical) already knew that over two thousand years ago!? By that, I mean the anti-Enlightenment sentiments of several continental philosophers, their deep distrust of a particular form of rationality that undergirded European modernity, which has been the basic target of the postcolonial critique. I was not surprised to find out later that Nietzsche and Heidegger, among other European philosophers, were exposed to and may have been profoundly influenced by Asian philosophies, Buddhism in particular (Parkes 1987; 1991).

Convinced that there was something fundamentally correct, or politically and ethically necessary, in the postcolonial and poststructuralist critique, I was then hoping the sense of excitement I felt in that class would have an extension or a parallel within the field of Southeast Asian Studies more broadly. It was not to be. The initial tide of rising interests within the Southeast Asian Studies community in the *posties* in the 1990s and early 2000s ebbed as the decade wore on. While doing a PhD in Australia (2002-2006), I observed the initial excitement in certain quarters quickly evolved into caution and later weariness, even hostility, towards them. Erstwhile proponents backtracked from their earlier postcolonial pronouncements, the most stunning example for me being the case of my former lecturer in the class I mentioned above. The mounting level of inhospitality to anything that has a "post" in it, both among self-proclaimed right-conservatives and left-liberals, made me wonder about the deep source of suspicion

or aversion towards them. Joan Scott bluntly calls the celebratory pronouncements by critics about the supposed death or demise of poststructuralism “not only premature but foolish” (2007: 20). She reiterated the call for a continued sharpening of history as a form of critique.

Unlike in South Asian Studies where the Subaltern Studies Collective proved crucial in developing PC, there is an impression that it did not make as much headway in Southeast Asian Studies. A special issue of the journal *Postcolonial Studies* in 2008, for instance, banners the title “Southeast Asia's absence in postcolonial studies.” The Guest Editor, Chua Beng Huat, observed that for a region that was among the most colonized in the world, and if I may add, where some of the most spectacular and painful episodes of decolonisation happened, it was rather curious that Southeast Asia hardly figure in global scholarly exchange on postcolonialism (2008: 235-6). For instance Chua (2008) wryly noted that only 43 pages or three short articles of the 2,000-page, five-volume handbook by Routledge, *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies* (Brydon 2000), were from or about the region.

By no means, however, has PC been really ignored in Southeast Asian Studies. There were scholars who have done notable works that follow PC analytics, most of whom did not explicitly identify with PC but nevertheless were employing approaches, concepts, or theories compatible with PC. Fine examples include the works of Aihwa Ong (1987; 1999), Anthony Milner (1995; 2008), Ann Stoler (1995), Ariel Heryanto (2005), James Siegel (1986), Joel Kahn (1993; 1995; 1998; 2006), John Pemberton (1994), Patricia Pelley (2002), Reynaldo Ileto (1979; 1998; 1999), Susan Bayly (2007), Thongchai Winichakul (1994), Trinh Minh-ha (1989; 1991), Simon Philpott (2000), S. Lily Mendoza (2002), Vicente Rafael (1988), and Wendy Mee and Joel Kahn (2012), among others. If we include anti-colonialism (both liberal and Marxist streams) as postcolonialism's disavowed forebear but, as Brennan (2004) argued, it fits to be acknowledged as such, this list expands considerably to include the work of Jose Rizal (Morga & Rizal 1890), Renato Constantino (1975; 1978),

Teodoro Agoncillo (1956; 1960), D. N. Aidit (1958) and Jose Ma. Sison (1971) and Syed Hussein Alatas (1977a; 1977b). The presence of PC in Southeast Asian Studies is far from insignificant but it is insufficiently recognized, limited, or concealed. Also, a drumbeat of retreat from PC (or at least from its “classical” version) was heard in the field even before it matured, as expressed perhaps most pointedly in Goh Beng Lan’s introduction to *Decentring and Diversifying Southeast Asian Studies* (2011), to which I shall return below. For the purpose of this paper, I limit my scope to the works that explicitly have been identified with PC, and refer to the works of scholars such as Spivak, Said, Bhabha, Chakrabarty, etc.

In this paper, I seek to reflect anew on PC with emphasis on what I consider a premature retreat from it, as well as its unfulfilled promises and persistent pitfalls. I shall delineate first what I mean by postcolonial critique to frame the scope of my reflection. Cognizant of the fact that PC is wide-ranging and expanding, and it consists of various and at times conflicting streams of thoughts and approaches, each of which has evolved through the years, it is very challenging to pin it down. Any attempt could easily result in a straw man. I can only select a few aspects which are sufficient to illustrate my argument that it is “premature” and “foolish”, taking a cue from Joan Scott, to abandon PC because it remains relevant, even necessary, in the context of the much ballyhooed age of “knowledge economy” or “information society.” There is a need to take another look at its promises and to work towards fulfilling them, but at the same time to be conscious of its persistent problems.

II. Making Sense of PC

That PC and related theoretical approaches such as poststructuralism are often misunderstood may be understandable. Some of the major proponents write in a manner that defy easy comprehension¹⁾, which is partly due to the naturally complex

1) Homi Bhabha, for example, won in 1998 the 2nd Prize in the journal *Philosophy and*

theoretical issues they tackle. More crucial is the nature of PC itself. Its radical skepticism that rejects outright the many long-established views about the nature of knowledge and scholarship can only baffle, even enrage, many scholars (e.g. Ahmad 1992; Dirlik 1994). Sometimes, one has to turn one's beliefs inside out in order to make sense of PC criticism. On the other hand, the reasons why it is controversial and is widely rejected, and I think this is more important, lies in its profoundly political implications. Critics complain bitterly against its alleged tendency to culturalize and depoliticize many deeply political issues such as identity, inequality, oppression and thus emasculate progressive politics (e.g. Chibber 2013; Kaiwar 2014; San Juan 1998).

Fluidity is integral to PC since its formative years in the 1980's. Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) offers a very clear expression of the built-in auto-criticism or self-reflexivity of PC as a scholarly project. Other proponents may not have been as explicit and demanding as Spivak on this aspect, but being a key tenet of PC theorizing, it is one of the driving forces for PC to continually change to prevent it from becoming what Bourdieu calls a *doxa*, an established authority "beyond question". This stance springs from the "nature" of PC as a critique of knowledge. It is a stance anchored largely on Nietzsche's and Foucault's notion of power/knowledge, which underpins Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), as well as Derrida's deconstruction, which became a defining element of PC through the works of Gayatri Spivak (Derrida trans. by Spivak 1976; Spivak 1996). From the epistemological standpoint, many proponents of PC subscribe to non-foundationalism. As opposed to foundational or realist epistemology which assumes reality "out there" can be directly accessed by observers and that human tools such as language are able to capture and represent it, non-foundational epistemology posits that access to reality can only be possible through

Literature's contest for bad writing, for passage in his book *The Location of Culture*. Incidentally, the top prize went to Judith Butler, who also has been invoked or cited often in PC writing. See http://denisdutton.com/bad_writing.htm , accessed on 10 April 2015

human-made or socially constructed mechanisms such as language. This is the reason for PC's tendency to be idealist, discursive, and textualist in orientation, as evocatively captured in Derrida's (1976) claim that "There is no outside-text" (commonly quoted is Spivak's translation: "There is nothing outside the text.") While this feature enables powerful critiques not possible otherwise, it is also a source of persistent problems or confusion within and beyond PC, as will be discussed further below. The fact that among proponents of PC, there are those who emphasize the Foucauldian-Derridean approaches, while others downplay them and uphold instead the materialist analytic trajectory, contributes significantly to the malleability and tensions within PC.

The deep Marxist roots of the anti-colonial intellectual movement in pre- and postwar years was a major factor that defines PC (Bartolovich and Lazarus 2004). The various shades of Marxist orientations that influence or were adapted within PC contributes to its shifting characteristics. Brennan (2004) has shown in his analysis of intellectual development in the interwar decades of 1920s and 1930s that the impact of the 1917 Russian Revolution was not only significant to the growth of anticolonial thoughts but also served as a bedrock for later development of PC. Interestingly, this deep roots, Brennan further notes, is being elided by PC theorists who are keen to emphasize instead their disavowal of Marxism. The convergence of the Marxist emphasis on political economy and materiality on the one hand, and Derridean-Foucauldian highlighting of epistemology and textuality on the other, ensures tensions and contradictions within PC. It should also be noted that Marxists or Marxism-inspired scholars proved the most virulent and trenchant critics of PC, particularly its non-foundationalist epistemology, culturalism, epistemological difference, ambivalence and hybridity (Ahmad 1992; Kaiwar 2014; Parry 2004; San Juan 1998; 2000).

Another strand of analytic approach that infuses PC is psychoanalysis. It has found its way into PC largely via the works of Franz Fanon (1963; 1967) and Homi Bhabha (1990; 1994). Why psychoanalysis proved useful for PC is summed by Greedharry (2008: 5-6) in these words:

psychoanalysis offers some methodological advantages...(I)t explains either some particular aspects of colonial culture or that it is an approach that allows colonialism to be seen in a deeper or broader perspective than other disciplines...Since Fanon, focusing on subjectivity, identity or the relational dynamic between colonizers and colonized, through psychoanalytic language, has allowed postcolonial criticism to insist and demonstrate that there are devastating cultural and personal manifestations and effects of colonialism that strictly economic and political accounts of colonialism have not, in the past, been able or willing to reveal.

What psychoanalysis did in effect was to enshrine, even celebrate, in PC the ambivalence, hybridity, and instability of the self or subject. By implications, if the self is in itself unstable and exists “merely” in relational form (always in reference to its Other), it casts doubts on the many long-standing and taken-for-granted views and approaches in scholarship which are grounded on the assumed integrity of the self. The notion of the fluid self perhaps captures accurately the theoretical approximation of reality but it also stretches to the utmost the tenuousness of any description of critique. I will return to this point below.

For the purpose of this paper, I take PC primarily as a non-foundational critique of knowledge and not as basis for producing alternative knowledge, such as those from the Marxist perspective. As a second-order approach, it focuses on the level of discourse and seeks to uncover power relations that are deeply imbedded in a knowledge claim. It exposes hidden assumptions that lend knowledge the appearance of naturalness, accuracy, certainty and transparency. What PC seeks to do is to free knowledge from the invisible “prison house” of power by exposing the supposedly non-existent or disguised link between the two. The ultimate aim seems to render knowledge transparent, and to democratize the use of, or access to it. With everyone aware of the potentially vicious link between power and knowledge, it will render knowledge less useful for the powerful to perpetuate their interests. The general public will then gain more space to exercise their freedom to design their own lives as knowledge will be transformed as everyone’s own²)—as a tool for

or as a site of resistance; a location of struggle rather than as an instrument of control. It is important to clarify this point because PC contains other tendencies, which could be contradictory, and these opposing tendencies emanate from theoretical traditions not epistemologically compatible with poststructuralism.

III. Pitfalls and Retreat

One of the major pitfalls that dog PC lies in the tendency of proponents to use it for the purpose that it was not really suitable. As noted above, it is best treated as a critique, not basis, of knowledge, as most clearly exemplified by Edward Said's book *Orientalism* (1978). As such, it problematizes the representation of reality—how scholarship, journalism, and literature represent the real. It cannot, strictly speaking, lay claim to it. The trouble is that the use of PC has been extended to problematize or cast doubt on reality itself, suggesting by implication that there is no reality or that the real cannot really be known as it is supposedly relative, fragmented, fluid, shifting, ambivalent, randomized, etc. This horrifies many including those who have progressive or humanistic advocacies as integral part of their scholarship. They complain that PC denies the platform to ground critique based on the stark reality of inequality and exploitation. Vasant Kaiwar captures the sentiment clearly when he claims that PC amounts to a “sophisticated apology for global and class polarization” and that it constitutes an “aestheticisation of poverty and human misery” (2014: 166).

One of the reasons for PC's tendency to be used for purposes other than what it is best suited for lies in its contradictory relations with other elements that converge in it. As noted above, Marxism and psychoanalysis coexist rather uneasily with poststructuralism in PC. Despite the fundamental epistemological differences between, say, the realist Marxism and the non-realist poststructuralism, scholars identified with PC such as Gayatri

2) I derive this point from Jenkins' (1995) interpretation of Hayden White's historiography.

Spivak have tried to integrate them in one analytic frame, thus, gives the impression that things are fine. Spivak's endorsement, for example, of strategic essentialism in the famous article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (Spivak 1988) may have emanated from her leftist sympathy for the truly marginalized, but it goes directly against her poststructuralist aversion for essentialism. Despite her categorical conclusion, reached after a very careful analysis, that the subaltern cannot speak, that someone who has a greater power such as scholars have to speak on their behalf, its damning implication that all knowledge is power-driven has not been pursued to its logical end, but was tamed and kept within what proponents of PC believe to be analytically manageable domain. In fairness to Spivak, she tries really hard to push the logic of deconstruction and power/knowledge in her analysis of knowledge politics, but others seem unwilling to follow.

In addition, the postmodernist or poststructuralist inflection in PC does not fit squarely with the inherently modernist nature of scholarship which it seeks to critique but within which it cannot but insert itself. This scholarship relies on a form of logic or rationality that is traceable to the long intellectual traditions of "modern" Europe. While PC scholars call for the rupturing of the deterministic binaries in thought and category-formation, they cannot but make use of the Cartesian logic that presupposes such relationship. On one side, they reject correspondence theory of language and representation but, on the other, they are left with no choice but use in their analysis the same language system inherent where the goal is to capture a meaningful essence. (Otherwise, how can they explain what they mean or how can they launch a meaningful critique?) They chide traditional scholars like historians for their "certaintist" belief in the ability to represent reality out there and suggest instead that rather than "reality", discourse should now be the object of study. At the other end of the line, however, in order for discourse to be analyzed it also requires some kind of pretension that it is a "reality" out there. One can cite contradictions after another and I think this only goes to show how heavy the price *postie* scholars have had to pay for postmodernist aspirations while

operating at the same time within the modernist scholarship. Many scholars have dealt with this awkward position by invoking and integrating self-reflexivity, about which I will return below, into their analytic practice.

Against the backdrop of complaints noted above, it seems easy to understand why drumbeats of retreat from postcolonialism or poststructuralism have ensued. While it is true that postcolonial studies has gained institutional presence with at least two major international journals and programs in several major universities in the US and Europe, it remains at the margins in Southeast Asian Studies, as noted by Chua Beng Huat in the special issue of *Postcolonial Studies* in 2008. The most stunning example for me was Goh's (2011) lengthy introduction to the book *Decentring and Diversifying Southeast Asian Studies*. Exasperated by the support inadvertently lent by PC key ideas to conservative high jacking of the progressive agenda for human rights, justice, freedom and racial equality in Malaysia and other parts of the region, Goh offers a theoretically grounded but ethico-politically dubious justification for regional/national perspective and in effect downplayed or abandoned altogether PC's critiques of East/West binary, nationalism, essentialism, and power/knowledge. In her words:

...I realized how the expansion of postcolonial politics into the political sphere had increasingly debilitated progressive politics as the struggle for freedom from oppression became quickly associated with Western ideology and rejected...One is called to develop pedagogic directions which are responsive to local social and material conditions, based on a recognition of different ethical imaginations... (Goh 2011: 35).

Having sat in Goh Beng Lan's class on Postcolonial Perspectives on Southeast Asia in 2000-2001 which was characterized among others by her enthusiasm and by a high dose of anti-metanarrative, anti-East-West binary and post-nationalist discourses, it induced vertigo in me to read the rather lengthy pages (35-45) Goh devotes to justify the resuscitation of the East-West divide and of the national framework on the ground

that they are needed and are real if viewed from the existential local experience. Knowing how committed she has been to ethico-progressive scholarship, it stunned me how easy those pages could be read as an apologist for conservative politics which she sincerely deplored. I strongly doubted if those were in fact the solutions to the problems she so clearly identified. In my mind, what Goh Beng Lan did amounted to turning her back on the core tenets of postcolonial critique. While one can easily concede the many problems with PC, what she did was like throwing the baby out with the bathwater. As I will show below, despite problems with PC, its core tenets remain valid and the shortcomings lie in the failure of scholars to take a heed to its promises that remain unfulfilled.

IV. Promises: Delivered and Unfulfilled

A major thing that postcolonial-poststructuralist critique has bestowed upon Southeast Asian Studies, among many other fields, is the centrality or the elementary role of power in knowledge production. Power is what lends the otherwise floating and fleeting signifier (knowledge) stability and the appearance of correspondence to reality. That this idea is often missed and if it is not missed, its full implications are ignored, may be due to the strong pull of realist epistemology in the scholarly community. It may also be due to the narrow conception of power that blindsides scholars into seeing only powers in political institutions and political leaders. Foucault's plea for the need to cut off the king's head in political theory has been ignored by many analysts of politics. But those who were influenced by PC with strong poststructuralist bent made it one their major starting points.

The deeply political, and often concealed, nature of knowledge is clearly demonstrated in, say, Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Foucault's several works (1966; 1978; 1980). While the entwining or mutually constituting or reinforcing relation between power and knowledge, as indicated in power/knowledge, is oft repeated

and in fact has become so trite by now, its implications have nevertheless not been taken to its full conclusion. That is, all knowledge regardless of form, whether it is true or not, is enabled or driven by power. What scholars including proponents of PC do is accept this postulate only up to an extent—to the extent that it will not obviously undermine the foundation of their analysis or scholarship in general. I shall return to this point below.

As noted earlier, one way scholars address the recognition of the deeply political nature of knowledge is via the call for self-reflexivity. It refers to the reasonable demand for scholars to be self-conscious of everything (including cultural and class background, subject position, stakes at power relations, ideological leaning, theoretical proclivities, epistemological vantage point, etc.) about themselves, and factor them in interpretive and analytic exercise. This is usually done via a lengthy preface or epilogue, or it is integrated into the introduction and conclusion, or the whole body of the study. By laying explicit the author's background, readers are informed of the factors that might affect the author's analysis and conclusion. This helped in deciding whether to accept a knowledge claim or not. This has been a common practice among anthropologists, but even non-anthropologists who have been influenced by PC have incorporated this practice in their own scholarly work. In PC, Spivak's works (e.g. her introduction to Derrida, 1976; Spivak 1988; 1996; 1999) exemplify perhaps the best and clearest illustration of how to be self-reflexive.

Reflexivity at the scholar's personal level is no doubt a welcome practice. Partial or individualized as it is, however, it may give a false sense of adequacy that lulls everyone into complacency. As one expects not all scholars are convinced or willing to concede that their scholarly practices are affected by their personal and locational context, the act of honesty of some might be construed as sufficient to address the problem. A form of collective reflexivity needs to be pursued by the scholarly class as a whole. This is one of the promises of PC that remain unfulfilled. As scholarship is like a machine that generates social and intellectual capital for the scholarly class, it must not be

treated as impartial or transparent. It is the scholars' main well-spring for power and influence. Full reflexivity is necessary to foreground the power of scholars and the scholarly community as a whole as an important factor in the analysis of production and transmission of knowledge. The analysis of power-knowledge usually focuses on how the powerful (elites, state, interest groups, leaders) control or influence knowledge production and how in the process it disempowers or marginalizes others in the community. The Marxist-inspired dominant ideology thesis exemplifies this approach. Other analysts make the marginalized and other less powerful groups their subject of interest. James Scott and Subaltern Studies are a good example. In either case, we hardly see the creator or the custodians of knowledge as an important factor in the analytic and accountability equation. Notwithstanding professional training, they cannot claim innocence or impartiality in the whole undertaking simply because it is the stamp of professional imprimatur that they provide that lend knowledge claim the appearance of believability of acceptability.

The development of nationalist historiography in postcolonial societies can illustrate the need for a collective reflexivity. Nationalist historiographies developed primarily as a response to colonial historiography that preceded it. Easy to see was the relationship between power holders, the elites who run the newly established independent states, and the growth of nationalist historiography. The latter served to legitimize and strengthen the position of the new leaders in the same way that colonial historiography underwrote the interests of the colonizers. Later, there came critics such as the Subaltern Studies of nationalist historiography. They say that it is elitist and that it utterly disregards the views, knowledge, and aspiration of the subaltern sectors. Such criticisms have been substantiated by studies purporting to speak for these marginalized groups. Iloeto's *Pasyon and Revolution* (1979), for instance, has earned rave reviews for its alleged success in allowing the Tagalog peasants to speak with their own voices through folklore, songs, myths, and legends, etc. The claim to fame of the Subaltern Studies group also rests on the same foundation. Granting that these scholarly works have

captured accurately the voices of the subalterns, it is rather disconcerting that it required passing through the scholarly “machine” before such folk knowledge could be recognized. Folk knowledge has been there since time immemorial. The question about the need for scholarly validation for such knowledge foregrounds the concealed power of scholarship to determine things.

It is worrisome to take notice of the absences in the whole equation. While it is very clear that elitist historiography serves the interest of the dominant groups in the society, one wonders whether shifting the gaze to the subaltern would really be to the subalterns’ advantage. It seems rather comic and has all the patronizing air to tell them “Hey your knowledge is a valid kind of knowledge after all. You and others can now use it to empower the marginalized!” For all we know, as far as scholarly success in terms of representing the voice or knowledge of the subalterns is concerned, such knowledge could be used by the already more powerful to control or oppress them even more. Their inscrutability is their last and sometimes only defense. Being known may just be a few steps away from being controlled. A question, therefore, is inevitable: Who could be the beneficiary of the whole subaltern project? Critics such as Arif Dirlik (1994), Epifanio San Juan Jr. (1998) or Vasant Kaiwar (2014) suggest that it is the PC scholars themselves, among others. With mastery of scholarly tools, they have the power and authority to chart the course of knowledge production. By speaking about or on behalf of the subaltern, they generate intellectual capital and in the process privilege their position. They have a huge stake in the whole scholarly enterprise which enable, validate, and perpetuate the forms of intellectual capital they accumulate. It is precisely on this account that I follow Bourdieu in treating scholars, as a class in themselves, alongside the powerful “elite” in the analysis of power-knowledge relations. One may argue that the scholars are part of the elite and thus should be lumped together. However, there are also scholars who not only refuse to identify with, but also actively oppose, the interests of the elite, and that their power derives primarily from their role in

knowledge production, rather than material wealth as in the case of the elite. Given these considerations, it is appropriate to regard them as a separate analytic entity. Besides, for all our concerns about inequality—social, political, and economic—there is a kind of inequality that, before the notion of knowledge economy or knowledge society became a buzzword, had often been ignored—the knowledge-based inequality. Given that all inequalities are probably based on or reinforced by various forms of knowledge, there is a need to fully recognize and understand its implications in scholarly practice.

Pushing the logic of power/knowledge to its conclusion is the major promise that remains unfulfilled in PC and similar critical theories. It refers, among others, to the logical and ultimately ethical requirement to regard all forms of knowledge, accurate or not, to be power-driven. There has been enormous amount of opposition to this idea. For the most part, the important thing about knowledge is the question of veracity or accuracy, whether a knowledge claim is true or not. From this standpoint, suggesting power relations as determinant of knowledge is perverse. There seems to be two closely related reasons for this rejection. The first is epistemological and the other is political. From the epistemological standpoint, pushing the logic of power/knowledge denies the long-standing belief in a possibility of concrete foundation for knowledge. As an extreme form of epistemological skepticism, this nihilistic position is easily rejected by scholars whose very existence validates the possibility of knowledge. In my view, one cannot say outright that nihilistic stance is wrong because for one, how do we know it is wrong if we haven't tried it as our basis for "knowing". Any attempt to prove nihilism wrong will only emphasize the validity of its opposite, and not the incorrectness of nihilism because we would only be judging the latter based on the former. In addition, the kind of logic we use in our analysis operates on dialectical, binary relationship. That is, if there is such a thing as knowing or knowledge, it automatically presupposes the existence of its opposite, not-knowing or non-knowledge. Since we cannot really prove nihilism wrong, and it seems to be a part of the logical

scheme of things, we have to allow it to occupy its rightful place in the spectrum of logical possibilities—that which range from the most positivistic on the one hand to the nihilistic on the other. Allowing such move does not necessarily erase all the foundations of knowledge, as feared by many. It does not necessarily mean that the world will be plunged into the state of absolute anarchy or chaos. This is because power precedes knowledge in circular power/knowledge relations. Knowledge can reinforce and help maintain power, but power is the starting point. Since society is always characterized by unequal distribution of resources and power, such inequality will always serve as the bedrock of knowledge production. Hypothetically, it would only be under a perfectly equal society where nihilistic state can operate. Does it suggest that there is no reality or truth at all? No, it only means that the existing power relations will decide whether the representations of truth and falsehood will be taken as an area. The extent of distortion from the transcendental truth serves as measure of power differentials between competing stakeholders.

From the political standpoint, scholars' outright rejection of nihilistic possibility may be due to the loss of power and privilege for scholars. As noted earlier, scholarship is the scholars' bread and butter. As long as society believes in scholarship, the scholars' main source of social capital is ensured.

What are the consequences of pushing the logic of power/knowledge and of allowing nihilism to occupy its rightful logical position? First, they facilitate full reflexivity in scholarly undertaking, as already noted earlier. It would mean that scholars will be afforded a chance to step back and see not just their position within scholarly community, which is a kind of partial reflexivity, but also the privileged position of scholarship in the scheme of things. While it is useful to see things from within, it is also limiting. Being able to see it from afar will pave the way for a better, more complete understanding.

Second, there is as much need for some kind of cartography and accounting of power/knowledge relations, aside from the

pursuit of empirical accuracy, conceptual clarity, and theoretical sophistication. For so long, scholarship has been mostly preoccupied by the latter and not enough attention has been given to the accounting of the different sources of power that gave rise to various forms of knowledge and the mapping out of the contexts and modalities of actual knowledge use. This imbalance, I argue, reflects the need for scholars (including PC proponents) to push the logic of power/knowledge to its logical end.

Goh's retreat from the core tenets of PC, which I have noted earlier, seems to be a consequence of the unwillingness to push the logic of power/knowledge. It may also have proceeded from an unwarranted expectation of PC to play a role that it was not meant to do. Had she pushed the logic of power/knowledge instead, the critical-analytic approach could have consisted in mapping out the dynamics and account for power relations that enabled the persistence of racial politics, the impasse on human debates, and the weakening of progressive politics as whole. In doing so, people will be in a better position to see why such kind of politics persist and who gets empowered and who gets marginalized by it. If a progressive scholarship has a main task, it is to inform or enlighten people and persuade them of a better alternative. The debilitated progressive politics in Malaysia or elsewhere cannot be addressed by resuscitating East-West binaries and regional/national perspective simply because these perspectives have long before been proven to suppress pro-people agenda and justify elitist interests in Malaysia or elsewhere.

V. Conclusion

Despite serious problems with PC, there are compelling reasons for upholding its key tenets, particularly non-foundationalism and power/knowledge. Not only do they remain relevant but they seem to be politically and ethically necessary. Progressive scholarship cannot seem to do away with the possibility that knowledge is cryptically political and that scholarship is deeply implicated in establishing, maintaining, and enhancing unequal

power relations in society. It is unfortunate that rather than pushing the logic of power/knowledge to its conclusion so as to open up new and potentially promising avenues for a more effective progressive politics, erstwhile proponents like Goh Beng Lan resuscitate politically dubious ideas such as the East-West divide and region/national perspectives. She also chides PC for emasculating efforts to promote pro-people agenda such as human rights and racial equality. Retreat is counterproductive. Deeper engagement is called for.

The continuing attacks on PC as vividly shown in the books of Vasant Kaiwar (2014) creates an impression of the lack of understanding of the nature of PC as fundamentally a critique of knowledge. It is a second-order theoretical project with aims and epistemological bases that are different from the realist-oriented, first-order theoretical approaches like Marxism. Rather than the war of attrition, therefore, it seems better to have a détente between them to allow productive critical engagements between their proponents. It is for the interest of general public to have both approaches in place.

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Constructing Southeast Asia and the Middle East: Two Corners of the “Victorian World”



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[*Abstract*]

How should we conceptualize regions? What is the context in which new approaches to regional study take place? What is the role of historical change in the reconceptualization of regions or areas? This article addresses this issue by using two case studies to shed light on the history of regional study by comparing some of the ways in which the Middle East and Southeast Asia have been conceptualized. Accordingly, the discussion traces the ways in which these areas were understood in the 19th century by highlighting the ideas of a number of influential Victorian thinkers. The Victorians are useful because not only did British thinkers play critical roles in the shaping of modern patterns of knowledge, but their empire was global in scope, encompassing parts of both Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

However, the Victorians regarded these places quite differently: Southeast Asia was frequently described as “Further India” and the Middle East was the home of the Ottoman Empire. Both of these places were at least partly understood in

relation to the needs of British policy-makers, who tended to focus most of their efforts according to the needs of India—which was their most important colonial possession.

The article exhibits the connections between the “Eastern Question” and end of the Ottoman Empire (and the political developments which followed) led to the creation of the concept of “Middle East”. With respect to Southeast Asia, attention will be devoted to the works of Alfred Russell Wallace, Hugh Clifford, and others to see how “further India” was understood in the 19th century. In addition, it is clear that the successful deployment of the term “Southeast Asia” reflected the political needs of policy makers in wake of decolonization and the Cold War.

Finally, by showing the constructive nature of regions, the article suggests one possible new path for students of Southeast Asia. If the characterization of the region is marked by arbitrary factors, it may actually point to a useful avenue of enquiry, a hermeneutic of expedience. Emphasis on the adaptive and integrative features of lived realities in Southeast Asia may well be a step beyond both the agendas of “colonial knowledge” and anti-colonial nationalism.

Keywords: Region, Southeast Asia, Middle East, Victorian, Britain, Ottoman, imperialism, territorial

I . Introduction

The recent discussions about the future of the study of Southeast Asia reflect the larger challenge for devising research methods for the academic exploration of the region (Goh 2011; Herayanto 2002; Kratoska, et. al. 2005). Fully comprehending Southeast Asia, an artificially defined but complex and hybrid region, will probably always be a perennial problem. The shrinking of the world, the success of global communications, and the veritable ritualization of travel may have collectively implied that understanding regions or areas has become easier or self-evident. In fact, it is possible that despite these developments (and others), the task of conceptualizing the study of areas and

regions (or nations, for that matter) has become even more difficult. This paper will draw upon historical analysis to depict some moments in the pre-history of the definition of “Southeast Asia” in order to exhibit the forces which played a role in defining the boundaries of the region. This will be achieved by contrasting some of the things articulated with the area later known as “Southeast Asia” with that of the “Middle East”, in order to show that these factors were at least as important in giving definition to that region. The connections between these regions may be greater than has been generally appreciated, but as one scholar observed, there is a “paucity of historiography” on these transregional issues (Tagliacozzo 2009: 1). While tracing some of these linkages is useful, the discussion here seeks to highlight some of the methodological issues both in the articulation of regions (which in the 20th century were increasingly confirmed by international borders and treaties) and the reasons why some geographical characterizations become decisive. Finally, this paper will conclude by suggesting some possibilities for future academic exploration for the conceptualization of Southeast Asia.

Given these priorities, it will be useful to draw upon political geography, particularly as it is reflected in the work of John Agnew’s idea of the “Territorial Trap” because it underscores the ways in which the “territorial state” has come to define the conceptual basis of international relations. In this discussion, “the territorial trap” will be extended to the critique of regional thought. Agnew observed that where space has been defined in relation to territory, it has come at the cost of disregarding other geographic indicators. He explained:

space is viewed as a series of blocks defined by state territorial boundaries. Other geographical scales (local, global, etc.) are disregarded. This usually taken-for-granted representation of space appears dominant in such fields as political sociology, macroeconomics, and international relations. (1994: 55).

In contrast, Agnew observed that space could also be understood in structural terms which implied that “geographical

entities of one sort or another, nodes, districts, regions, etc., have spatial effects that result from their interaction or relationship with one another" (1994: 55). He explained that both of these conceptions of space tended to be ahistorical. As Agnew put it, "these understandings have idealized fixed representations of territorial or structural space as appropriate irrespective of historical context" (1994: 55). Agnew's point was that international relations had to be reconceptualized away from the "territorial trap" and consider more nuanced ways of understanding the world. For us, the "territorial trap" serves as a reminder of the dangers of epistemic or scholarly homogenization within an ascribed territorial region. At the same time, this discussion will refer upon the broader ocular tradition of critical thought to suggest that ways in which these regions (and others) become visible is significant.

Furthermore, this paper will follow in a general way the work of Arjun Appadurai, whose *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy* (1990) explored a number of issues to the cultural engagement with regions. In particular, Appadurai's construction of "scapes" provides a basis for exploring how meaning is ascribed to places-often unknown (1990). The history of thought about regions has yet to be written, but it seems evident that many regional definitions have been exonymic, in that it has come from outsiders.

In addition, this discussion will be informed by some of the theoretical work associated with tourism. The exploration of the subject has produced many useful insights into cultural history, but the analysis of the phenomenon itself may have even richer implications. The works of Dean MacCannell (*The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1976) and John Urry (*The Tourist Gaze*, 1990) might be taken to mean that the act of beholding—central to any tourist encounter—may be more representative of the ways in which the "other" is understood than indicating a new direction for the study of tourist behavior. In fact, it might make more sense to situate these figures in the tradition of 'the picturesque,' and Grand Tour in order to argue that the visibility of external phenomenon continues to be of critical significance.

For our purposes here, it should become evident that it was not enough to locate regions, but they had to be made visible and ideally audible.

One assumption made here is that the territorial limits defined by nations tend towards conceptual homogenization. Moving forward, the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, especially *Truth and Method*, will provide a possible basis for both the recovery of the hermeneutics of “colonial knowledge” and building upon the genealogies of knowledge about Southeast Asia, an interpretative model which is sensitive to the nuances of regional identities.

The objective of this paper is neither to fully delineate these challenges nor to try to measure the extent to which the epistemological hurdles toward the academic comprehension of regions has increased; rather by providing a case study from the 19th century, the idea here is to shed light on what is in fact an old problem. Trying to find the means to understand a place and then to organize the systematic study of it has always been a challenge. The re-conceptualization of Southeast Asia, in fact, might be described as a repetitive or even ritual exercise (King 2010). In this instance, the discussion highlights the manner in which the Victorians, that is, those who were part of the worlds associated with 19th century Britain and the British Empire, conceptualized and understood the regions that are currently referred to as Southeast Asia and the Middle East. It might be remembered, as well, that the Victorians were the dominant global power of the 19th century. The clichés associated with *Pax Britannica* are well known and need not be repeated here, but it is important to recall that many of the decisions made by the builders of the British empire directly affected both the regions later known as the “Middle East” and “Southeast Asia”. These examples should make the contingent basis on which the study of two very different, but significant parts of the world were conceptualized and understood. To anticipate, it should be clear that these efforts produced not necessarily “colonial knowledge” but imperial knowledge. These areas were comprehended not only by the needs of the empire—but through the lived realities

of empires.

This discussion will examine the ways in which a number of 19th century British authors, who had direct experience in the region currently referred to as “the Middle East” or even “the MENA” (Middle East and North Africa) conceptualized these areas. These writers tried to explain what they had seen and experienced to readers in Britain. Their task, as such, was to translate their experience and they did so by trying to make it visible. It might be remembered that these figures were bringing their own conceptual frameworks to bear upon a foreign and inherently “other” environment; that is, their needs reflected the imperatives of British power as it dominated global politics. It is probably safe to argue, as well, that it would be the needs and interests of British policy makers in the 19th century, who would play a key role in the articulation of some of the world’s key geographic features. To cite one obvious example, the naming of many geographic features in different parts of the world was occasioned by the death of Prince Albert and more than a generation later, Queen Victoria.

At the same time, this paper will also treat the ways in which the area now known as Southeast Asia was defined by British authors. Since it is clear that the term “Southeast Asia” came into use in the early 20th century, attention will be devoted to manner in which the British conceptualized the spaces that it now occupies. Hence, British writing about Burma (then part of India), the East Indies, the Philippines, Siam, the Malay peninsula (including the Straits Settlements), Indochina, and Hong Kong will be considered. At stake for the British was the ability to define and discuss the region which was influenced by China, but not Chinese and still affected by India (their chief priority), but clearly not Indian. To look ahead, it might be added that in the 19th century, the British were hardly interested in trying to find the area’s homogenous or essentializing features. Just as the British understood the Middle East through the realities of engaging the Ottoman empire, so too, the assessment of things in Southeast Asia reflected their own imperial agenda.

This paper has been developed to shed light on some of the issues inherent in the reconceptualization of Southeast Asia. Accordingly, it highlights both the “Middle East” and “Southeast Asia” to call attention to the ways in which regions have been understood and defined. This discussion will stress the importance of developing a genealogical perspective which focuses upon regions. The achievements of the scholars who studied Southeast Asia are themselves worthy of chronicle—if not historical and hermeneutical analysis. Recovering these efforts, which may be described as almost “against the grain”, should enable scholars to raise new questions and delineate alternative lines of enquiry. Accordingly, this articles aims to be suggestive, rather than comprehensive or definitive because it aims to stimulate reflection and future modes of analysis—as a way to further the basic aims of this conference. In fact, this discussion has looked at “colonial knowledge” possibly in a new way: instead of examining its biases with respect to subject populations, it has explored the ways in which the needs of empire (as well as post-imperial situations) affect the assessment of other empires, and, more importantly here, the peoples and places that they govern. What should emerge is that the term “Middle East” made little sense in the 19th century because much of what is assumed to be in that area today was part of the weakened Ottoman Empire. The term “Southeast Asia” has a different, but related beginning. Ultimately, the main assumption on which much of this discussion has been predicated is that regional analysis is largely a post-imperial phenomenon. That is, the need to study regions is a direct result of a relatively new world political order which is based on the sovereign powers of the nation state system. To put it another way, the necessity of studying cultures, peoples, languages, geographies, economies, histories, and migrations might well be done within an empire or within and in relation to extant empires. In contrast, in a system made up of nation states, each with well defined borders and nation-building projects, the necessity to make these academic investigations is probably even greater, but the means to do so are diminished. Regional study, it follows, becomes attractive because it offers scholars the preconditions for conducting their

research without being halted by national borders.

Furthermore, this paper will adopt a constructive position for exhibiting the ways in which regions have been understood. Since the conceptualization of regions has often taken place from outside, it makes sense to take account of some of the insights to be gleaned from studying tourism (and the literature it produced) in order to capitalize on what is yielded by new work involving cross-cultural encounters. Accordingly, it will emphasize that it is precisely the artificial nature of the region's definition, which actually makes a good departure point for subsequent study. At the same time, many scholars write about Southeast Asia from "inside" it. To generalize a bit, the "internalist" perspective, as such, de-emphasizes the constructive nature of regional definition, which tends to take the territorial borders for granted.

II. Understanding the Ottoman East

The representations of the Ottoman Empire in modern geographic and cartographic discourses reflected the same process by which the Middle East would later be depicted (Yilmaz 2012). The term Middle East, which is currently deployed to define a broad, changing region, appears to be a relatively recent invention. At the heart of these representations lay "the Eastern Question" which carried a range of meanings, but most commonly involved the future fate of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, examining 19th century discourses reveal that there were a range of other terms which had similar—but not identical functions. The most common of these was "Near East", but it might be remembered that the term "Orient" might also be used in these discourses.

The term "Near East" has its own history which helps to illuminate the prehistory of the idea of the Middle East as a region. Yilmaz has collected a number of European formulations about the "Near East": it is useful to note that for some authors, including the historian, Leopold von Ranke, it began at Belgrade

(then a part of the Ottoman Empire). Eduard Alletz, who could be said to have engaged the “Eastern Question” from an early point, regarded the Balkans as a frontier which divided Austria and Turkey, Occident and the Orient and Christianity and Islam. British authors were hardly different: Alexander Kinglake also believed that the East started in Belgrade (Yilmaz 2012).

More interestingly, other British authors contrasted the “Far East”, by which they meant China and Japan, with “the Near East”. This term might well be compared with “Near Orient” because it was more closely tied with commercial and strategic interests. As the 19th century came to an end, it would be the “Near East” which would be deployed by British writers with greater frequency (Yilmaz 2012). It might be noted that the term “Nearer East” was employed—often to emphasize the region’s connections with Christianity (Yilmaz 2012).

It is instructive to examine Charles Doughty’s *Wanderings in Arabia* because in that volume many of the presuppositions which the Victorians held about the Middle East become apparent. Doughty characterized the region (without defining its limits) as the “Semitic East”, (yet another term with its roots in the broader Judeo-Christian tradition) which was a land with a deep sense of the past. Doughty explained that it was “a land of sepulchres” (1908: 44), with Syria “a limestone country…full of tombs” which had come to have other uses. He explained that these tombs were now “stables for herdsmen, and open dens of wild creatures” (1908: 44). These features were definitive because these “are the lands of the resurrection. Palmyra, Petra, Hejra, in the ways of the desert countries, were all less oases of husbandmen than the great caravan stations” (1908: 44). Considering these structures in the desert led Doughty to draw a lesson: in “all is seen much sumptuousness of sepulchers; clay buildings served their short lives and squared stone columns were for the life of the State. The care of the sepulture, the ambitious mind of man’s mortality, to hold eternity captive, was beyond measure in the religions of antiquity” (1908: 44).

Doughty believed that the Ottoman empire was characterized

as “ruinous” (1908: 44). He made the Ottoman presence visible by connecting some decayed bridges “as all is now ruinous in the Ottoman Empire” (Doughty 1908: 5). In addition, he portrayed the Ottomans as corrupt and deeply resented. Nomads, he continued, have an “ill opinion of Turkish Haj government, seeing the tyrannical and brutish behavior of these pretended rulers” (1908: 18). He characterized the “criminal Ottoman administration” (1908: 18) as a feature with which the local Arab populations had to contend. The more important point to emerge from Doughty’s massive narrative was the difficulty of travel in Arabia. For Doughty dangers abound: the presence of outlaw gangs was just one of the challenges which had to be surmounted.

In order to understand Mesopotamia (Iraq), the best figure to cite is Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894), whose unique career, connected archaeological study with politics in a way which would be difficult imagine today. Layard, who served as British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire between 1877-1880, was much better known for his excavations at Nimrud and Nineveh. Two generations later, Gertrude Bell’s encounters with Mesopotamia would again see the area through its ancient past and Ottoman present.

British travelers to Egypt were almost as well known and possibly no less influential. Thomas Cook’s ability to bring tourists down the Nile is an iconic moment in the rise of modern tourism. Cook had the insight to develop a business out of the larger reality that many Britons were increasingly willing to take the risks (and experience the hassles) to travel to Egypt to see the well publicized archaeological discoveries which helped to produce “Egyptomania”.

Harriet Martineau, one of the 19th century’s great travelers, also ventured to Egypt, but she went beyond Palestine to what is present-day Jordan. Her assessments of the area offered in *Eastern Life, Present, and Past* (1848) not only a detailed look at the social practices of Egypt under Mohammed Ali Pasha, but a different interpretation of history and civilization. Egypt may have

technically belonged to the Ottoman Empire, but for Martineau it was the fate of the country under Mohammed Ali Pasha, which motivated her to launch a scathing critique of its society and modalities of human depopulation and regression. In Alexandria, Martineau explained:

we made our way through heaps of rubbish and hillocks of dust to the new fortification, passing Arab huts more sordid and desolate-looking than I remember to have seen in other parts of the country. We met fewer blind and diseased persons than we expected; and I must say that I was agreeably surprised, both this morning and throughout my travels in Egypt, by the appearance of the people. About the dirt there can be no doubt;—the dirt of both dwellings and persons; and the diseases which proceed from want of cleanliness: but people appeared to us, there and throughout the country, sleek, well-fed and cheerful. I am not sure that I saw an ill-fed person in all Egypt. There is hardship enough of other kinds, —abundance of misery to sadden the heart of the traveler; but not that, as far as we saw, of want of food....this partly owing to the law of the Kuran, by which every man is bound to share what he has, to the last mouthful, with his brother in need....Of the progressive depopulation of Egypt for many years past, I am fully convinced... While I believe that Egypt might again, as formerly, support four times its present population, I see no reason to suppose, amidst all the misgovernment and oppression that the people suffer, that they do not still raise food enough to support life and health. I have seen more emaciated, and stunted, and depressed men, women and children in a single walk in England, than I observed from end to end of the land of Egypt—So much for the mere food question (1848: 9-10).

Martineau, who had seen slave markets in the United States, was an unflinching critic, but one who attempted to overcome metropolitan stereotypes and prejudices regarding Egypt. Nonetheless, her Egypt was a place defined by poor social conditions, which were mercifully moderated by the more humanistic precepts of Islam.

One more British author, James Bryce (1838-1922), should be mentioned here. Bryce's career was extraordinary in its scope and breadth. Historian, lawyer, and diplomat, Bryce traveled in

the Ottoman Empire, and wrote with the idea of public policy foremost in mind. Bryce would be remembered for his writing during the First World War—most notably for his coverage of atrocities—one real and the other largely imagined or the result of British and French propaganda—in publishing *The Treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-1916* (1916), which focused upon the events associated with the “Armenian Genocide” and the Bryce Report which exhibited atrocities allegedly committed by the German army in Belgium. Bryce, possibly better than anyone, had to conceptualize the Ottoman Empire both in terms of its defining characteristics and future trajectories. To do so, inherently also involved comprehending the areas adjacent and relevant to Ottoman dominion.

Drawing upon these diverse, but representative figures, reveals the ways in which the region, now referred to as the Middle East, was made visible. The region, as such, might be defined or at least characterized by the frequent descriptions of backward conditions, Islamic practices, poverty, corruption, and bad governance. In addition, the portrayal of the area’s distant historical past (as manifested by its Biblical roots and the excavations at Nineveh) made the region visible, but did so by emphasizing its past prosperity in contrast to its poor conditions in the 19th century. It might be added that by making the region visible in terms of its deficiencies, it almost certainly rendered other features invisible.

The British and Ottoman conceptions of the region varied—often profoundly. The juxtaposition of Eastern and Western view of the land from the “Nile to the Oxus” is worthy of exploration, as are the earlier Islamic and pre-Islamic conceptions of the region. But what had the Ottomans thought about it? Did they see the area as a region and how did the immediate world appear to them? These questions cannot be answered without any significant study—but the travel narratives of Evliya Celebi, who traversed Ottoman dominions in the 17th century, may be helpful because they remind us about the contingency of regional or area definition. The recovery of Celebi’s writings reveal that from the point of view of Istanbul, the world might well be

organized by the “Holy Land”, the site of the two holy cities and the destination of the haj. Looking eastward, the power of Safavid Persia, a long term opponent, guaranteed that the frontier remained an important feature of Ottoman geography. Also in the East, lands populated by the Armenians revealed yet again the ethnic diversity of Ottoman dominion. Celebi looked (and traveled) west: the lands (now “Eastern Europe”) associated with the Balkans—especially Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Transylvania, and Albania were well known to him. To the north, he could boast of travels to the Crimea and some knowledge of the steppe beyond. All told, this traveler did not know the “Near East” or the “Middle East”, but a diverse set of lands united either by Ottoman dominion or by its definition as a “borderland”.

Celebi’s view of the world from the empire drew upon the older Muslim conceptions of geography. To generalize, these earlier spatial considerations focused upon a center, “the middle of the world” which might be understood to be within the “Levant”, delineating the holy cities of Mecca and Medina (Celebi 2010). More relevant here, Muslim geographers did not seem interested in developing any kind of vocabulary for “East and West” (Celebi 2010). In contrast, the very definition of the region was predicated by a sharp differentiation between “East and West”. Furthermore, it should be clear that the formulations regarding “the Eastern Question” prefigured the identification of the region with the failings of the Ottoman Empire.

2.1. The Idea of the Middle East

It is probably a truism that the term “Middle East” has the same intellectual parentage as “East Asia”, “South Asia”, “Central Asia”, and of course, “Southeast Asia.” While significant political realities lay behind these designations, what is more interesting is the rapid acceptance and use of these terms. The term “Middle East” hardly made sense in a world was geographically defined by the Ottoman Empire. To cite another example of regional nomenclature, it might be argued that the term “South Asia” would hardly have been attractive when maintaining the needs associated with

British India (which was often called “the Indian Empire”; the same may be true about “Central Asia” in the era of the USSR). However, the end of the Ottoman Empire and competition between the British and French (as well as other powers) for dominance in these areas served to produce a context in which a new and dominant term might be developed.

The use of the term “Middle East” reflected not only changes in nomenclature and politics, but in the needs of policy makers. It is generally agreed that the term began to be deployed with some consistency very early in the new 20th century. (Yilmaz 2012) In fact, even a cursory examination of its usage shows that its boundaries were far from settled. (Yilmaz 2012). What may be significant is that British authors increasingly moved from “Orient” to “East” which Yilmaz regards as the persistence of the “Eastern Question: in discourses about the region—long after the Ottoman Empire was dead and buried.

British reliance on the concept “Middle East” is clearly a product of the post-Ottoman historical setting. Nonetheless, it might well be argued that the consistent application of the term came about slowly. For example, in 1920 the Royal Geographical Society published a resolution in which the term “Near East” was to be used for the Balkans, while “Middle East” was to refer to the area between the Bosphorus to the Indian frontiers (Adelson 2012). In the 1930’s the British began to use the term with respect to military preparations. For instance, in 1938, the Royal Air Force reorganized the Middle East Air Command to include squadrons in Palestine, Transjordan, Iraq, Aden, and Malta. The British army followed suit by reorganizing its command structure. The previously separate units in Egypt, Sudan, Palestine-Transjordan, Iraq, Aden, the Arabian Gulf, Cyprus, Iraq, and Iran were consolidated into one structure under General Archibald Wavell, who was stationed in Cairo. (Adelson 2012) All of this coincided with the growing importance of the region to British planners.

It should be satisfactory to add that the persistence of the term can also be explained by contemporary factors. In this case,

the Middle East is all too visible, but the prevalence of the region in the various modalities of international media may also come at the expense of rendering many of the complex realities of the region less visible—if not invisible.

III. Defining Southeast Asia and the Making of the Postimperial World

The articulation and definition of “Southeast Asia” followed both intellectual and political developments in the first half of the 20th century. The term “Southeast Asia” probably had a plural parentage, but as Victor King has pointed out, it was well in use before the World War II. Germanic scholarship may well have paved the way in making the term “Southeast Asia” popular. King credits Franz Heger, an Austrian ethnologist, for using the term in the title of a publication in 1902. He would be followed by Robert Baron van Heine-Geldern, an Austrian ethnologist and prehistorian who held a Chair at the University of Vienna. Last, Karl Josef Pelzer deployed the term in the 1930’s and might be said to have introduced the term to the United States when he began to teach at Yale University (2010). At the same time, it would be the realities of that conflict which began to dictate not only the use of the term, but helped to create a situation in which the term (or another like it) would become necessary.

It is worth noting that in the 19th century, the term could hardly be said to exist. To again highlight the Victorians, the use of the term is practically non-existent in the 19th century. A few examples illustrate the ways in which leading British writers, many of whom were connected to policy making, conceptualized the region. For the purposes of our discussion we might delineate three strands, even though it hardly exhausts British and colonial perspectives on the region: (1) those who like Alfred Russel Wallace focused on the Malay archipelago; (2) those who worried about separating Burma (then a part of the Indian Empire) from India; (3) last, those interested in connecting India to China (through Burma); there’s actually another strand, those

represented by Hugh Clifford who sought to define “Further India”, recognizing the distinct Asian (and “Oriental”) space which needed to be comprehended apart from its giant neighbors.

Alfred Russel Wallace had argued that the Malay Archipelago was its own distinct region. He began his magisterial work by defining the subject matter:

we shall perceive between Asia and Australia a number of large and small islands, forming a connected group distinct from those great masses of land, and having little connection with either of them. Situated upon the equator, and bathed by the tepid water of the great tropical oceans, this region enjoys a climate more uniformly hot and moist than almost any other part of the globe, and teems with natural productions which are elsewhere unknown. The richest of fruits and the most precious of spices are here indigenous. It produces the giant flowers of the Rafflesia, the great green-winged Ornithoptera (princes among the butterfly tribes), the man like orang-utan, and the gorgeous birds of paradise. It is inhabited by a peculiar and interesting race of mankind—the Malay, found nowhere beyond the limits of this insular tract, which has hence been named Malay Archipelago (1869: 13).

Hugh Clifford’s interest and experience was quite different: he engaged not only the Malay world, but the land to the west of it. In *Further India* (1904) Clifford probably came the closest to articulating the current accepted boundaries of Southeast Asia. For Clifford, the region was distinctive: “The great peninsula which forms the southeastern corner of the Asiatic continent, comprising, as we know it to-day, Burma, Siam, French Indo-China and the Malay Peninsula” (1904). Recounting the history of geographic encounters with “Chryse the Golden”, he explained that the region had indeed been neglected:

The failure of the lands of southeastern Asia to make a strong appeal to the imagination of the peoples of Europe is to be ascribed, however, not to their intrinsic unimportance, nor yet to any lack of wealth, of beauty, of charm, or of the interest that springs from a mysterious and mighty past. The reason is to be sought solely in the mere accident of their geographical position (1904).

Clifford referred to “southeastern Asia”, but this did not include much of the Malay archipelago. His interest in what would later be known as “mainland Southeast Asia” would be shared by Sir George Scott, who was introduced to Malaya before Burma, and V.C. Scott O’Connor, who labored to provide detailed accounts of life in Burma. For these authors, Burma did not belong in India, but it was not obvious or inevitable that it should be connected with the Malay world either.

The effort to connect India to China for economic reasons bears examination. Archibald Ross Colquhoun (*Across Chrysê: Being the Narrative of a Journey of Exploration Through the South China Border Lands from Canton to Mandalay, 1883*) might well be taken as a representative figure among those who explored, labored and, ultimately, wrote about the commercial possibilities of opening routes which would make trade between western China and India feasible. This might be called a Burma story, but for our purposes, it was done with little interest in either “southeastern Asia” or the Malay archipelago. In fact, the success of such ventures would have done much to separate the Straits Settlements from Burma and possibly other parts of the region. All of this suggests that British authors engaged Southeast Asia for many reasons, but when they did so, it was with a decidedly alternative conception of the region than is orthodox today.

At the same time, these writers did make these areas visible—but not necessarily as “Southeast Asia”. Burma was to be separated from India, the Straits Settlements anchored with the Malay archipelago, while the identity of northern Burma (and to a lesser extent Siam) was described in terms of being a route to connect China and India. More important, while the “territorial trap” referred to developments in the last decades of the 20th century, it reflected realities associated with the imperialism as well: colonial discourses might be said to have reified the linkages between space, political actors, and indigenous cultures.

German intellectuals may have been the first to deploy the term on a consistent basis, but it would be the realities of the

Second World War which helped to ensure that the term became widespread. The withdrawal of imperial power was gradually replaced by a collection of new nations, many of which were perceived to be vulnerable to the realities of Cold War politics. It would be the creation SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) which was created by the Manila Pact in 1954 which reflected these concerns. The Manila Pact was an attempt to strengthen these new nations, by creating an alliance in which they could both support one another and be tied to the United States and its allies. At the risk of repeating the obvious, SEATO followed the creation of other regional security alliances, which were aimed to preventing or forestalling communist advances amidst decolonization.

SEATO might well be a footnote to regional specialists, but the creation of ASEAN in 1967 followed and helped to confirm the territorial reality of the new region. The leaders (broadly understood) of these new nations might have been said to confront the challenge posed by what might be called the “imperial impediment”. If the “territorial trap” meant that state borders became the basis for envisioning international relations, then the “imperial impediment” might be regarded as a kind of mirror image. The “imperial impediment” refers to the difficulty inherent in conceptualizing space (and territory) which has already been defined and controlled by empires—many of which are evidently powerful (it might be noted that it can also apply to the failure of imperial leaders to understand alternative conceptions of space within their own dominions). This obstacle can be significant not only with regard to legitimacy outside a state or new nation, but within it as well. At the risk of belaboring the obvious, it might be added that included within the “imperial impediment” were the numerous ways in which 19th century empires defined space: the local maps, surveys, place names, memorial sites, and routes of transit, which had all been developed in relation to colonial governance. Even more fundamental, the vocabularies, means of organizing geographic knowledge, and modalities of conceptualizing space remained in place—long after many empires had departed the region. In

addition, while touristic encounters (epitomized by the “tourist gaze”) has come to underscore global inequalities, their existence was often predicated on the order and structures provided by imperial power. It may well be, then, that the extent of the imperial impediment has been actually underestimated—even by postcolonial scholars.

For our purposes here, it also implied that investing in regional identity meant much more than the opportunity to capitalize on Cold War politics, but became a means to inscribe a new set of spatial and geographical realities. That is, the construction of regions based on new nations, each with its territorial borders, might be regarded as one more step in the move away from a world system in which empires predominated. To put this differently, overcoming the “imperial impediment” may have helped to open up the “territorial trap”.

More important, perhaps, it could be said that between the Manila Pact and the creation of ASEAN, came the “golden age” of Southeast Asian (King 2010). In this period scholarship on the region flourished. For the most part, this “golden age” (which might be easily disputed by those who write about the region from an “internalist” perspective) could best be witnessed within the friendly confines of Western universities. Nonetheless, scholars who originated from the region also made increasing contributions to the discourses which now became to be defined as “Southeast Asian Studies”.

More broadly, the successful development of ASEAN also ensured that its members were all party to the collective efforts at regional maturation, even as they made nation building their priorities. The effect of ASEAN was to confirm not only the existence of the region, but the articulation of its borders. That is, membership in ASEAN reified the shape of the region, with now clearly defined borders, thereby creating regional and non-regional spaces. In short, the political developments which gave rise to SEATO and then ASEAN proved decisive in the formation of a distinctive space understood as Southeast Asia.

VI. Reconceptualizing the Study of Southeast Asia

This article has used the instances of some of the shifts in perception about the Middle East and Southeast Asia to exhibit the mutability of the ways they have been conceived. Our focus here is Southeast Asia and developing a fresh perspective which will enable scholars to formulate new questions about the region.

To that end, this section will briefly explore some of the mythologies and conventions which have shaped regional study. Furthermore, in order to widen our discussion, the paper will briefly move towards a constructive position for the subsequent academic exploration of the region. It will be suggested that a hermeneutic might be developed which emphasizes genealogies of knowledge, drawing upon developing methodologies, and embracing multidisciplinary in order to make the region both visible and audible. In doing so, the discussion should open some new avenues for inquiry in the interest of advancing the discussion of the region as a Holon.

4.1. The Myth of Autonomous History

John Smail's seminal article which explored the possibility of creating an autonomous history for Southeast Asia now reads as something of a historical document. Smail, of course, was objecting to the dominance of Eurocentric conceptualizations of the growing field of Southeast Asian history. Smail communicated his enthusiasm for D.G.E. Hall's aim of presenting Southeast Asia as an important subject in its own right (1961). However, it would be his comments about the writing of the region which would prove to be programmatic for two generations of the region's historians. Smail might as well have commanded:

If we are to have successful and solidly-grounded new history of modern Southeast Asia we must begin by realizing that it is not enough simply to adopt an Asia-centric viewpoint. We must be clear in our minds what it is that we want to look at from this viewpoint. We must displace our attention from the colonial relationship to the domestic history of the area, shift it from historical sequences like the extension of colonial rule and nationalism-independence to

sequences like the birth of Indonesia as idea-as-fact, the growth of new classes by creative adaptation. Alongside this, we must learn to see continuities which span the late colonial period and carry on to the present day, like the persistence of the preindustrial elite-mass society. We must look for the autonomous history of Southeast Asia, hitherto largely hidden by our preoccupation with the impact of colonial rule (1961).

Smail wrote not only against the background of newly independent nations, but the emergence of a new field of study. The timing of his article was possibly better than its sensitive and forward-looking character.

At about the same time, in the early 1960's, the historical profession began to debate the social position of the historian. In particular, E.H. Carr's *What is History?* spawned a debate about not only the nature of historical evidence, but also the historian's relationship to it. G. R. Elton, Carr's chief critic, defended "traditional history" with both skill and tenacity, but in the wake of postmodern (and now postcolonial critiques of knowledge), the idea that historians can ever be autonomous now almost certainly looks naïve. Instead, the writing of history is interesting not only for its assessment of the past, but also the ways in which it reflects the biases of the historian. That is, both colonial history and anti-colonial history (to use Smail's language) can now be read "against the grain" to reveal the interests which guided the construction of particular approaches to the past as well as those historiographical trends which have become subsequently dominant.

4.2. Reading Colonial Sources "Against the Grain"

Students of Southeast Asia have become accustomed to reading sources "against the grain" in order to at once exploit the value of colonial sources and to overcome to their inherent biases—to the extent that it is possible. In fact, the practice has become so widespread, that one leading scholar has called for the utility of returning to the archival grain (Stoler 2009). Elsewhere, I have argued that it also makes sense to engage materials "outside the grain". This involves nothing less than developing a hermeneutic

aimed initially at rescuing these colonial authors from being written out of history because of their ostensible relationship to it. That is, exploring these figures “outside the grain” means providing their efforts, labor, and ideas with adequate intellectual autonomy, instead of forgetting them as merely a bit more than the ordinary peons associated with the colonial state. Reading these authors “outside the grain” hardly means forgetting that most were in some way connected with imperial projects. It does allow their work to be understood more broadly. Indeed, to probe the content of these texts is to recover a much richer intellectual world—complete with both advocates and dissidents of colonial practices—engaged in trying to describe, explain, understand, and ultimately assess places which were different and often rendered “other”.

While the idea of reading “outside the grain” might not be palatable in some areas of academe, it raises yet another hermeneutical issue for those who wish to reconceptualize the study of Southeast Asia. The academic exploration of Southeast Asia flourished in the second half of the 20th century. Its new independent nations were eager to develop narratives which moved away from previously dominant colonial representation of the region (and individual countries’ past). It would be in these decades that the study of the region burgeoned both within and outside the region. The development of ASEAN legitimated not only the idea of regional study, but provided an easy, short hand answer for definitions of boundaries.

Consequently, it may become necessary to read early and mid- 20th century scholars against the grain as well. Just as colonial scholarship reflected the realities of specific conditions, so too, the academic exploration of Southeast Asia in the second half of the 20th century could be understood as equally affected by historical circumstances. Reading this body of secondary literature “against the grain” hardly means repudiating its major achievements (of which there are many) or drawing upon it to document regional or national trends. Rather, it requires the recognition that many of the academic conventions which have shaped discourses about the region were no less biased as many

of those deployed by colonizers. That is, the academic exploration of the region, whether supported by colonial interests, university establishments, or state sponsored research which have all collectively shaped the study of Southeast Asia, might both be used to demonstrate the importance of the issue raised first by Martin Heidegger and followed by Gadamer of the “hermeneutical circle” which shaped humanistic enquiry. Both the colonial authors and those who followed came to the region with their own prejudices, modes of interpretation, and research agenda. Building on these different moments in the interpretation of the region might well require the recognition of one’s own place within the broader context of history of the region. Gadamer adds: “Effective-historical consciousness is primarily consciousness of the hermeneutical situation” (1975). This point should be taken to heart by researchers who might come to the region without the carrying either colonial agenda or any program of struggle against it when they evaluate the identity and significance of Southeast Asia.

4.3. Imagining Communities: Creating Regions

Benedict Anderson’s contention that nations are “imagined communities” because they are inevitably conceived of as a “deep horizontal comradeship” (1983) raises important issues for the study of regions as well. Nations were both “limited” (they did not embrace universal humanity) and “sovereign”, meaning, that the “emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state” (Anderson 1983). These communities were imagined because even in tiny nations, most “will never know most of their fellow-members” (Anderson 1983). If nations could be created, made to appear homogenous, then, this might hold true for regions. Above all, the creation of regions, re-enforced by political developments, makes the “territorial trap” relevant to the study of Southeast Asia. We have seen that in the 19th century, the region could not really have said to exist in the minds of many key Victorians who were no less interested in the area than many who followed. However, the definition of regions with borders may well have produced the appearance of homogenizing

factors, which may not be fully warranted; or, alternatively, if warranted, it might well imply that the creation of a regional identity which was a transformative event.

4.4. Making Regions Visible

British authors did not lift their pens to make these regions, but they were trying to communicate what they had seen and experienced. Nowhere is this more evident than the way in which Alfred Russel Wallace begins *The Malay Archipelago*. It had not been enough to place the region on the map: Wallace wanted to supplement the geographic description with images. That is, it was important to enable their readers to literally see what they had; it might be added that the attention paid to descriptions mattered. To some extent, the need to produce visible images reflected both the difficulties of gathering the information and also the bias towards description which was a part of Victorian culture. Wallace's observations underscored the direct experience of a regional traveler:

To the ordinary Englishman this is perhaps the least known part of the globe. Our possessions in it are few and scanty; scarcely any of our travelers go to explore it; and in many collections of maps it is almost ignored, being divided between Asia and the Pacific Island s...few persons realize that, as a whole, it is comparable with the primary divisions of the globe...The traveler, however, soon acquires different ideas. He sails for days, or even for weeks, along the shores of one these great islands, often so great that its inhabitants believe it to be a vast continent. He finds that voyages among these islands are commonly reckoned by weeks and months, and that their several inhabitants are often as little known to each other as are the native races of the northern to those of the southern continent of America. He soon comes to look upon this region as one apart from the rest of the world, with its own races of men and its own aspects of nature; with its own ideas, feelings, customs, and modes of speech, and with a climate, vegetation, and animated life altogether peculiar to itself (1869).

Wallace understood the challenges of articulating a region –

it might not be enough to make it visible through images alone; narration, particularly on an epic scale, might well serve to make an area or region not only visible, but audible. That is, the advantages of travel narratives (and many others) stemmed from the fact that they connected people's experience with the images and cartographic modes of representation. Collectively, it might well make sense to say that these authors helped to shape a discourse in which the places, customs, and peoples of both Southeast Asia and the Middle East were made manifest and visible.

Scholarship about Southeast Asia after 1945 made the region manifest in other ways. To begin with, it became a priority to replace the discursive formulations now associated with colonial knowledge and "Orientalism". Moreover, regional scholarship embraced the task of creating new genealogies of knowledge which were much more complete and seemingly definitive achievements of scholarship. The region would now be studied in the university and the ease with which tens of thousands of visitors ensured that making the region "visible" would be done through other means—if it were to be done at all.

Additionally, connecting the rise of "orientalism" to the visible articulation of regions (for both the Middle East and Southeast Asia) is warranted, but it might be no less fruitful to investigate the impact of intentional orientalism. This concept refers to the practice followed by many in the tourist industry to sell places as exotic oriental experiences. If "orientalism" is the product of the occidental mind, intentional orientalism is the deliberate manipulation of the concept for commercial purposes. To be sure, this topic requires greater elaboration, but the collective work of ministries, tourism bureaus, advertising agencies, and transportation industries has done much to ensure the perpetuation, not only "orientalism", but also of stereotypes connected to particular regions. Intentional orientalism, then, has done much to manufacture regional and area identities.

More important, the argument here has documented the

artificial construction and maintenance of regions. Regional identity runs counter to the rhetoric of nation-making in which the nationalist trajectory seeks to frame the arrival of the new nation-state as an event which is consistent (if not the fulfillment) with any kind of natural order. That is, while nationalism has various forms, many have followed the example of Johann Gottfried Herder and Giuseppe Mazzini, who both believed that the nation is a natural expression of popular sovereignty or will. Accordingly, perhaps, many nation-building narratives feature revolution, the overthrow of corrupt or external governments, as necessary moments in the creation of a nation which inevitably reflect the will of the people. Heritage making, supported by the new state and often by commercial forces, finds martyrs, erects monuments, builds museums, manufactures traditions, and ensures that history, correspondingly, is rewritten – continuously if necessary to underscore these fundamental realities.

Regions, of course, are different. The forces that foster heritage making are not necessarily aligned to support the construction of regional myth-making. Consequently, it must often be academics who must often look beyond the national narratives to try to define and articulate the content of regional study. The importance of seeing how regions are made visible arises from the need to interpret the ways in which they have been constructed.

Yet, what we would like to argue here is that the artificial quality of Southeast Asia should be considered and explored. Many of the nations, communities, peoples, languages, religious traditions in the region themselves reflect artifice – not natural but creative and impressive. Southeast Asia's hybrid qualities need not be unpacked here, but it might not be too much to claim that it goes to the very heart of its intrinsic experiences. Accordingly, it might make sense to study the region apart from its colonial past and early nationalist moments and focus on precisely the ways in which artifice defines not only its external boundaries – but the lives of so many of its peoples.

Developing a hermeneutic of the artificial or the expedient might well open new lines of scholarly inquiry. A hermeneutic of artifice might privilege the “expedient”, the “savvy”, the “gimmick” and the device” because it would aim to capture the modalities of contrivance (including “intentional orientalisms”). Beginning with these discursive formations might allow scholars to recover some of the more creative and original aspects of regional experience. These subjects also put distance from the discursive patterns which emphasize “organic developments”, “innocence” “sincerity”, and even “simplicity”. Emphasizing the subjects which aim to exhibit the integrity of cultural phenomenon has worked well in both colonial and anti-colonial nationalist narratives. A hermeneutic of artifice might serve to highlight the hybrid character which makes the region unique and compelling.

It might be observed that even if colonial knowledge has become benighted in ostensibly sophisticated academic circles, many of its tools remain in use. The disciplines that shape colonial modes of enquiry—philology, history, theology, literature, philosophy, and anthropology are all flourishing in the modern university. So, too, is the partnership between research and public policy and the hierarchies of knowledge which reflect the professionalization of academic study. To probe Southeast Asia with these tools is useful; it is even better to capitalize not only on new methodologies but emerging subject matters. Migrations, spatial constructions, tourist consumption, reconciliation and reconstruction, gender and other targets of Inquiry have the potential to move the study of the region beyond both the earlier colonial forms of knowledge and the reactions to it.

V. Conclusion: Reconsidering the ‘Corners’ of Regional Study

Much about the Middle East and Southeast Asia interested scholars in the last two centuries. These areas were not corners, but then it was not obvious that they were independent regions either. Regional definition came from political needs—first in relation to empire and second near the end of empire. This

article has suggested that comprehension of these realities would be useful for enterprises which aim to develop innovative approaches to the academic exploration of Southeast Asia. Furthermore, since the construction of these regional identities came from discreet historical circumstances, it seems likely that the methodologies which have been used to understand both were also products of these earlier global situations. Consequently, this paper which has used these case studies to stimulate discussion about the nature and challenges inherent in regional study, raises the prospect of studying Southeast Asia by moving away from the issues related to the “territorial trap” to developing a hermeneutic which can draw upon the genealogy of colonial, early nationalist (anti-colonial), and now post-colonial scholarship to find fresh and viable ways of thinking about this rich subject.

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A Multidisciplinary Frame for Studying Democratic Shifts in Southeast Asia: Mixing Politics, Sociology And Psychology Across Historical Time



Cristina Jayme Montiel

[Abstract]

Southeast Asia has been a showcase for democratic transitions in the past 30 years. This paper proposes a conceptual lens for studying political shifts in the Southeast Asian region. The argumentative storyline follows two fundamental propositions about democratic transitions. My first proposition is that during democratic transitions, human phenomena arise on nested analytical layers namely the global arena, the state, prodemocracy movements, and individuals. Each layer is conventionally studied by international relations, political science, sociology, and psychology respectively. I propose a multidisciplinary lens that transverses all these analytical layers. A second proposition is that during political shifts, social conditions are historically-situated. Historicity is anchored on stages of democratization, namely the authoritarian regime, toppling the regime, power shift, state building, and nation building. This paper describes a 4 x 5 matrix (analytical layer x historical stage) that may guide a regional agenda on the

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empirical study of democratic transitions in the Southeast Asian region. It likewise gives examples of research findings in Philippine-based studies that have already begun to provide empirical data about segments of this research matrix.

Keywords: democratic transition, stages of democratic shifts, Philippines, Southeast Asia, politics

I . Introduction

Democratic transition refers to a shift in the nature of a state's power distribution, from an authoritarian government to a more distributed form of political system. Such transition or regime change is often stimulated and brought about by collective action, sometimes referred to as People's Power. This specific phenomenon of authoritarian regime toppling tends to draw wide international media coverage; it has also become the main analytical focus of social scientists when studying democratic transitions.

The story, however, of democratic transition extends far beyond the dramatic and does not end with regime toppling and collective movements. The transition from authoritarian to a democratic form of state power is a long process; and not all transitions are linear or permanent shifts. Some states pendulum in a cyclic manner, from authoritarian to more open politics, then back to some form of personal or military dictatorship.

Existing social science research, specifically in political science, elaborates on the conditions for successful democratization or complete democratic transition (Dahl 1971; Dirdala 2009; Linz & Stepan 1996; Diamond 1994), with a specific focus on the institutionalization and normalization of democratic procedures, behaviors, and values in political and civil society. The theory of polyarchal democracy, as put forward by Robert Dahl (1971; Dirdala 2009) enumerates a set of institutional requirements, such as suffrage rights, free and fair elections, freedom of expression, and associational autonomy, which are deemed essential for the

democratization process. Dahl (1971; Dirdala 2009) explains that both political opposition (liberalization) and an increased opportunity for political participation (inclusiveness) are fundamental to establishing a democracy.

Theories of democratic consolidation (Linz & Stepan 1996; Diamond 1994) provide rich descriptions in terms of the process by which new democracies mature or become profoundly embedded in society, such that they are unlikely to break down or revert to authoritarianism. Democratic consolidation is achieved when democracy becomes deeply embedded in political, social, institutional, and even psychological life (Linz & Stepan 1996). This is characterized by a robust civil society able to monitor and influence the conduct of government; effective institutionalization of democratic political processes that govern our collective life; and a citizenship that believes in democratic procedures and institutions even in the face of severe crises (Linz & Stepan 1996; Diamond 1994). Some challenges to democratic consolidation include the lack of homogeneity especially in multinational or multicultural settings, which may exacerbate problems of the stateness, as well as the slow or lack of economic reform, which may delegitimize the new political democratic system (Linz & Stepan 1996).

Theories on democratic consolidation specifically highlight democracy to be more than a regime, but a process and an interacting system that extends beyond the state. In this research wherein I consider how democratic shifts and setbacks shaped the political landscape of the past 30 years, I ask, *how can one scientifically study the massive and dynamic field of democratic transitions, especially in the Southeast Asian region?*

I forward two propositions that can guide scientific observations about democratic transitions. The first is about penetrating the borders of one's disciplinary analytical lenses; the second calls for historical anchoring based on democratization stages, rather than on a nation's ancient past.

II. Democratic Transitions in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia has been a showcase for democratic transitions in the past 30 years, with various versions of People Power happening in the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, East Timor, and Cambodia. Here are some stories of democratic shifts in the region.

With the 1986 People Power Revolution, Filipinos toppled the Marcos dictatorship and set up a new democracy under the leadership of President Corazon Aquino (Santiago & Tirol 1995). A final blow to the Marcos regime can be attributed to the massive nonviolent show of force by millions of Filipinos who confronted the government military tanks on a main highway called EDSA or Epifanio de los Santos Avenue. One of the first laws passed under Corazon Aquino's presidency was the Local Government Code, which redistributed political and financial power away from the Manila-based central government to the local government units throughout the archipelago.

In the early 1990's, Cambodia likewise underwent its own democratic transition, with strong people's support on the ground. After a series of authoritarian regimes, democracy was gradually introduced to this war-torn country, through The Final Act of Paris Conference on Cambodia of 1991 (United Nations, Department of Public Information 2000; United Nations General Assembly 1991; United Nations Peacemaker 1991). As part of this normalization process, general elections took place in 1993, and Prince Norodom Ranariddh was elected prime minister (BBC 2015; UN n.d.). The monarchy was restored and the country was re-named Kingdom of Cambodia (BBC 2015; Lizée 1996; Un 2011).

Dhammayietras, or Buddhist Walks for peace, marked historical moments when Cambodia's peaceful transition threatened to escalate into another civil war. The Buddhist Walk practice began in April 1992 in an attempt to reunite Cambodian refugees on the Thai border, with their local Cambodian compatriots. A second Dhammayietra took place a year later, in the midst of

political tensions and sporadic violent outbreaks surrounding the 1993 electoral process. From 1994 to 1996, three more Dhammayietras were organized to address sporadic eruptions of political violence, land mines, and deforestation (European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation n.d.; Khemacaro 1998; Oxfam Community Aid Abroad 1994).

East Timor's democratic transition moved against a foreign-based rather than a domestic authoritarian ruler. This Southeast Asian country fell under Indonesian control in 1976, but the forceful integration was not recognized by the UN, which called for Indonesia's withdrawal (BBC 2015; United Nations Security Council 2002). In the meantime, the East Timorese organized themselves into liberation fronts, led by the *Frente Revolucionaria de Timor-Leste Independente* (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor) or FRETILIN. However, through the years, local resistance suffered heavy casualties from systematic bombing campaigns. Gradually, the FRETILIN considered nonviolence as its overarching strategy, and collaborated with the East Timorese Catholic Church. By 1999, the East Timorese overwhelmingly voted in favor of independence through a UN-managed referendum. In 2002, the East Timorese celebrated their Independence Day, with FRETILIN leader and 6-year political detainee Xanana Gusmao as the country's new president (Burr & Evans 2001; Deats 2001; Shah 2000).

Indonesian democratic transition demonstrated a steady and stable progression toward democratic consolidation (Abdulbaki 2008; Mietzner 2014). The Suharto government was pushed to its toppling edge by youth protest rallies, other prodemocracy movements, and economic and political jolts directly linked to the Asian financial crisis in the mid-1990's (Abdulbaki 2008; Lee 2011). One distinct feature of Indonesia's new democracy was the separation of military and civilian powers. Armed forces personnel were prohibited from participating in the bureaucracy, a stark difference from the earlier Suharto government (Abdulbaki 2008; Meitzner 2014).

Finally, Thailand's recent history has been marked by pendulum

swings toward and away from democratic governments, alternating between civilian and military rulers (Farrelly 2013). Although often pushed to the brink of unbridled military control and street chaos, Thailand has remained politically cohesive largely due to everyone's loyalty to the Thai monarchy, and the monarchy's peaceful interventions during critical historical moments of political conflict (Farrelly 2013; Ockey 2007). For example, in 1992, bloody street protests against the military government of General Suchinda persuaded King Bhumibol to intervene. Eventually, Suchinda resigned as Prime Minister of Thailand.

In summary, the Southeast Asian region has recently hosted dictatorial downfalls, people-based prodemocracy movements, and swings toward and away from local forms of state democracy.

To answer the question of how to scientifically study the massive and dynamic field of democratic transition in the region, I elaborate a conceptual lens for studying political shifts based on two fundamental propositions about democratic transition. But before I proceed with my suggested way of doing science in this field of study, I would like to offer a word of caution. I do not forward any pretensions to causal explanations or predictions. This is not because I do not want to stumble into ideological rhetoric of colonial or neocolonial arguments, but more so because before one argues causality, one must first observe. What I suggest are ways of observing and making thick descriptions. Hence, this paper suggests ways of answering the What's and How's of democratic transitions, rather than the Why's.

III. Proposed Conceptual Lens on Studying Southeast Asian Democratic Transitions

My argumentative storyline follows two fundamental propositions about democratic transitions. My first proposition is that during democratic transitions, human phenomena arise on nested analytical layers, namely, the global arena, the state, prodemocracy movements, and individuals. A second proposition

is that during political shifts, social conditions are historically-situated. Historicity is anchored on stages of democratization, namely the authoritarian regime, toppling the regime, power shift, state building, and nation building. My final argument merges the two propositions and asserts that a research agenda on democratic shifts should transverse analytical layers and social disciplines, and should simultaneously reference particular historical stages of a country's political transition.

3.1. Proposition One: In democratic transitions, social phenomena arise on nested and interactive analytical layers.

Political shifts and their related phenomena unfold simultaneously on varying layers of human analytical units. One can observe democratic transitions from the viewpoints of macro lenses like global and state changes; meso units like social movements and liberation fronts; and micro individual phenomena like the leader and activist. Conventionally, these observations of democratic shifts have been carried out by different social sciences bound by their respective idiosyncratic lenses. Specifically, global effects on transitions have been studied by international relations, state changes by political science, collective movements by sociologists, and individual mentalities and behaviors by psychologists. However, because human phenomena related to political transitions take place simultaneously on the levels of the global system, state, collective, and person, observations of power shifts likewise need to collect social data on all these levels, and analyze data with an openness not only to main effects but also to interaction effects traversing these layers. Succinctly, what and how things happen in one analytical layer are interconnected with what and how things happen on the other layers of analysis.

The call to heightened interactive analysis across disciplinary borders is not new. Political scientist Migdal and his colleagues (Migdal, Kohli & Shue 1994) asserted the bidirectional embeddedness of society within the state. Similarly, sociologists Giddens (1994) emphasized the imperative role of society in

viewing democracy, including in his analytical lens social spheres like personal life, social movements, and self-help groups, organizations, and the global order. Recently, psychologist Montiel (2015) demonstrated how personal traumas during transitions develop and heal alongside varying stages of a political shift away from dictatorship.

<Table 1> identifies varying human phenomena in different analytical layers during democratic transitions in Southeast Asia. The columns give examples of Southeast Asian countries that experienced democratic transitions fueled by large-scale people’s mobilizations. The rows, on the other hand, identify layers of analytical units from the more macro global and state phenomena, to smaller groups like social movements, to the micro unit of the individual.

<Table 1> Examples of Analytical Layers during Democratic Transitions in Southeast Asia

	Global System	State	Social/Political Movement	Individual
Cambodia	Global peace NGO's	Cambodian People's Party domination (one-party ruling)	Dhammayietra or Buddhist Walk for Peace	Buddhist monks
East Timor	UN-managed referendum	Indonesia occupation	FRETILIN	Xanana Gusmao
Indonesia	Asia Financial Crisis in the mid 1990's	Suharto regime	Student protest movements	Student protesters
Philippines	US offered Marcos helicopters to fly to Hawaii	Marcos regime	People Power	Corazon Aquino
Thailand	International reaction to Suchinda violence	Suchinda military rule	Black May street protests	King Bhumibol

If one reads across the rows of <Table 1>, one gets a sense of events simultaneously occurring during a particular country's political shift. A purview down the columns presents patterns of similar analytical layers across countries. However, observing human phenomena in each column cannot be understood unless one lets go of disciplinary boundaries, crisscrosses columns, and observes other episodes airing simultaneously on the other columns or layers of the nested diaspora.

3.2. Proposition Two: The human landscape changes dramatically according to the different political stages of the transitioning state.

I identify at least five stages of democratic transition, as the state morphs from an authoritarian to a more open political system. When one analyzes features of a democratic transition, it is imperative to anchor one's analysis to the political stage at which data were collected, because political conditions vary significantly from one stage to the next. The details of these stages are expounded in another paper (Montiel 2010), and I summarize them here.

The first stage of transition begins during the dictatorship. Authoritarian rule is characterized by the full control of the state by one person or one political party or a combination of leader and party. Many regimes are ruled by civilian dictators, dictatorial political parties, and military generals. It is during these dark days that alliances across pro-democracy movements are formed, mental and physical traumas are experienced, and politico-personal loyalties are cemented (or fractured). The sufferings during authoritarian regimes likewise provide the psychological collective frames for massive and coordinated street protests.

Regime toppling marks the second stage of transition. This arises when the strong ruler falls, as a climax to massive protests. Regime toppling starts but does not end with the overthrow an authoritarian ruler and may be enacted by a combination of the weakening of a regime by internal fracturing (usually over access to regime resources), and by the strengthening

of external opposition forces.

I call the third stage of transition power shift. This refers to the historical moment after a regime falls and when the victorious groups consolidate their hold on the new state. Power shift is a sensitive historical moment marked by celebrative euphoria and possibilities of collective and personal vendetta by the groups who struggled to topple the authoritarian regime. New forms of negotiated power-sharing may evolve among former-opposition groups in the new state. One critical feature of a power shift is the conduct of a trustworthy electoral process. Elections provide a venue for people to decide on their leaders. This is easier said than done, in a country whose immediate past showed that street and armed power can work to remove one leader and install another, even without elections. Often, the cycle of democratic transition pendulums back to earlier forms of violence and authoritarianism due to failed electoral procedures.

After a successful power shift, a fourth stage of democratic transition emerges as leaders of the new state work toward state building. State building covers the period of re-configuring the political system and resuscitating damaged institutions. This entails making the state's executive, legislative, and judiciary branches function effectively to improve the everyday lives of ordinary people. Issues of widespread corruption and misuse of public funds capture public attention at this stage.

Finally we come to nation-building, or making ethnicities and tribes live together peacefully within a single country. Nation building involves re-defining the cultural and political identities of ethnic groups that may have been forcefully unified under the former dictatorial regime. A nation may be different from the people of a state, especially in countries where the configuration of state boundaries were defined during the colonial era without recognition of ethnic adhesions among local peoples. Nation-building has to do with building social or tribal identities in one country that respect variations in ethnicities within a state.

Each transitional stage tells a different story, and demands widely disparate political moves from the global community, state,

prodemocracy movements, and individual activists. Let us take for example, the changing public discourse on power. During a dictatorship, the political discourse among liberation groups revolves around power production, or how to produce political power to topple the state. However, during the power-shift stage, the discourse turns to power allocation, or how to distribute the newly gained power among groups and individuals who helped obtain political victory. Finally, when the new state starts to stabilize, issues revolve around power utilization, or how to use state power for the common good, rather than for corruption-saturated personal gains.

International media coverages and Western representations of power shifts in the Global South tend to dramatize the earlier stages of democratization, like dictator toppling or power shifting. Further, during state and nation building stages, human phenomena are evaluated against a comparative backdrop of stable democracies, as if the new democracies suddenly switched out of its transition process.

3.3. Merging Propositions: Observing democratic transitions scientifically entails an interactive lens of (Analytical Layers x Historicity)

Let us now fuse the two propositions. This merged proposal emphasizes the importance of defining not only the unit of analysis one is studying, but also, the democratic stage at which data is collected and evaluated. <Table 2> recommends an observation matrix for studying democratic transitions in Southeast Asia. The matrix contains 3 analytical layers and 5 stages of democratization, with a total of 15 observation categories. However, although democratic transitions research allows a variation of analytical units, the state stands as the pivotal agency around which collective and individual phenomena arise.

<Table 2> Locating Social Research on Democratic Transitions:
Analytical Layer x Historical Time

Analytical Layers	Authoritarian Rule	Regime Toppling	Power Shift	State Building	Nation Building
Transitioning State	Martial law	Defection of military forces to join opposition movement	<i>Bargaining during Coup Attempts (see 3.4.1.); Civilian Military Social Representati ons of People power (see 3.4.2)</i>	<i>Social Network Analysis of Legislator's Web of Corruption (see 3.4.3)</i>	<i>Positioning in a Muslim-Chri stian Peace Agreement (see 3.4.4)</i>
Anti-state Movement	Prodemocracy Movements/ Communist Insurgency		Politicized Military/ Communist Insurgency		Ethnic-based Liberation Movements
Politicized individual	<i>Political Trauma and Recovery of On-the-ground Prodemocracy Leaders (see 3.4.5)</i>				

Conceptually, one need not be bound by the lines that separate the rows and columns. Operationally, this implies that a researcher can ask questions crisscrossing analytical units or historical moments, but should make sure that theoretical traversion is clarified and finds equivalence in operational and methodological strategies.

3.4. Observing democratic transitions in the Philippines using the proposed interactive lens of (Analytical Layers x Historicity)

To elucidate on the abovementioned propositions, I present some research findings on a political psychology of democratic transition in the Philippines. I locate these studies in the conceptual matrix, to show that a wide range of analytical lenses and historicities can be used to observe power shifts in Southeast Asia. Allow me first to give a brief background about the

Philippine power shift.

From 1972 until 1986, the Philippines was ruled by the Marcos dictatorship. In 1986 we celebrated a successful People's Power Revolution, when millions of peaceful street protesters forced the Marcos family to flee on a US-provided helicopter to Hawaii. Between 1986 and 2003, the new democratic government under President Corazon Aquino was hounded by a dozen failed coup attempts. As the state stabilized, government turned to nation-building. From 1996 to 2014, the Christian government sponsored peace talks with Moro liberation fronts in Mindanao.

I now present a summary of five psychological researches done about democratic transition. Each study is embedded on varying analytical layers (marked by the rows on this matrix) and located across historical time, or more specifically across different stages of a transitioning political state (marked by the columns in the matrix). Note the changing anti-state movement. As transition progresses, prodemocracy movements become the new state, and may be subsequently threatened by politicized military forces. In general, the researches I highlight are thick descriptions rather than causal queries about democratic transitions. They do not explain why but rather describe the psychological what's and how's of political shifts. First we will look at intergroup negotiations during coup end-game bargaining and social representations of People's Power during power shift. Using social network analysis, I then describe how interlocking relationships among legislators can form a web of corruption during state-building. After which, I will show how Muslim-Christian peace processes during nation-building can be understood through the lens of conversation analysis and positioning theory. Finally, I will end with an activist's story of psychological trauma and recovery across the different stages of political transition.

3.4.1. Military movements during power shifts: End-game coup bargaining.

The first study took a closer look at end-game bargaining during three of the biggest coup attempts in the Philippines—Operation

Noel or No Elections in 1987, a bigger attempt in 1989, and an attempted power grab called Codename Freedom in 1990 (Montiel 1995). We asked: What psychological features mark the different stages of bargaining for a peaceful termination of coup attempts? We collected our data from television news coverage, newspaper reports, and government documents. We also interviewed the government mediators.

My study identified five stages of end-game coup bargaining, namely: (1) the start of coup; (2) feelers being sent by coup leaders to negotiate with the government; (3) the start of 3rd party negotiations; (4) the end of 3rd party negotiations; (5) military rebels departing from captured buildings. Our findings showed that coup leaders decided to negotiate and negotiated swiftly as government troops successfully surrounded rebel strongholds, and as an ultimatum from the government approached.

I further broke down the end-game negotiations into smaller stages of bargaining, and identified collective emotions of both the military rebels and government negotiators. The negotiation process has this emotional picture: As the rebels contact the third party, there is apprehension and hope. Mediators enter rebel-held territory and both parties express solidarity with each other. Then peace bargaining starts and rebels are very angry as they gripe against the government. When griping subsides, the coup leaders present their demands for peaceful termination. At this stage, they are still angry, but also say that they fear government retaliation after surrender. Government mediators then respond to the coup leaders' demands with sympathy and firmness. When the two sides of the conflict reach an agreement, they are both relieved and exhausted. As coup participants exit out of their captured buildings, they hold feelings of relief and fear. There is some kind of public face-saving ritual or speech or street march by the coup participants, as they publicly show their relief and celebrate their so-called victory. For example they are allowed to give press interviews to announce that that they are merely returning to barracks without surrendering.

After this first study on coups, I ran a second study,

wondering what psychological representations may be fueling these military grabs. I suspected that it had something to do with the military's understanding that they were once part of the overthrow of the Marcos regime and therefore deserved central powers in the new democracy.

3.4.2. Social memories of regime toppling: Civilian-military social representations of People Power.

My second study looked at civilian-military social representations of the 1986 People Power (Montiel 2010). The sample consisted of graduates from key military and civilian academic institutions that participated in the 1986 People Power democratic shift. The research included graduates from the Philippine Military Academy and Ateneo de Manila University, from two cohorts that were 20 years apart. I asked survey participants what they thought was the most important event during the 1986 People Power Revolution. Results showed that both civilians and military agreed that the unity among all sectors during People Power toppled Marcos. But the intergroup agreement stopped there. Civilians claimed that the previous assassination of Senator Benigno Aquino Jr. triggered the mass protests, while military participants believed it was their institution's withdrawal of support for the dictatorship that caused the downfall of Marcos.

One part of the survey asked participants to describe their social representations of the power shift, by asking them to *Please describe People Power One with the help of the following set of adjective pairs*. Findings showed starkly different social representations of People Power in civilian and military institutions, even 20 years after the power shift. Our discriminant analysis classified 98.5% of the groups correctly into two groups. Civilians represented People Power as courageous, successful, strong, admirable, and good; while military personnel saw People Power as cowardly, unsuccessful, weak, not admirable, and bad. Further, the civilian set of representations was what was circulated on international media, while the military representations fueled coup attempts.

3.4.3. Government corruption during state building: Social network analysis of state corruption.

As the dust settled, our new democracy turned to state building or to strengthening the effectiveness of government. One issue was the misuse of government funds and widespread corruption among those who enjoyed state power. A study on Philippine corruption used social network analysis to map out relationships among legislators who allocated public funds to fake non-government organizations. This study analyzed corruption as a social system rather than as an individualized behavior.

The research showed that legislators and fake organizations formed a social network that covered the same communities or clusters in one overlapping web of corruption (Sison, Pasion, and Tapang 2013). One central hub included our former senate president and at least two other current senators. All three senators have been charged in court. As of this writing, two remain in detention, while one has just been released from detention due to his frail health.

3.4.4. Ethnic liberation movements during nation-building: Positioning in a Muslim-Christian peace agreement.

Systemic government corruption is an endemic issue during state-building. On the other hand, during nation-building, the concern is for some semblance of social peace among peoples or tribes with varying ethno-religious identities. In 2008, the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front signed a Memorandum of Agreement or MOA. This agreement was eventually nullified after protests, military attacks, and counter-attacks. We studied the procedural failure using positioning analysis, a kind of conversation analysis that can study intergroup conversations that change rapidly across time (Montiel & de Guzman 2011).

Our result plot contained conversational storylines across political layers and historical episodes of the peace talks. We

identified four storylines about the public meaning of the agreement, namely that it was (a) for peace and development, (b) a threat, (c) victimizing certain groups, and (d) terrorizing other groups. Our main finding for this study points to the President as the conversation changer. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo changed her political position midstream, perhaps to appease the Christian legislators. In this research, we likewise discovered that the *meaning* of a peace agreement varies across different social actors, and even within one collective actor such as the state. We also noted that it changes within the same social actors, across time, as the public debate intensifies.

3.4.5. *Gendered trauma during democratic transition.*

As a final psychological feature of democratic transition, let us now focus on political trauma. Trauma and recovery among prodemocracy activists arise on the individual level, but are anchored on the changing conditions of one's liberation movements and the shifting state. Although trauma is acquired during the authoritarian regime, its healing and recovery take place largely after the political chaos subsides, and the state settles down.

This is my story, up close and personal (Montiel 2015). I was then married to a political organizer Boyet, who was detained thrice on charges of subversion. During Martial Law, I founded and led *Lingap Bilanggo* (Care for Prisoners) a nationwide movement to free all political detainees. I likewise organized political education workshops on social change and nonviolence, for the Pilipino Democratic Party – Lakas ng Bayan (Nation's Strength), a political party that challenged Marcos in open elections.

Here are examples of some traumas I experienced during Martial Law: sexual transgressions during sexualized body searches before entering the detention center; hypervigilance, for 14 years of Martial Law; continuous fear and paranoia for possibly being followed or kidnapped by intelligence agents; stopping all emotions because “Ang emosyon ay sagabal sa rebolusyon” (“Emotions are obstacles to the revolution.”). Further, many of

my women friends likewise suffered mentally because they had to part with their little children in order to go underground or let their children be cared for by relatives or a collective, especially the little ones.

After Martial Law, my panic disorder erupted. I had nightmares of being chased by intelligence agents, waking up in the middle of the night sweating, and with rapid heart palpitations. When I would see military forces on television or hear about others' political sufferings, I would weep and vomit uncontrollably. I also had difficulty breathing and suffered from high blood pressure. Today I am better, and I attribute my emotional improvement to a mix of western and eastern therapies.

Allow me to add to current ideas about political trauma and healing, especially during democratic transitions. Firstly, the duration of trauma infliction is not always brief but may also be experienced over many years. Secondly, context is not only a source of trauma but also a source of healing, as when a dictatorship falls. Thirdly, recovery does not take place in war-free and comfortable places but in continuously unsafe and impoverished conditions. And finally, those who are traumatized are not only victims but more often agents of change as they continue to lead their society through democratic transition after the regime is overthrown (Montiel, 2000).

IV. Conclusion

As demonstrated in this paper, the scientific study of massive and dynamic democratic transitions can be conducted through considering varying analytical layers located in historical time or different stages of a transitioning political state. Hence, I end this essay with an invitation to continue studying democratic transitions, adding larger or smaller analytical layers beyond one's disciplinary lenses, and considering political historicity of democratic-transition phenomena. I call on scientists from the fields of international relations and political science to consider smaller analytical units like pro-democracy movements and

individual mentalities. Likewise, sociologists and psychologists may want to broaden their views to see what and how things happening in the state and global arena interface with collective movements and individual lives. For more solid and deeper social changes especially in our region and the Global South, we may need to use new lenses, and new methods. The future of a social science on democratic transitions lies in other intellectual areas that remain unexplored.

This 2015, we celebrate the official establishment of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations or the ASEAN community. Let us study our political histories together, as our new states transit out of authoritarian regimes and into democracies that will need to define their own political trajectories, based on local human landscapes.

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The Khmer Rouge Genocide Trial and the Marcos Human Rights Victims: the Quest for Justice and Reparations



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[Abstract]

Just how does one make sense of the genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge during its rule in the 70's and the numerous human rights violations in the Philippines during the Marcos period? Like the conflicts that have marked human history at the close of the 20th century, Southeast Asia is no exception, similar to the many attempts to come to terms with the past and put to account wrongdoers worldwide. The paper is an attempt to historicize these two seemingly unrelated events and analyze them from the synoptic frameworks of transitional justice and reparations. Similar to the experiences faced by many societies transitioning towards democratic rule, notably in Latin America, the dilemma of whether to pursue justice or preserve the peace and the newfound status quo has characterized the length at which justice had eluded the victims in Cambodia and the Philippines. Yet, no matter what the limits are in pursuing accountability, or these so called historical injustices, closure is still achievable. The paper would like to argue that closure

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is possible when one, all or a combination of the following, depending on the gravity of the crime, is present—truth-telling, prosecution for the crimes committed, and a grant of compensation.

Keywords: Khmer Rouge, Marcos human rights victims, reparations, human rights in Southeast Asia, history and closure, amending historical injustices

I. Introduction

From 1975 to 1979 the ruling Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK or Khmer Rouge) undertook its own brand of revolution. Trying to establish “Kampuchea democracy”, the CPK wanted to bring back Cambodian society to its obfuscated roots, that is, to bring the country back to its pristine state before the advent of Hindu, Buddhist, and colonial heredity, thus the name Democratic Kampuchea (Thion 1993). Shortly after taking power, the CPK went about implementing its social program. This included relocating urban dwellers into the countryside, in the process erasing all traces of modernity and eliminating its enemies. Aside from orders emanating from the senior leaders, there were also “assertive killings” done by lower level cadres which occurred mostly in communes outside the capital Phnom Penh. Purposeful killings along with starvation, diseases, and exhaustion from work decimated an estimated twenty percent of the population or about 1.7 million persons, making it the highest per capita genocide in the world (Kiernan 1992: 159-160).

Four decades after this horrific episode in Cambodia’s history, and after several years of bruising negotiations and grudging compromises, the Cambodian government and the United Nations finally established a hybrid tribunal to try senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge in 2005. Called the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia for the Prosecution of Crimes Committed during the Period of Democratic Kampuchea, or simply the Extraordinary Chambers, this hybrid court, composed of Khmer and foreign judges and prosecutors, and largely funded by the international

community, aims to put to account the seven most senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge.

In the Philippines, it took 27 years after the downfall of the Marcos dictatorship before the government recognized the sufferings of human rights victims and allotted financial remuneration to compensate for their sacrifices in the restoration of democratic rule. Known collectively as the Marcos human rights victims, they filed a class suit against the former dictator in Hawaii for illegal detention, torture, summary executions, and forced disappearances. The class suit was a landmark case and achieved many firsts. It was the first human rights litigation on a mass scale against a former head of state. And it was also the first time that a dictator was found guilty of human rights violations and ordered to pay his victims. The case also set a precedent wherein dictators could no longer hide from the veneer of immunity for actions supposedly done in behalf of the state and by national borders. All in all, the victims were awarded almost US\$2B in moral and exemplary damages. However, this victory would only be the start of the victims' travails and heartaches as the decision would encounter huge challenges and roadblocks. Because compensation for the victims would come from laying claim to the Marcos ill-gotten wealth stashed in a number of Swiss banks, it collided with the Philippine government's efforts to recover the same assets through the efforts of the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG). In this sense, justice for the human rights victims collided with the Philippine government's pursuit of justice—to claim the Marcos ill-gotten wealth and use it to fund an urgent social reform measure, agrarian reform.

The paper would like to explore the tensions attendant in many democratizing societies that wanted to prosecute perpetrators of human rights violations committed during the former regime. It attempts to explore the difficulty of balancing the desire for justice on the one hand but also to keep the peace on the other. For many newly-restored democracies, there is a tendency to pursue peace and to forget wrongdoings done in the past. The paper then examines two cases—the trial of the senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and the class suit filed against

Marcos by the Philippine human rights victims. The two cases highlight attempts at putting to account for past crimes and will be assessed in as far as providing repair to historical injustices and closure to the victims are concerned.

II. Transitional Justice and Reparations

Transitional justice may be defined as the conception of justice associated with periods of political change. The concept of transitional justice developed from earlier works of scholars on democratic transitions or sometimes referred to as “transitology” (O’Donnell et.al. 1986; Linz and Stepan 1996). These works focused on the problem of how to consolidate democratic rule in order to avoid a slide back to authoritarianism, as many Latin American countries were prone. Transitional justice takes a step further by focusing on accountability on dictators whose rule was often marked by human rights abuses or gross human rights violations but at the same looking at the context for its success or failure. Transitional justice may also refer to the mechanisms by which societies undergoing transitions to democracy deal with the dark and atrocious past of former regimes, in particular, gross human rights violations.

The first debate in transitional justice literature revolves around the dilemma of whether to pursue prosecution over past human rights abuses during the transition period or defer them until such time that the political situation has become propitious for such reckoning (Mc Adams 1997; Teitel 2000; Mamdani 2001: 47-48). This so called justice-versus-peace dilemma was described succinctly, thus:

“Putting to account perpetrators of human rights violations in democratizing countries are difficult as authoritarian regimes are brought about by deep divisions within society and they generally drive them even deeper. So that there is an immediate and widespread need in post-conflict societies to heal social wounds they have produced and there are strong pressures in many societies to cover up the past because it is thought to be damaging to the precariously

achieved cohesiveness of a new democracy, where stability depends to a large extent on keeping social and political divisions within reasonable limits." (Hamber et. al. 2003: 148).

On the one hand, the issue of pursuing justice against perpetrators of human rights violations ran alongside the issue of whether to grant amnesty. In some instances wherein new democratic regimes and human rights advocates were predisposed to punish past offenders, the threat of retribution and coups forced them to reconsider the granting of amnesty (Sriram 2004). As some of its adherents would contemptuously point out, "But is it not democracy or the attainment of democratic rule that is the real reparation? Is it not official silence, or the policy of letting bygones be bygones, the price to pay for a transition to a democratic government? Is it not that non-acknowledgment of past crimes keeps the 'peace and harmony' in society?" (Mendez 1999: 6).

On the other hand, proponents of the pursuit of justice in spite of the political instability it brings believe that there is a need to address the wrongdoings of the past regime as a way of avoiding such practices and establishing the rule of law, a necessary process if a society is to move forward and achieve national reconciliation (Mendez 1997; Hesse and Post 1999). Quoted often by its adherents is the dictum "We cannot forgive those whom we cannot punish!" (Arendt 1962: 56).

Reparations on the other hand extend the concept of justice beyond those societies transitioning to democratic rule to include, but not confined to, victims of the Second World War and those of colonialism, both internal and external. Furthermore, reparations provide the modalities by which to address these so-called historical injustices. The concept of reparations, in its narrowest definition, means nothing more than compensation. Previously, reparations were given and received by nations alone. However, the Holocaust, being the cornerstone of contemporary reparations, altered this concept. Because other select groups aside from the Jews - such as gypsies, homosexuals and the handicapped - were the targets of the Holocaust, it came to mean compensation for

the oppressed and disadvantaged groups and individuals. As a result, it shifted the focus of reparations away from states and into individuals or select groups. Thus the Holocaust changed forever the concept of international law by making the individual, a group or non-state actors the subject of reparations (Torpey 2003: 2-9; Barkan 2000).

The rise of reparations in the late 20th century was due to many factors. One is the ascendancy of the concept of human rights after World War II with the passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 which was followed by other conventions which formed part of what is known as the first generation of rights or commonly known as political rights (Ratner and Abrams 1997: 5-7). Another is the curtailment of the strong “Westphalian” notion of sovereignty of the state at the end of the Second World War where nation-state formation in many Third World countries was seen more as a process than as an end result. Lastly, there was a strong sentiment among many nations at the end of the last century to make amends for crimes committed by the state. (Torpey 2003: 63-69; Ignatief 2001: 17).

There are three basic streams or sources of demand for reparations. First are those cases arising from acts of injustice perpetrated during World War II. These include claims arising from state-sponsored mass killings (the Holocaust being the prime example), forced labor and sexual exploitation on the part of the Axis powers. In Asia, the most publicized crime would be on the so-called comfort women. But this also included wartime incarceration of Japanese immigrants in the United States and Canada to economic and other types of collaboration with the Nazis by countries previously assumed to be neutral like Switzerland and even the Vatican.

The second set of reparations claims stems from colonialism - both in the classical European sense and internal (e.g. slavery, apartheid, forced assimilation, and occupation or appropriation of indigenous ancestral lands). In the former case, there are African nations that plan to seek reparations for economic devastation

brought about by European colonialism in the last century. In the latter, reparations are normally undertaken by First World countries vis-a-vis their indigenous populations. For example, Australia apologized for taking young aborigines away from their parents and forcing them to live in white families to hasten the process of assimilation. Canada likewise apologized to Native Americans or First Nations for taking over their lands for commercial purposes as atonement for this internal colonization.

The third set of reparations claims arose from state-sponsored violence and other authoritarian practices during the transition process to democratic rule in many countries in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and South Africa. The victims were generally understood not in racial but in political terms and constitute groups with a shared experience of political repression. Reparations, such as monetary compensation in South Africa, Chile, and Argentina came as a result of the findings of the truth commissions (Torpey 2001: 337). This is where transitional justice and reparations intersect with each other.

2.1. Modalities of Repair

The following are mechanisms most commonly used in order to obtain justice and reparations:

2.1.1. Prosecution or trials

Punishment for perpetrators of human rights violations through trials may be the most visible and dramatic form of pursuing justice. Of late, trials are not only international in nature but sometimes under United Nations supervision. This is to minimize threats to, or preserve, internal social cohesion in post-conflict societies, aid countries that have limited judicial capabilities and/or come up with tribunals that meet international standards, -. Tthe Khmer Rouge Genocide Trial in Cambodia, the trial of Serbian leaders in the former Yugoslavia, and the Rwandan Genocide Trial are examples. But they are time consuming. Death may overcome justice as in the case of Augusto Pinochet and some of the senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge.

2.1.2. Financial compensation

Financial compensation may arise as a result from the reports of truth commissions, a decision or order from a court undertaking trials for human rights violators, or a policy of restitution. In the first case, the victims of the apartheid regime in South Africa received substantial amounts of money at the behest of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Argentine and Chilean dissidents also received modest financial help from the government after the findings of truth commissions were announced to the public. In some other countries, financial compensation came about as a result of trials against human rights violators. In this regard, financial compensation is used more as reparations for victims or disadvantaged groups.

2.1.3. Truth commissions

One of the most common demands from victims and their kin in many transitional societies is an official truth-telling activity. Truth commissions has four important elements: it focuses on the past; does not concentrate on a specific event but paints an overall picture of certain human rights violations over a period of time; it exists for a pre-determined period of time; and, it is vested with a certain authority (Hayner 2001).

South Africa provides the best example yet of how a truth commission could be a way for repairing past historical injustices. Yet while it is famous outside of South Africa and is seen as a model for other countries to replicate, many victims of the apartheid regime resent the immunity given to those who opted to confess for their crimes (De Kok 1998: 67). The TRC fused the twin objectives of truth recovery and reparative process with the grant of amnesty (Simpson 1999: 16). However, the first country that came up with this mechanism though was Argentina. A truth commission was established immediately after the end of the military regime of Gen. Jorge Videla and its “dirty war” on dissidents in 1982. Then President Raul Alfonsin established National Commission for Disappeared Persons (CONADEP) the following year, which came up with a final report entitled *Nunca Mas* (Never Again) four years later. The report was used to

prosecute the military but such attempts were met with successive military revolts and eventually succumbed to it (Alfonsin 1993; Hayner 2001).

2.1.4. Lustration

The term lustration has long been used in Eastern Europe to refer to the compilation of an inventory or register. Thus, to lustrate someone meant to check whether his name appeared in a database. Lustration and *decommunization* were used interchangeably. While the former is understood as ascertaining whether an occupant of, or a participant for, a particular post worked for or collaborated with the communist security services, the latter refers to the wider removal and exclusion of people from office for having been functionaries of the Communist Party or related institutions. Thus, lustration was presented as a means of safeguarding the state and democracy either by compelling thousands of candidates and officials to disclose their personal histories or by using a discreet bureaucratic procedure to filter out such persons from the state sector (Kieran et.al. 2005: 24-26).

2.2. Moral Reparations

2.2.1. Restitution

In its simplest definition, restitution means to return something which was forcibly or improperly taken. It may be personal property (like pieces of art, real estate, or money) or communal property (ancestral domains or “homelands” and cultural or historical artifacts). Restitution aims to reestablish to the fullest extent possible the situation that existed before the violation took place. It may also mean rehabilitation, which may include, but is not limited to, legal, medical, psychological, and other cares (Hayner 2001: 171). Among the often mentioned cases of restitution includes the return of ancestral domain to First Nations in the US and Canada and the return of looted artifacts back to their countries of origins (Hamber and Wilson 2003: 156).

2.2.2. Apologies

Coming from the Greek word *apologos*, which originally meant

an oral or written defense or vindication of charges by others, it came to mean as justification, explanation, or excuse on account of an offense that was unintended. Apology may come in many forms. It may be official or personal. It may also be an individual apologizing to a fellow individual, a group to an individual, or a state to an individual or group. Apologies can be offered to someone or for something. Apology also entails non-repetition of the transgression. Though a violation may be irreversible, with an apology it may not be irreparable. Apology may also have the power to contain socially disruptive conflicts (Tavuchis 1991: 22-28). Shortly after assuming office, Prime Minister Rudd apologized to Aborigines for forcibly taking their young and bringing them to white homes for rearing in order to hasten the process of assimilation, a practice common in Australia from the 1920's to the 1970's. In Asia, many countries would very much welcome an apology from Japan for the so-called comfort women and other atrocities committed on civilian populations.

2.2.3. Symbolic or Commemorations

Reparations or redress of past human rights violations may not only be limited to financial compensation, educational or housing benefits, and exemption from military service. Especially if the intention is to instill the collective memory of the victims to future generations and remind them of the horrors of authoritarian rule, the symbolic remembrances may very well be the best form of reparations. Aside from erecting markers, memorials, or establishing museums, symbolic reparations include commemorations or setting aside a particular day to remember a particular event or date to keep alive the memory of the victims and save it from going into oblivion or what has is referred to as "forgetting" or "deremembering" (Smith 1996). But to write history without acknowledgement of past wrongs would only result in so-called "contested memories." Without facing justice and owning up to past misdeeds, there is a tendency among perpetrators to challenge the memories of the victims as a way of exonerating themselves (Bourguet et. al. 1990).

And the end goal of reparation measures is to effect closure.

Closure may be effected, depending on the gravity of the crimes committed, with a combination or all of the following elements - truth, accountability, and redress. The truth behind gross human rights violations must be established for the benefit of survivors or the next of kin of victims. Furthermore, truth is necessary in order to establish the basis for compensation. However precarious, it is necessary to pursue accountability measures, like trials and punishments, to establish the rule of law and do away with impunity. Finally, redress provides a modicum of consolation to the victims. Redress may be compensation but it need not be monetary alone. More essential to victims are moral or symbolic in nature - apologies, memorialization, and shared history-writing among former protagonists.

III. Untangling the Gordian Knot in Cambodia

Surprisingly, the first attempt to put to account the leaders of the Khmer Rouge came from the Vietnamese after invading the country in 1979. As expected, this plan could not be taken seriously. Aside from the civil war that would engulf Cambodia for the next one and half decade, the Khmer Rouge, being the strongest of all Cambodian opposition forces, effectively became the battering ram of Vietnam's enemies - ASEAN, China, the United States and Western Europe. Regardless of its past, the Khmer Rouge now enjoyed support - financial, military, diplomatic - as they implemented the policies of Vietnam's enemies. It was only after the death of Pol Pot and the dramatic implosion of the Khmer Rouge in 1999 that the trial became feasible. More than that, the usefulness of the Khmer Rouge has ebbed as the end of the Cold War signaled the start of a comprehensive agreement to pursue peace and rehabilitation in the former Indochina. Furthermore, the presence of a multitude of Western non-government organizations and aid agencies in the country put pressure on the Hun Sen government for accountability as a precondition for aid and assistance. Grudgingly however, Hun Sen mused that "We should dig a hole and bury the past. I do not see what a trial would achieve" (Evers 2000: 27-28).

While the US and France were intense lobbyists for a trial, China was however reluctant for it might reveal the details of its involvement with the Khmer Rouge. Initially, it was feared that China would use its veto power in the Security Council to block any attempts for a trial. But China relented in 2004, paving the way for the General Assembly to approve the UN's participation in the trial. From 1999 to 2002, protracted negotiations between the UN and Cambodia ensued. To break the impasse, the US, the European Union and Japan, the UN and Cambodian government came up with a compromise agreement - the formation of an "extraordinary chambers" still within the Cambodian court system but would include foreign judges. It accommodated the concerns of both parties - the UN's desire for an internationally controlled trial and the Cambodian government's resolve that international assistance would not infringe on its sovereignty. After half a year, its official report recommended that the UN establish an ad hoc international tribunal to try senior Khmer Rouge officials and that the prosecutor appointed by the UN limit his/her investigation to those persons most responsible for the most serious violations of international human rights laws in order to achieve the twin goals of individual accountability and national reconciliation.

The draft law was passed by the National Assembly in August 2001 and within the same month signed into law by then King Norodom Sihanouk as The Law on the Establishment of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia for the Prosecution of Crimes Committed during the Period of Democratic Kampuchea. In May 13, 2003, the UN General Assembly approved the agreement between the United Nations and the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC). And on June 6, 2003, the UN and the RGC signed an agreement to regulate the cooperation between the two parties in bringing to trial senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge, i.e. the time frame is to be between April 7, 1975 and January 7, 1979. Thirteen foreign judges and prosecutors have been chosen to serve alongside 17 Khmer judges in the Extraordinary Chambers.

Despite the seeming success in forging consensus between

Cambodia and the international community, there were persistent criticisms of the process. One is the definition of the term genocide, its applicability to the Cambodian case, the period covered and the defendants for prosecution. Critics of the genocide trial believe that the supposed genocide committed by the Khmer Rouge was not based on racial or religious motives but in pursuit of their own brand of revolution. It was, in their opinion, a case of bad history for it did not resemble Hitler's Holocaust. Over the years however, there was a growing consensus that genocide covers a whole range of horrendous crimes, including the deliberate targeting of political or class enemies (Heder 2012).

Because the nature and extent of the atrocities committed varied over time, there was difficulty in pinpointing blame or accountability. This brought up two other crucial elements of the trial. One is the period covered by the trial. While it is undisputable that a significant percentage of Cambodia's population perished under the Khmer Rouge regime, it is equally true that American carpet bombing of Cambodia killed an undetermined number of Khmers numbering in the thousands. In fact, according the Cambodianists, skeletal remains purportedly attributed to the KR were actually victims of the violent bombing campaign launched by the US from 1968 to 1975 (Vickery 1984: 64). It must also be mentioned that other countries were equally responsible for supporting the Khmer Rouge with weapons, finances, sanctuary, diplomatic support, etc. chief among them, China and Thailand.

Another contentious point was the very limited number of accused that were tried in court. In fact, even the late King Norodom Sihanouk said that the trial had become a farce, if not comedic, because there were more judges than defendants. There were 27 judges and prosecutors to try three defendants in four cases. Middle or low level cadres directly involved in the killings did not face trial. A great number of them were either pardoned earlier by then King Norodom Sihanouk including Prime Minister Hun Sen, himself a Khmer Rouge battalion commander, in order to diffuse political tension and weaken the Khmer Rouge. If the trial were indeed serious, critics claim, the list should include not

only the prime minister himself but also former and present Khmer Rouge officers who became high ranking members of the government. A veteran Cambodia specialist predicted that if the trial leads to a direction threatening to people in positions of power, they could pose obstacles to the tribunal's running smoothly. Thus it is not so much the issue of lack of knowledge and training and credibility on the part of the Cambodian courts as it is of political will on the part of the government (Heder 2012).

Another is Cambodia's external relations. Cambodia is highly dependent on foreign aid and it does not come free, for it infringes on the country's sovereignty. The passage of economic, political, and legal reforms was a prerequisite for the release of any grant, aid or loan. Several governments, including Australia, France, Great Britain and Japan have urged that Cambodia reach an agreement on the trial. But it is not only Western donor countries that hold sway over Cambodia. China has transformed itself from Hun Sen's bitter enemy to its closest ally in the Southeast Asian region, in the process becoming Cambodia's largest donor and investor.

IV. The Troubled Transition in the Philippines

The Corazon Aquino administration faced a common dilemma attendant to many countries seeking to address human rights violations in times of transition to democratic rule - how to balance the demands for justice against the destabilizing threat of military intervention. Pres. Aquino inherited from the previous regime a politicized, fractious, ill-disciplined, notorious, and corrupt military (Coronel 1990). Thus, in contrast to many countries where reparations for human rights victims were initiated by the state, the experience in the Philippines was in effect a "forgive and forget" policy. Thus, if legal remedies for the Marcos human rights victims were not available in the Philippines, it was the United States legal system that provided the basis and venue for such undertakings. American legal statutes provided the framework

and bases for prosecuting the former dictator for human rights abuses. Although the case was stalled for some years because of the legal obstacles thrown by the defendants, the Filartiga case, a landmark case that brought to prominence the Alien Tort Claim Act (or ATCA) in 1987 and the passage of an important human rights instrument, the Torture Victim Protection Act in 1992, paved the way for the case against the Marcos family to proceed.

One month after fleeing the Philippines, five lawsuits were immediately filed against Marcos, his daughter Imee and the head of the military, General Fabian Ver, in three judicial districts in the United States for human rights abuses committed between 1972 and 1986. These were: 1) The "Group of 21" - student activists who were detained and tortured by the military during the early part of the martial law period and eventually moved to the United States; 2) The Piopongco Case or the Group of Three - a case involving an activist who was detained, tortured, and held in solitary confinement in Malacañang itself and Jose Ma. Sison, former Chair of the Communist Party of the Philippines and a leading opponent of the Marcos regime; and, 3) The Maximo Hilao et.al. Case - filed by Maximo Hilao in 1986 in Pennsylvania in behalf of her daughter Liliosa who died while undergoing tactical interrogation, a euphemism for torture. This case was the last to be filed but was the biggest in number with approximately 10,000 other victims. This last case was used to consolidate other cases against Marcos.

In the meantime, another case was tried involving another victim, Archimedes Trajano, a Manila-based student who criticized Imee Marcos-Manotoc at a forum. After the forum, he was kidnapped, interrogated, and tortured to death. Her mother Agapita sued Imee Marcos-Manotoc for false imprisonment, kidnapping, wrongful death, and deprivation of rights. Marcos-Manotoc's defense was that she could not be sued because she was acting in an official capacity as a government agent and had control over security personnel. She claimed immunity under the Foreign Service Immunities Act (FSIA) that exempted foreign states and their agents from prosecution. The court struck down her argument for two reasons. One, the crime was committed outside

of the scope of her official duties and beyond her authority. And two, she acted on her own authority and not upon the authority of the GRP.

She then questioned the court's jurisdiction over the case in spite of the fact that the act was committed outside of US territory and that the US Constitution did not provide provisions for trying purely foreign disputes. The judge ruled that Article III of the United States Constitution granted federal courts jurisdiction over civil actions brought by foreign plaintiffs against foreign nationals or sovereigns. It further pointed out that actions against foreign nationals in US courts raised sensitive issues over US foreign relations, thereby making it a federal concern and falling within the purview of federal courts.¹⁾

With this ruling, the human rights victims filed for the reopening of the original case by way of a motion for reconsideration at the US Court of Appeals' Ninth Circuit in San Francisco, California. The Estate²⁾ quickly filed a manifestation against the appeal by the human rights victims. But the court deemed the appeal as meritorious. Furthermore, the Estate was found liable; even if Marcos did not directly order, conspire, or aid the military in the torture, he knew of such conduct and yet failed to use his power to prevent such abuses. The court upheld the concept of command responsibility in international law. As a result, the Ninth Circuit Court reversed the earlier decisions dismissing the cases against the Marcos Estate and remanded the cases for trial to the District of Hawaii under Judge Manuel Real. The Judicial Panel on Multi-District Litigation consolidated all the cases and certified it as a class action suit on April 8, 1991 (Ramirez 2000: 115-116).

The class suit, now docketed as Multi-District Litigation 840, was a bifurcated trial or a two pronged trial. The first phase is divided into two stages: 1) the first is the 'liability stage' where

1) In the United States Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit, 1983, 987 F.2d 493 and 25 F.3d 1467.

2) Refers to the surviving members of the Marcos family after the patriarch Ferdinand died on September 28, 1989.

the court, through the jury, will determine whether the Marcos Estate was indeed liable for violations of international law; and, 2) if the Marcos Estate was adjudged to be liable for the crimes committed, the process will then proceed to the 'damage stage' in order to determine the amount of compensation due to the class or the whole set of victims. The second phase is intended for the Court to determine the amount of compensation due to each of the victims or claimants (Orendain 1992).

After only two weeks of trial, the jury found the defendants guilty for the acts of torture, summary executions, and disappearances when it handed its verdict on September 22, 1992. On February 23, 1994, the Court awarded the victims US \$1.2 B as compensatory damages for all the plaintiffs, whether class or direct. Then on January 20, 1995, the Court again awarded the victims US \$776M for exemplary damages for the class suit members. The Hawaii district court was also able to determine that the individual plaintiffs be awarded money ranging from \$150,000 to \$700,000. (Ryan 1992; Kaser 1994a and 1994b).

The three-phased trial officially culminated on January 27, 1995 when the Hawaii District Court released its Final Order. First, it found the investigation report of the Special Masters it sent to the Philippines to validate the 135 randomly selected the previous year to be authentic and individually awarded them financial remuneration ranging from US\$ 20,000 to US\$ 185,000, depending on their personal circumstances or ordeal. The Court also rewarded the remaining subclass that suffered torture the aggregate amount of US\$ 251,819.811 to be divided pro rata; the remaining subclass that suffered summary executions, US\$ 409,191,760 to be divided pro rata; and, the remaining subclass that suffered involuntary disappearance (and are presumed dead) the aggregate amount of US\$ 94,910,640 to be divided pro rata.³⁾

In addition to awarding US\$ 776M in compensatory damages, the Court also awarded the human rights victims US\$ 1,197,227,417.90

3) In the United States District Court, District of Hawaii, "Final Judgment" in Re: Estate of Ferdinand E. Marcos Human Rights Litigation, MDL 840, January 27, 1995, par.3

in exemplary damages to be divided pro rata, to make an example for the common good. Furthermore, the Court added prejudgment interest of ten per cent per annum from April 7, 1986 when the case was first filed to January 1995 when the case or class suit finally ended. Judge Real reasoned out that this award was due to the diminution of the victims' awards for the long time it took between when the injuries were committed up until an entry of judgment was made. The award also took into consideration the value of the money that were compounded by inflation and the depreciation of the Philippine peso to the US dollar which is in accord with laws of the state of Hawaii. The judge, now imbued with the language of the new international human rights regime, noted that this was done in "manifestation of the objectives of international law which is to make human rights victims whole for their injuries."⁴⁾

The Final Order did not stop at granting financial rewards to the victims. Aside from setting an example that human rights violations do not pay, it wanted to make sure that such a landmark judgment is enforceable. The Court granted plaintiffs their petition for a Permanent Injunction. The Court noted with disappointment however that in spite of an earlier (temporary) injunction, Imelda Marcos and the Swiss banks involved (Credit Suisse and Union Bank of Switzerland) did not cooperate with its effort to recover Marcos assets in Switzerland in order to compensate the human rights victims. In fact, Imelda Marcos, the Court noted, entered into two agreements with the Republic to transfer and split all the Estate's assets. Judge Real then ordered the Estate, the two Swiss banks, and the Republic from transferring or concealing the said assets and all other assets that shall be collected whether by execution or settlement shall be held and disbursed by the Court. Now that the trial part had passed and was greatly in favor of the human rights victims, the time has come for the difficult part of dispensing justice to them - — enforcing the decision (Casiple 1999 and 2000).

The class suit, in spite of the many obstacles and challenges,

4) Ibid., par.5

was able to achieve many objectives based on what it has set out to do when it was first filed in 1986. First, the case was able to give the victims a sense of justice, even if the suit was tried abroad, for all other victims even those not included in the class suit. In fact, there was a lot of sympathy and goodwill towards the human rights victims and the case in general, even from those in high government positions who were themselves victims of imprisonment and torture.

Second, the class suit was able to expose the violations of Marcos and his family. It gave the Filipinos and the world a glimpse of the heinous crimes the Marcos family committed. Third, the class suit proved that Marcos, and dictators in general, are not beyond the reach of the law. The suit was able to deny them safe haven in the US. Fourth, the landmark case was a contribution to international jurisprudence on human rights and thus to the strengthening of a human rights regime in the world. It was the first class action human rights suit in history and it was also the first time that plaintiffs were awarded compensation from their torturer or from the person responsible for their ordeal. Until the class suit, never before has a former head of state been found guilty of human rights abuses in a regular court and that the award given by the Hawaii district court for exemplary damages represents the largest personal injury award in history.

Yet, the class suit had many limitations. First, the trial did not produce the catharsis necessary for victims to tell their ordeal and confront their tormentors, thus effecting closure. Of the 10,059 victims listed in the original complaint, only 137 individual cases were selected at random by a computer to represent the whole class. Fewer still were able to testify in court during the trial period. There was no way of fully knowing what transpired and who were accountable for their sufferings. The US court's jurisdiction did not extend to the military who were directly and personally involved. Had it been possible, a truth commission may have been better for the victims if the intention is in attaining closure.

If ferreting out the truth during the trial was not satisfactory, so is redress. The trial was civil in nature and not criminal. The trial did not put the perpetrators behind bars. Similarly, the cases filed in the Philippines did not prosper for various reasons. Even if there was intense pressure for the Marcos family to issue an apology, this could not be had for in the absence of criminal conviction, the Marcos family denied any wrongdoing. Thus, the victory gained from the class suit failed to provide satisfaction and closure to the victims.

V. Conclusion

In spite of the many limitations and obstacles the genocide trial faced, what is imperative is that the process of putting to account the remaining leaders of the Khmer Rouge pushed through. Even if critics claim that the trial is an expensive exercise to cleanse Western guilt and could not produce the kind of justice the victims desired, the trial could be instrumental, at least, for symbolic justice. Educating the public, especially the youth, is a central objective of the trial. Coming up with a collective memory of the Democratic Kampuchea era could help the future generations of this dark past and perhaps make efforts to reform Cambodian political culture. Truth commissions or international criminal tribunal are not automatic ticket to reconciliation and may be unrealistic in the short-term. The truth may not lead automatically to justice. But without justice, there is no hope. It is not possible for a society to build a democratic future on a foundation of contested memories.

The search for truth in Cambodia owes much to the efforts of academics or scholars from other countries. In the aftermath of the destruction wrought upon the country by the Khmer Rouge, many Cambodianists took the painstaking task of documenting the events during the Democratic Kampuchea period, establishing what was necessary to know what transpired during that era and pave the way for the prosecution of the remaining leaders of the movement. Thus, even if the trials had many shortcomings, this

process in effect became the equivalent of truth telling. And even if reparations did not include a compensation package, the conviction of key leaders as well as the memorialization and international recognition accorded to the victims already offers satisfaction to the survivors and kin of victims.

The quest of the Marcos human rights violations for justice and compensation after the historic trial was not achieved because this came in conflict with the state's version of justice, or restitution, which was to run after the Marcos ill-gotten wealth and use this money to fund another important social justice concern - land reform. It was only in 2013 when reparations for the Marcos human rights victims was finally enacted into law - Republic Act 10368 or the Martial Law Human Rights Victims Reparations and Recognitions Act. The law not only provided financial compensation. More importantly the victims were given official recognition by the state. After all, the democracy that the Philippine enjoys today was due to the sacrifices of these victims. A museum funded by the government to remind the future generations of the memory of martial law is now in the process of construction.

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Emotions and Awareness of Rights among the Thais



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[*Abstract*]

This article is based on a research conducted from 2009 to 2012, on the political disputes in Thailand. During the data collections periods, it was common to hear the frustration, bitterness and anger, expressed by the Redshirts, especially those who lived in the northeast and northern regions. Coming from the said research, this paper will examine the relationship between emotions and rights. According to the sociology of emotions, there are connections between macrolevel social processes and the arousal of emotions. Emotions arising from macrostructural processes may affect individuals at the microlevel, prompting them into actions collectively. In addition, expressions of resentment and articulation for vengeance can be interpreted as the emotions related to the awareness of rights, which may include the rights to one's needs and the access to resources that fulfill such needs. It will demonstrate how emotions, political demonstrations and the increasing awareness of rights, are related.

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Keywords: Resentment, vengeance, rights, Redshirts, northeast and northern Thailand

I . Rights-related Emotions

Between 2009 and 2012, my friends and I conducted a research on Thailand's political conflicts, which were otherwise known as the Yellowshirt-Redshirt movements. From the beginning, we assumed that the disputes were related to the socio-economic changes in the last few decades. Although the findings did not entirely contradict our assumption, some of them surprised us (and some of which persuaded us to investigate further). During the data collections periods, we often experienced the discontentment, frustration, bitterness, or even anger, expressed by the provincial people¹⁾, particularly those who lived in the northeast and northern regions. They felt insulted by the comments and attitudes of the Bangkokians, who viewed the provincial people as being poor (*chon*, in Thai) or having little education (*khwamrunoi* literally, little knowledge). Our informants, particularly the northeasterners both the Redshirts and the Yellowshirts, complained that whatever they did was always wrong (*hetyangkophit*, in northeastern Thai) in the Bangkokian's points of view. Some of them said that in the past they did not dare to speak the northeastern Thai language (Isan) because they were afraid that the residents of Bangkok might look down (*duthuk*) on them. Isan people thought that their language was inferior to the language spoken in the capital. Some of them complained that they were left to be ignorant (*doipanya*), having little opportunity for development. Many northeasterners expressed that they were driven by being *noi nue tam chai* (feeling bitter and belittled) to become the Redshirts. Emotions stimulated them to join the protests that finally marched to the capital. According to the sociology of emotions,

1) In this paper, the terms "provincial people" and "rural people" are used interchangeably. Owing to Thailand's uneven development, which heavily concentrates on Bangkok, the provincial and rural areas have long gained less improvement than the capital. In addition, since mobility between the rural and provincial areas is rather high, the lives of these peoples are not greatly different.

however, such feelings could be interpreted as the reactions of “resentment” and “vengeance”. It is said that both emotions are often related to the awareness of rights, which may include the rights to one’s needs and the access to resources that fulfill such needs.

Using some findings from our research, this paper aims to analyze the protestors’ emotions. It will apply concepts in the sociology of emotions to explore how emotions are related to the awareness of rights, especially among the provincial people who feel that their rights have been denied. It will also demonstrate that many Thais, the middle-class and the residents of Bangkok in particular, lack of knowledge of rural Thailand, which have been changing significantly in many aspects. As a matter of fact, lack of knowledge of the rural has led to the cultural prejudice, which is part of the urban-rural divergence.

II. Interpreting the Emotions

One of the most striking experiences I had during our research was the emotions expressed by the provincial people, especially those who lived in the northeastern region who refer to themselves as *khon Isan*, or the Isan people (which means the northeasterners). Most Isan people felt bitter and angry by the comments of some public figures. The most insulting comment, many of them furiously responded, was that “Khon Isan pendaikhae khonrupchai kap dekpam” (Isan people can only be servants and petrol station attendants).²⁾ Insulting the northeasterners,

2) Most Redshirts believed that this comment was made by Chirmsak Pinthong, a famous public figure and former senator, and Seri Wongmontha. In the website called “Pantip.com”, however, it is stated that Charoen Kanthawongs, a former member of the Democrat Party, made the comment. In fact, he actually said that “Khunrumai, khonchakphakisan pen lukchang hai khonnaikrungthep khonrupchai khongphom machakphakisan lukchangpamnamman nai krungthep komachakphakisan” (You know, people from the northeastern region are employees of Bangkok’s residents. My servant is also from the northeast. Petrol station attendants all came from the northeast.) (Pantip.com. ““..Khonisan penphenglukchang..” chak Charoen Kanthawongs su Sombat Thamrongthanyawong “Nuengkho nuengsiang yangchaikapthaimaidai” (“..Isan people are simply employees..”, from Charoen

however, is nothing new (see Keyes 1967, 2012, 2014), but I shall return to this issue later.

How do we interpret the frustration, repulsiveness, and fury of the provincial people, especially the northeasterners? How do we understand their emotional expressions, such as feeling bitter and belittled, or being insulted as poor, uneducated people, who were always wrong? One of the challenging tasks in sociology, it seems, is to develop concepts or theories “on how social structures determine the arousal and flow of emotions” (Turner and Stets 2005: 215). J. M. Barbalet, a sociologist who applies the macrosociological approach to investigate emotions, explains that “the structural properties of social interactions determine emotional experiences, and that particular emotional experiences determine inclinations to certain courses of action. Culture plays a role, certainly, in the details but not the gross character of an actor’s response to their circumstances. The point...is that emotion is a necessary link between social structure and social actor. The connection is never mechanical, because emotions are normally not behaviorally compelling but inclining” (Barbalet 2001: 27). Sociologists like Barbalet aim to understand the connection between macrolevel social processes and the arousal of emotions. He assumes that emotions arise from macrostructural processes may affect individuals at the microlevel, prompting them into actions collectively. He is interested in “the relationship among selected aspects and social structures, especially those revolving around inequality and power, and selected emotions, including *resentment*, *confidence*, *shame*, *vengefulness*, and *fear*” (Turner and Stets 2005: 252; italics not mine). I will here apply his assumptions of “resentment” and “vengefulness” to interpret the expression “noi nue tam chai” of the northeastern Redshirts.

Barbalet, citing Marshall’s work, confirms that social emotion must be examined in the “politico-economic framework”. He then explains that “the structure of social relations is important because it determines the level of class resentment. The level of

Kanthawongs to Sombat Thamrongthanyawong “..One man, one vote, is not applicable with Thailand). 27 February 2015. <http://pantip.com/topic/31407472>).

class resentment is important because it determines the level of class conflict. Here, an emotion has both a basis in social relations and a society efficacy in changing those relations" (Barbalet 2001: 71).

He notes that "vengefulness and resentment are frequently treated together as forms or expressions of moral anger associated with claims to basic rights". He then refers to Adam Smith, who "describes resentment and revenge as "the guardians of justice, and of the equality of its administration" (ibid: 134). A friend of mine, who is also a sociologist, observed that "resentment" was an emotion that led to "vengefulness", which would possibly drive people into action. Barbalet, however, emphasizes that both emotions are related to basic rights, which "require basic needs" (ibid: 140). He then argues that basic needs are beyond human being's natural or physical needs. They include needs to be in the society. He proposes that "basic needs ... are more likely to be commensurate with the needs for society" (ibid: 140-142). His conception of basic rights is interpreted as rights "to form meaningful social relationships and cooperate with others", and basic needs as needs for meaningful social status and roles (Turner and Stets 2005: 255).

For Barbalet, resentment is a moral emotion "in the sense that individuals feel resentful when they perceived that others have gained in power or material well-being in contravention to norms and cultural expectations. Resentment can be a conscious feeling, but it can also remain subliminal, operating to influence people's actions without their full awareness. The distribution of resources is typically the fuel of resentment because as people perceive others gaining resources that are not their due, resentment will increase. If one segment of a population must experience losses while others gain, the resentment becomes even more intense". In addition, resentment may occur between social classes and in the segments of a particular social class (ibid: 253).

Vengefulness "emerges when those with power are seen by others to use their power to deny them their "basic rights""

(ibid: 255). It operates at the collective and the individual levels. It is “an emotion of power relations. It functions to correct imbalanced or disjointed power relationships. Vengefulness is concerned with restoring social actors to their rightful place in relationships. It is therefore both the appeal against an abrogation of rights and an assertion of an actor’s rights both to their accepted position and to punish those who would dispossess them of their rightful place” (Barbalet 2001: 136).

In brief, resentment and vengefulness, according to Barbalet, evolve when basic rights are violated. But the difference is that resentment arises “from perceptions that the denial of status in social relations violates normative expectations, or it comes from a sense that others are given more status in relations than they deserve by cultural codes”. Vengefulness, on the other hand, “comes from perceptions that third parties have used their power to deny person their rightful place in social relationships. It drives people to restore their place in social relations and to punish those who used their power to deny this basic right” (Turner and Stets 2005: 255). Barbalet’s conceptions of emotions imply that those who are in disadvantaged positions are more likely to be denied basic rights. His also suggests that this is because those who have power and wealth “can use their resources to occupy the most favored positions and play the most rewarding roles, whereas those without these resources will often perceive that they are denied rights to positions or that others are given access to positions that they do not deserve” (ibid: 256).

III. Views of the Poor

For decades, it has been commonly believed that Thailand’s rural areas are poor and less-developed and the people are “stupid, poor and sick”, or “ngo chon chep” in Thai. A lot of Thais also believe that the rural people generally have little understanding of the politics. And they are often the victims of the politicians, who are corrupt and greedy. Politics in the rural areas are

viewed as “money politics”, where politicians can buy their way to power, or to the parliament, by way of “vote-buying” in the said areas. It is thus not surprising that many Thais, including academics, mass media and NGOs, view the election rather negatively and, as a result, they seem to have little faith in the representative democratic system. The following comments are the good examples of such views:

- “Khonchonnabot maimikhamrukhamkhaochai prachathippatai” (Rural people have neither knowledge nor understanding of democracy.), Chitpas Bhirombhakdi (Kridakorn)³⁾
- “Samsaensiang nai ko to mo taepensiangthimi khunnaphap yomdikwa siphalsiang nai to cho wo taeraikhunnaphap” (Three hundred thousand votes in Bangkok is better in quality than the fifteen million votes from the provinces.), Seri Wongmontha
- “Nuengkhn nuengsiang yangchaikapthaimaidai” (“One man, one vote” is not applicable for Thailand.), Sombat Thamrongthanyawong

The above three people were the members of the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), an anti-government group which began its street protest in Bangkok before the end of 2013 and eventually led to Thailand latest coup d’état on May 22, 2014. The three comments were expressed during the protest and, despite the undemocratic attitudes, were warmly received by many Thais, especially Bangkok’s middle class.

3) Her comment led to an outcry among Thai people, especially those who lived in the rural area. Her father later apologized to the Thais on his daughter’s behalf via the mass media and explained that she had changed her surname to “Kridakorn”, the maiden name of her mother. Such an explanation was intended to tell the Thai public that the Bhirombhakdi, her fathers’ family which owned Boon Rawd Brewery, one of the country’s largest breweries, had distanced itself from Chitpas and her political activities (Khaosod online, December 23, 2013). It was speculated that such action was to prevent any damage to the family’s business caused by her comment.

IV. Myths of the Rural

Prachak Kongkirati, a young and well-known Thai political scientist, states that the Thai democracy has been dominated by a very influential tale. It is a political tale with moral notions, telling us about the struggle for democracy in Thailand. But it is hardly an academic explanation supported by data or a convincing debate. Rather, it is a description repeatedly produced by the media, activists, including some academics, through the mass media and the public sphere. It tells a story of how Thailand fails to be a democratic country. Among the problems are two villains. The first one is the rural people who are stupid, poor and sick, and the wicked politicians who are vulgar, dirty, and greedy. Both join forces to commit a crime called “suesitkhaisiang” (literally, “buying rights, selling votes”; vote-buying) during the elections. As a result, the elections have been downgraded to merely a meaningless political ritual, resulting in a corrupt and disgraced Thai politics. Unfortunately, the rural poor remain where they are, lacking in development and education, and comprising the majority. Their votes, therefore, always dominate the election’s results, leaving the minority, who are “suksabai chaladlam lae ruaylon” (literally, comfortable, clever, and rich),⁴⁾ bearing the pains of defeat. It also tells about the heroes, the typical white knights, who come to rescue. They are the “khondi” (literally, good people), who are charismatic, enlightened, and moral, who will guide the country to success and prosperity. And since the elections are viewed as dirty and corrupt, the heroes need not come through the electoral system. They can be in power by appointments or, sometimes, by the use of force or by manipulating the legal system. The ultimate goal is to get the heroes to power (Prachak 2012: 3-4).

Prachak’s article may seem sarcastic, but it is not without justification. It has raised a number of the public misunderstandings, not only about Thai politics but also about rural economic development and poverty. Let me briefly discuss two issues,

4) It implies the middle class Thais, who are generally wealthier and live more comfortable than the rural folks. They usually think that they are cleverer (Niti).

namely, rural poverty and vote-buying, to prove my point.

4.1. Rural Poverty

I do not deny that rural Thailand is less developed than the urban areas, especially Bangkok, in terms of infrastructures and other programs. The country's socio-economic developments in the last 3 to 4 decades, however, have changed the rural areas tremendously. It has altered the rural life from what James C. Scott calls a "subsistence ethic" (Scott 1976) to something Thais have not expected. The rural areas have been developed so much that many of their residents are now in Keyes' term 'cosmopolitan' villagers (Keyes 2012). They often travel far and wide, earning more income from the non-agricultural jobs. They also gain new experiences, information and knowledge, from such mobility. Keyes (2014: 149-157) reports that since the 1970s the northeastern villagers have travelled to find jobs outside their homes. Many men went as far as Taiwan and the Middle East to work. Some villagers who live in the village that Keyes studied, came back home with some savings and invested in new enterprises, for example, "food stalls, small restaurants, vehicle repair shops, tailoring shops, beauty shops, a bakery, convenience stores" (ibid: 155). Rural Thailand has been transformed in almost all aspects of life.

In terms of the rural poverty, a new study states that it has been reduced dramatically. In the 1960s, for example, "about 96 percent of rural household were living below the poverty line. ... The rate of rural poverty fell steadily during the 1960s and 1970s, increased as a result of the economic slowdown in the early 1980s, and then continued its downward trend until the middle of the 1990s, when it reached 14 percent". In 2007, it fell to only 10 percent (Walker 2012: 39). Another study reports that in 1988, 42.2% of the whole population was living under the poverty line. But in 2010, it fell to 7.7%. There was a sharp difference between the people who lived in the rural and urban areas in the aspect of poverty. In 1988, for example, people living under the poverty line in the rural areas were 49.7%, but it decreased

to 10.4% in 2010. But in the urban areas, it was 23.7% in 1988 and 2.6% in 2010. The average income per person increases 8.8% per annum and 7.3% per year for the expense (Apichat et al. 2013: 40-41). Walker estimates that the majority of the population outside the capital is “at least 50 percent above the poverty line”, ranging “from at least 80 percent in central Thailand to 70 percent in southern and northern Thailand and 60 percent in northeastern Thailand”. He thus calls them the “middle-income peasants”. He, however, also acknowledges that some 20 to 30 percent of the rural households “could be classified as poor or near poor” and among the poorest ones are “landless laborers, although given the increasing importance of nonfarm income, there is no longer a clear correlation between landlessness and poverty” (Walker 2012: 43).

It should also be noted that the increase of household incomes in the rural areas has shifted from the agriculture-related incomes to the non-agricultural ones. Between 1986 and 2006, for example, a survey indicates that the sources of rural household incomes include other occupations, such as trade, self-employment, and services, which increased quite significantly during the years (Apichat et al. 2013: 41-42). According to Keyes, who took surveys in a village in Maha Sarakham in the northeast region in 1963, 1980 and 2006, the significant source of income was non-agricultural work. And the “money the villagers brought back from urban or overseas work was increasingly invested not in agriculture but in small enterprises such as convenience stores, repair shops, and food stands as well as rice mills” (Keyes 2014: 143). It is clear that, firstly, rural Thailand is not as poor as it used to be or as one thought. Secondly, mobility is common among Thai villagers. Many of them had worked outside their villages. And it is not unusual to work overseas. Finally, the source of household income from non-agricultural jobs has increased significantly.

4.2. Vote-buying

Vote-buying is another issue that the rural people have been accused

of. As a political scientist pointed out, in Thailand it “is common to hear that vote buying is a key issue of Thai politics. The political disease of vote buying, according to prominent commentators, not only corrupted Thailand’s election system in the 1990s, but plagued Thai society more generally” (Callahan 2005: 95). It is also common to jump to a conclusion that this is because the rural people are poor and lack of education. They have, therefore, been the easy preys of crooked politicians who use money to buy themselves political power and wealth. Rural areas have always posed major challenges to the country’s modernization and democratization processes.

But using money in the elections does not guarantee the victory. A number of studies not only indicate that the practices of vote-buying vary from place to place, but the money used to buy votes must be spent wisely and strategically. In his frequently quoted article, Anek Laothamatas noted that voters are not simply concerned with the money they receive, they also tend to choose “politicians who visit them regularly; who help them cope with difficult personal or family problems, often in collaboration with their canvassers; who regularly attend social functions at the village level; who make generous donations to neighborhood monasteries or schools; and who bring in public programs that generate jobs, money, and reputation for their villages and provinces” (Anek 1996: 206). Other issues that voters take into consideration include the candidate’s qualifications, relationships between the voters and the candidates, and between the candidates and the political parties; and the party’s policies that will benefit the voters, the preferences of the communities, villages or kin groups (Apichat et al. 2013: 65-69). Most importantly, at the village level kin relations are often the most decisive factor. Pattana Kitiarsa reports that when his maternal relative decided to run for village headman, other relatives voted for him. He won the election because Pattana’s “mother’s family commands the largest kin network in my village, no one apart from my relatives has been able to win election as our village headman until today” (Pattana 2012: 238). At the national level, on the other hand, a study revealed that 46.79 percent of the

voters admitted they accepted the money given to them but did not vote for the candidate and 48.62 percent insisted that they would vote for the candidate they admired whether or not they received money. Only 4.59% of the voters declared that they would vote for the candidate who paid them (Thairath online, 17 August 2012).

Winning an election is a tactical, well-organized, and thoughtful task. Using money is just one of the many tactics, but it does not ensure a victory. A candidate need to understand his voters' needs and priorities, otherwise he may be beaten in the election. And rural voters, or "political peasants" in Walker's term (2012), certainly have new needs and aspirations, which have been generated by the economic development and prosperity in the last few decades.⁵⁾

V. Political Conflicts

This section will provide some background details of Thailand's recent political crisis. The most well-known and recent one was probably the Yellowshirt-Redshirt conflicts. Sources often state that the conflicts started with the anti-Thaksin Shinawatra in 2005. Thaksin Shinawatra, a telecommunications mogul who founded the Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT), won the 2001 election and became the Prime Minister. He soon introduced his populist policies, which mostly benefited the rural populace and the lower-middle class. He was seen as the first politician of the modern era that had not come from the traditional Thai elites. Thaksin therefore managed to attract a broad spectrum of the electorate, particularly in the north and northeast, and renewed his term of office by a large majority following the 2005 elections, which had a record participation of 75% (Hinojar 2012: 216).

But Thaksin was not without enemies. One of them was

5) Other scholars propose the term "urbanized villagers" to call many rural Thais who have "lower middle class income levels and aspirations" (Naruemon Thabchumpon and McCargo 2011).

Sondhi Limtongkul, a well known media tycoon who founded the People Alliance for Democracy (PAD), known as the “Yellowshirts”, in 2005 which soon took the lead in the anti-Thaksin movements. The group was later joined by several state-enterprise unions, which were against Thaksin’s privatization plans for state enterprises, and a number of civil rights and human rights activists. Thaksin was criticized as being undemocratic, monopolizing the power, suppressing the freedom of press, violating human rights, including the harsh handling of the three southern Muslim-dominated provinces, and involvement in extrajudicial killings in the war against drugs. For the poor and rural voters, he was a popularly elected leader. For the urban middle-class voters and the intelligentsia, on the other hand, he was an abusive authoritarian and self-serving politician.

In February 2006, Thaksin Shinawatra dissolved parliament and called an election, which was boycotted by the Democratic Party and the rest of the opposition. The TRT won the election in April, but the political crisis was not averted. On Tuesday September 19, 2006, the Thai army staged a coup d’état against Thaksin Shinawatra, who at the time was in New York City. Since then, Thaksin has been living in exile. The military junta, which called itself the Council for National Security (CNS), soon set up a governing council and named retired General Surayud Chulanont as acting Prime Minister. In 2007, the Constitutional Court ruled that the electoral laws had been violated by the TRTP in the 2006 elections, thereby ordering the party’s dissolution and the disqualification of 111 of its members (ibid: 218). The 1997 Constitution, which was considered by many as the success of Thai democratic constitutional reform, was replaced by the 2007 Constitution. A new general election was then held on December 23, 2007.

The People Power Party (PPP) won the election by obtaining 45% of the votes. Samak Sundarajev, the party’s leader and a former Governor of Bangkok, became the new Prime Minister on January 29, 2008. But Samak and the coalition of five minority parties governed the country for less than a year, that is, from January to September 2008. During that time, the political crisis

deepened. The PAD resumed its activity, mobilizing campaigns against Samak in response to the drafting of a political amnesty law that would allegedly benefit Thaksin Shinawatra. In September 2008, a sentence passed by the Constitutional Court found Samak Sundarajev guilty of a “conflict of interest”. The verdict led to his resigning as head of the government. However, the appointment of Somchai Wongsawat, Thaksin Shinawatra’s brother-in-law, as the new Prime Minister on September 17, 2008, was rejected by the PAD. The conflicts between the government and the PAD thus escalated. On December 2, 2008, the Constitutional Court of Thailand passed another sentence dissolving the PPP for electoral fraud, along with two other groups from the coalition. Their leaders were disqualified from holding public office for 5 years, including the recently appointed Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat, who was forced to resign. After the sentence, the PAD announced the end of its protests. Abhisit Vejjajiva, leader of the Democratic Party, became the Prime Minister in December 2008. He is said to be connected with certain members of the PAD and traditional aristocratic political blocs, which earned him the parliamentary election. The United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), commonly known as the “Redshirts”,⁶⁾ which emerged in 2006 in opposition to the military coup that deposed Thaksin Shinawatra, stepped up their protests against Abhisit (ibid: 218-219).

In early 2010, mass demonstrations organized by the UDD took place in several areas in Bangkok. In April and May of that year, the government used military forces to suppress the protestors. According to Truth for Justice (2012), there were 94 deaths and at least 1,283 injuries as a result of the crackdowns in April and May of that year. The Thai government appointed the Truth for Reconciliation Commission of Thailand (TRCT) to investigate the crackdowns. The report produced by the TRCT, however, was “widely criticized for blaming too much of the violence on the actions of rogue elements of the demonstrators and failing to focus tightly on the obvious legal transgressions of the security

6) There are a number of papers on the Redshirts, for example, Keyes (2012), Naruemon and McCargo (2011), Nishizaki (2014), and Pattana (2012).

forces” (McCargo and Naruemon 2014).⁷⁾ The court inquests, for example, confirmed that many Redshirt protestors and civilians were killed by soldiers’ bullets (The Guardian, August 6, 2013, The Nation, November 26, 2012, The Nation, October 1, 2013). The TRCT hardly mentions such deaths.

VI. The Changing Rural

I will now present some findings from our research. But first, let me give you a background. It began as a pilot project, which focused on both Redshirt and Yellowshirt movements in 2009. Several months later, we completed an inception report (Apichat et al. 2010), which became the foundation of an extensive, more detailed research project that took two years to complete. It was an umbrella project for the other seven projects, which applied various approaches and methodologies. There were four community studies, including a southern village (Anusorn 2012), two communities in the northeast region (Jakkrit 2012, Yukti 2012), and one in the central (Prapart 2012). While Pinkaew Laungaramsri et al. (2012) employed a comparative method to study the Redshirt movements in several districts in Chiang Mai, Viengrat Nethipo (2012) examined the relations between the electoral system and the patron-client relationships in various locations. Wanwiphang Manachotphong (2012) applied a quantitative research methodology to analyze the public attitudes on the socio-economic changes. Data and findings from these projects are used for the analysis and conclusion in Apichat, et al. (2013), which is the principal investigator’s report.

Although the seven projects differed in terms of research settings and local details, their findings can be concluded, as follows. Firstly, the average household income has increased owing to the country’s economic development, at least in the last twenty years. Most people, including those who live in rural areas, have earned more income, often from non-agricultural

7) McCargo and Naruemon (2014) also state that “by failing strongly to criticize the role of the military in most of the fatal shootings, the TRCT arguably helped pave the way for the 2014 coup”.

endeavors. Their lives are now modernized and are engaged in market economy. Most rural people are also highly mobile, often moving between their homes and towns or cities to work or for other activities. Their consumption, way of life, and viewpoints are not much different from those who live in urban areas. The distinction between rural and urban has therefore become blurred. Although the “new middle class”, as we call them, are not poor in terms of income and assets, their earnings are irregular, often from petty trading, remittances, or other non-agricultural wages. Consequently, their lives are rather insecure and vulnerable (ibid: 89-97). In summary, Thailand’s political conflicts in recent years were not the result of the economic disparity between the urban and the rural. Rather, the disputes were socio-culturally and politically related.

Our findings indicate that owing to the political reforms, at least since the 1990s, most of the rural populace has become politically active. The decentralization, for example, has encouraged local people to be enthusiastically involved in local elections. New laws have established local government units, such as the Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO), where officials are elected by the residents in the tambon. The *saphatambon* (tambon council) consists of two representatives from each administrative village in the tambon, both of whom are elected. Each TAO council has one president, who is also elected. Our informants agree that most local people actively participate in the elections of the tambon council’s members because the TAO’s administration and decisions directly affected their lives. Such elections are highly dynamic and competitive.

One of the most important political reforms, however, was the promulgation of the 1997 Constitution (Ratchakitchanubeksa. Ratthathammanun haeng ratcha-anachakthai phutthasakkarat 2540). It was said to be the first constitution to be drafted by a popularly-elected Constitutional Drafting Assembly. The constitution created a bicameral legislature and, for the first time in Thai history, both houses were directly elected. Many measures were established to increase the stability of elected governments. Other reforms included the separation between the executive and legislative

branches. Unlike in previous constitutions, Members of the Parliament were forced to resign from the House in order to become Cabinet Ministers. It also encouraged parties to put potential ministers on the “party list” rather than on a particular constituency. Consequently, the numbers of political parties at the national level was reduced, making the major parties bigger and stronger. It is reported, for example, that between 1986 and 1996 the number of political parties was 7.2, but it was reduced to 3.8 in 2001 and to 2.6 in 2005 (Apichat, et al. 2013: 104).⁸⁾ Human rights were explicitly acknowledged in this constitution. Decentralization was strongly supported, such as the TAO mentioned above. New independent government agencies were established to separate powers and put in place check and balances in the government. And there were many other political reforms.⁹⁾

Life at the local level is also dynamically changing. Villagers in the central region, for example, have set up various kinds of groups for several purposes. Prapart Pintobtang reports that villagers in Ban Khlong Yong, most operating small-scale farms, have engaged in numerous organizations at the local and national levels for their politico-economic goals. They founded “Sahakon kanchaosue thidin khlongyong” (Khlong Yong Land Hire-Purchase Cooperative) in the 1970s in order to help small farmers buy land by way of an installment plan. A number of saving groups were established to collect funds for the agricultural activities, production, and welfare of members. Villagers, however, have also extended their networks beyond the local level. Their alliances at the national level include organizations, such as “Khruetakhai nisinchaona haeng prathetthai” (The Farmer’s Debts Network of Thailand), “Samatcha kaset raiyoi” (The Assembly of the Small Farmers), “Samatcha khonchon” (The Assembly of the Poor) (Prapart 2012). These networks not only provide help and support for Ban Khlong Yong’s residents, but also connect them

8) Apichat, et al. (2013: 105, footnote 51) note that the number of political parties shown here is what Hicken calls the “effective number of political party”, which may not be an integer.

9) The 1997 Constitution, however, was repealed by the Council for Democratic Reform on September 19, 2006, following a successful military coup. It was soon replaced by the 2006 Constitution on October 1, 2006.

with other villagers throughout the country. Village life is no longer confined to a small local community. Villagers are not passive peasants anymore.

VII. Cultural Prejudice

As demonstrated above, rural Thailand has changed rather significantly, but the public seems to have little knowledge about it. Or perhaps, I would argue, it reveals the negative attitudes towards the rural people. It is not uncommon, for example, that the urban people view the rural-folks as poor, less educated and “lack “progress” (*khwaam charoen*)” (Keyes 2014: 185). In fact, such prejudice against the rural people, the northeasterners in particular, can be traced back over a hundred years. In the early twentieth century, for instance, it is documented that the high-ranking government officials made “constant reference to the “stupidity” and “ignorance” (*ngo*) of the northeastern populace” (ibid: 48). Migrants from the northeast who worked in the capital in the 1960s often experienced insults by the Bangkokians, who viewed them as “a Thai lower class” (Keyes 1967: 38; and Keyes 2014: 77). It is also noted that after working for a number of years in the capital, “the returned migrant carried home with him feelings of class and ethnic discrimination directed towards him as a rural northeasterner by the central Thai inhabitants of Bangkok and enhanced awareness of the common culture and problems which all northeasterners shared” (Keyes 1967: 39; and Keyes 2014: 78). Four decades later, the northeasterners still suffer many insults by urban Thais. Comments of the three PDRC’s members mentioned at the beginning of this paper exhibit such an insult and prejudice against rural people.¹⁰⁾

When we were conducting the interviews with the provincial

10) In a couple of occasions, some international students, especially those who came from Western countries, asked me to clarify Seri Wongmontha’s comment. They wondered how the votes of the urban people were “better” than the rural ones. How could that be possible? And how could we measure the quality of political votes? On what criteria? I tried my best to explain, but I soon realized that some political comments were incomprehensible to foreigners.

people, the northeasterners in particular, it was common to hear them declare that

- “we were insulted (*duthuk*) because we were poor (*chon*) and had little education (*khwamrunoi*)”,
- “the society was divided into classes”,
- “there was no justice (*maimi khwamyutitham*) in the society. Whatever the Redshirts did was always wrong” (*hetyangkophit*),
- “there is inequality (*khwammaithaothiam*) in the society”.

Many Redshirts in Ubon Ratchathani, one of the biggest provinces in the northeast region, exclaimed that insulting comments made them feel *noi nue tam chai* (literally, little fresh, low heart, which is an expression of someone who feels bitter and belittled).

It is worth noting, however, that the Yellowshirts in Ubon Ratchathani, most of whom were school teachers and businessmen, also displayed similar bitterness and anger. They said, for example, that

- “in the past when we went to Bangkok, we did not dare to speak Isan language. We were afraid that they would look down on (*duthuk*) us”,
- “governments lacked of the long-term plans for the well-being of the Isan people”.

In Chiang Mai, the biggest city in the north, many Redshirts remarked that because they generally had limited opportunities, they wanted changes that might give them more opportunities. In contrast, the Bangkokians had many opportunities, which more or less provided stable security. Although the Chiang Mai’s Redshirts were not as furious as their comrades in the northeast, they were fully aware of their political movements. According to Pinkaew (2013), the Redshirts in Chiang Mai see themselves as second-class citizens ignored by the governments for a long time. Their aims are therefore to fight for the full citizenship in the liberal democratic society.

VIII. Rights over Resources through Elections

I would add, however, that in the Redshirt's case, feelings of resentment and vengeance were not merely about being denied a meaningful social status and roles. In their perception, basic rights should also cover access to and the use of resources, both material and non-material. As Jakkrit (2012) and Yukti (2012) have discovered, northeastern rural people now have new needs and aspirations, owing to the improvement of their lives. On the one hand, economic developments in the last few decades have not only improved their lives in general, but also raised their expectations. Political progress, on the other hand, has changed their perceptions about political participation. Ordinary people have realized that they need to participate actively in politics to acquire resources that fulfill their needs and aspirations.

In their view, one of the most important political participations was the election. Elections in the last ten years confirmed this view. Thaksin Shinawatra and his party, for example, won the election in 2005 by more than 19 million votes. It is said to be the highest voter turnouts in the Thai political history. One of the obvious reasons of his victory was Thaksin's populist policies, which was perceived by ordinary people as most favorable and beneficial to them. His policies include a four-year debt moratorium for farmers; the village fund; the 30 Baht universal healthcare program, which guarantees universal healthcare coverage; the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) program, which stimulates the development of rural small and medium-sized enterprises, among others. While the 30 Baht universal healthcare program seemed to be the most favorable policy, the four-year debt moratorium and the village fund were very popular among rural people. Thaksin was overthrown by a military coup d'état on September 19, 2006 and has lived in exile ever since. In the 2011 Thai general elections held on July 3, 2011, about 75.03% of the 46,921,682 eligible voters came to cast the ballot. Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin's sister, became the first female Prime Minister. Again, Yingluck's victory was also due to her party's populist policies. In the Redshirts' perception, political participation, especially voting

in the democratic electoral system, will secure their rights to resources that the elected government has promised to them. Pattana's statement emphasizes the importance of elections in the northeastern's perception. He writes, "For the first time ever in the history of my village, people have had a chance for direct participation in national political events, and they have embraced it. My guess is that a strong sense of political consciousness and sensibility concerning voicing and claiming their rights in electoral politics are in the air. For these villagers, the message is clear: elections mean democracy" (Pattana 2012: 242).

IX. Rights Denied by Coup d'états

Almost all of the Redshirts we interviewed, both in the rural and urban areas, confirmed that they joined the movement, or the UDD, because of the 2006 coup d'état. Many confessed that it was the first time they became aware of the importance of democracy and governments. They also realized how vulnerable an elected government was. A military coup d'état could destroy such a government, as well as deny their rights. Thus, it is not surprising for the Thais to experience a series of Redshirt political protests in Bangkok, which eventually became mass demonstrations between March and May 2010. Any Redshirts would say that they rallied for the return of an elected government. But, more importantly, they came to protect their rights.

On May 22, 2014, another military coup d'état took place. Yingluck Shinawatra, like her brother, was overthrown from power. A large number of civilians, including the Redshirts and their leaders were arrested. Many of them were imprisoned without trials. Internet Law Reform Dialogue (iLaw), a Thai human rights NGOs, reports that from May 22 to December 31, 2014, there was at least 666 people who were summoned to report to the junta. At least 362 people were arrested and at least 134 on the political demonstration charge (iLaw Freedom). All cases were prosecuted by the military court. In the rural areas, there have been numerous cases of forced relocation of

villagers and demolishment of the villagers' properties by the military. Until now, the junta has not confirmed whether or not there will be an election.

X. Summary

I have demonstrated in this paper that rural Thailand has transformed significantly. The new rural is "clearly not understood or, if it is, appreciated by those in Bangkok, who still assume that 'rural' people have (or should have) the same characteristics of subsistence-based agriculture that Phya Anuman described half a century ago" (Keyes 2012: 354-355; and Keyes 2014: 187). The transformations, however, have not only occurred in the economic and political spheres, but also altered the emotions of the people.

Emotional expressions of local residents in the northeast and northern regions, such as resentment and vengefulness, do not only reveal their bitterness and anger for the insults hurled by some public figures and the Bangkokians. Both emotions are also associated with their perceptions of rights and denials of them. Resentment, which occurs when basic rights are denied, drove many northeasterners and northerners to join the Redshirt movements. They also believed that the democratic elected governments, especially the ones that they elected, would defend for their rights. This was one of the reasons for voting Thaksin Shinawatra and his party, and later on Yingluck Shinawatra. When the government they elected was overthrown from power by the military, they felt that their rights were violated and denied. They were furious. Resentment became vengefulness. They marched to the streets of Bangkok to protest and fight for their basic rights, and "to punish those who used their power to deny" their rights. In addition, it must be noted that the Yellowshirts, at least in Ubon Ratchathani, also expressed their resentment and vengefulness. It is quite clear that Isan people share some common emotions, no matter what political colors or ideologies they had.

Focusing solely on the politico-economic developments is not adequate to understand the fast-changing rural Thailand. We need to understand the people's emotions, especially those revolving around inequality and power, such as resentment and vengefulness.

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The Marma from Bangladesh: A ‘de-Arakanized’ Community in Chittagong Hill Tracts



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[*Abstract*]

The Rakhine (Arakanese) from present-day Rakhine State (Arakan) in Western Myanmar and the Marma from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Southeast Bangladesh originated from the same region, share the same culture and practice the same religion. However, the people from CHT have developed a distinctive identity and are individualized by a different name “Marma”. This development raises a number of historical questions. This paper explores how the Arakanese descendants became “Marma” in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Rakhine, Arakanese, Marma, Arakan, CHT, identity

I. Introduction

Rakhine State (formerly known as Arakan)¹⁾, situated in the western

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1) In this paper, I will alternatively use either “Rakhine State”, “Arakan” or “Rakhine/Arakan” to refer to the region and “Rakhine”, “Arakanese” or “Rakhine/Arakanese” to the people.

part of present-day Myanmar, is the home of people known as “Rakhine” or “Arakanese”. In the adjacent coastal areas and the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of present-day Bangladesh and in Tripura State of Northeast India, there are people ethnically similar to the Arakanese from Western Myanmar speaking a similar language, sharing the same culture and practicing the same Buddhist religion. While the people from the Bangladesh coastal regions call themselves “Rakhaines” (Mustafa 2005), those from CHT and Tripura identify themselves as “Marmas” (Ahsan 1995)²⁾ and “Mogs” (Krairi Mog 2011).

The “Rakhaine” people of coastal Bangladesh and the “Mogs” of Tripura consider themselves as descendants of Arakanese (Rakhine people).³⁾ However, the people of CHT who identify as “Marmas” hold a different view about their ancestors. They claim themselves to be Burmese or Mon by origin and not Arakanese (Bernot 1960; Bernot 1967; Ahsan 1995). This development raises a number of historical questions. What circumstances have produced a differentiated identity in the CHT? How and why did the people of CHT become “Marma” instead of “Rakhine” or “Arakanese”? These questions are addressed and discussed in this paper.

1.1. Background

Arakan was formerly an independent kingdom. In 1784 CE, it was conquered by the Burmese and became part of Myanmar. During the hey days of the Arakan kingdom, i.e., between the 16th and 17th centuries, parts of the present Chittagong Division and Tripura came under the control of the Arakanese kings (Qanungo 1988; Leider 2004; Van Galen 2008). Some historians claim that the people of CHT, now widely known as “Marma”, are the descendants of the Arakanese who controlled Chittagong in the 16th-17th centuries. After the loss of the port-city of Chittagong to

2) However, the “Rakhaines” and “Marmas” in Bangladesh are collectively called “Maghs” by the Bengalis (Khan 1999).

3) The Mogs from Tripura sometimes identify themselves as “Mrima” but consider that they are of Arakanese descent (See: Krairi Mog 2012).

the Mughals in 1666 CE, the Arakanese retreated to the jungles of CHT and settled there (Qanungo 1988: 21-38). Some argue that Marmas are the Arakanese emigrants of the late 18th century who fled to Bengal/CHT due to the Burmese conquest of Arakan in 1784 CE (Bernot 1967: 33) or a few decades earlier (Khan 1999: 44-50).⁴⁾ The Mog inhabitants in Tripura are considered to be originated from Arakan (Menon 1975: 153) or Arakanese immigrants from the Chittagong area (Webster 1910: 28).

II. Marma: a ‘de-Arakanized’ Community from CHT

Some Bangladeshi scholars write that “Marma” is used to refer to people of Burma/Myanmar (Khan 1984: 117) or the Burmese nationals (Ahsan 1995: 4).⁵⁾ Others link the Marma people of CHT with the “Talaings”⁶⁾ or Mons of Lower Myanmar.⁷⁾ Some other scholars argue that the word “Marma” is simply the Arakanese pronunciation of the Burmese word “Myanmar” which means “Burmese” (Bernot 1953: 19; Bernot 1960: 142; Ahsan 1995: 4). Many Western, Bangladeshi and Arakanese sources reveal that the Marmas of CHT are Arakanese (Lewin 1869; Lethbridge 1893; Hutchinson 1909; Bernot 1967; Ishaq 1971; Sattar 1971, San Tha Aung 1980; Sakkinda 1996; Khan 1999). However, the Marmas of CHT nowadays claim that they are Burmese nationals or of Mon origins.

The Marmas of CHT were migrated from ancient Burma (Myanmar) and their original and ancestral land was in the ancient Pegu city of Myanmar.⁸⁾

4) Both Bernot and Khan retell Marmas’ claims (i.e., the Burmese/Mon origin). But, they conclude that these people are the Arakanese descendants.

5) Khan (1984: 117-118) states that the “Rakhaines” from Pataukhali (who were formerly known as “Marma”) in Bangladesh came from Arakan, a portion of Myanmar, but argues that “Marma” means people of “Myanmar”. Ahsan argues that their original home of the “Marmas” of CHT was the Pegu (Bago) city of Myanmar.

6) Now, “Talaing” is considered a derogatory term and is no more used in Myanmar.

7) See: “The Marma” (in Banglapedia). http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Marma_The (Accessed March 20, 2015)

The Marma community, led by the Mong Chief, were originally Burmese settlers who fled Myanmar to escape unrest in the 16th Century.⁹⁾

Most articles written by Marma writers, especially those published by the Tribal Research Institute of Bandarban, support the “Talaing” ancestry.¹⁰⁾ According to these conditions, a series of questions arises. What makes the “Marma” self-identify as Burmese rather than “Arakanese” or “Rakhine”? How and why were they ‘de-Arakanized’ to become Burmese or Mon people? In this article, I will invalidate the statement of Burmese or Mon ancestry by starting with an investigation on the original meaning of the word “Marma”.

2.1. “Marma”: an old name for the “Rakhine” people

Many scholars intuitively consider that the word “Marma” means “Burmese” (Bernot 1953; Bernot 1960; Bernot 1967; Khan 1984; Ahsan 1995). However, ancient Arakanese texts and old British records explain the term differently. These sources reveal that the Arakanese people in ancient times called themselves “Marama”. Even though this word is similar to *Mranmā* (Burmese), it would be difficult to conclude that “Marma/Marama” means “Burmese” in the past. It will be anachronistic if we make a conclusion based only on modern terminology.

The 18th century Arakanese texts such as *Dhaññavatī Are:taupum* and *Mahā Paññakyau Lhyokthum*: written in 1787 CE used the word *Maramā* to denote the people of Arakan (Kavisara 1967, 76) and the language and scripts used in the former kingdom of Arakan (Kavisara 1964, 54) ¹¹⁾. Another undated manuscript,

8) <https://sites.google.com/site/voiceofjummaland/marma> (Accessed March 20, 2015).

9) <http://mongraja.com/history/> (Accessed March 20, 2015).

10) Personal communication with Mong Sing Neo, Flinders University, on September 21, 2015. For example, the articles written according to the Marmas’ point of view can be seen in: Maung Kyaw Shwe Nue 1998; Mong Sing Neo 2010; Mong Shanoo 2012. Mong Sing Neo later dropped this idea (Personal communication).

11) Khin Maung Saw (2014) explains this usage in his article “Burma or Myanmar? Burmese or Burman? Rangoon or Yangon?”.

*Natsamī: Suik Rakhuiñ Rājavanī*¹²⁾, frequently uses the term *Maramā* to refer to the people in Arakan.

In an old Western account published in 1799 CE, Francis Buchanan¹³⁾ (1799: 223) writes:

The Burmese esteem themselves to be descended from the people of Arakan whom they often call Myanmawgyee, that is to say, great Burmas.

Another account of Buchanan, dated 25th March 1798 CE, tells us:

... that his nation are Ma-ra-ma-gre, or Great Burmas, which is the name given by the inhabitants of Ava to the people of Arakan (Van Schendel 1992: 33)

A Burmese compendium of traditional administration refers to the people of Arakan as *Mranmā-krī*:¹⁴⁾ (Tin 1963: 177). From these writings, it could be understood that people of Arakan were called *Maramā-krī*: (Ma-ra-ma-gri)¹⁵⁾ or *Mranmā-krī*: (Myan-ma-gyi) by the Burmans in ancient times. On the other hand, the people of Arakan/Rakhine called themselves *Ma-ra-mā* (with three syllables) while the Burmese people of Ava from central Myanmar called themselves *Mran-mā* (with two syllables). It is noticeable that while *Mranmā* meant “Burmese”, *Maramā* (endonym) and *Maramā-krī*: or *Mranmā-krī*: (exonyms) were terms used for the people of Arakan. As Francis Hamilton (1820: 264) explains:

The people of Rakhain, however, write their name Marama, making

12) My thanks go to Mong Sing Neo for pointing out this manuscript.

13) When he retired, he adopted the name of his mother whose property he inherited.

14) According to this *Mranmā-maī: Upkhyup-pum Cātām*: (Administration Manual of the Kings of Myanmar), *Mranmā-krī*: refers to “Arakanese” and *Mranmā-ñay* refers to the “Pyu” people.

15) The Barua Buddhists from Bengal who are also known as “Maghs” to the Bengalis (or, Barua Maghs) claim themselves to be “Marama-gri”. Phayre (1841: 683) states: “There is a class of people residing in the Chittagong District, who call themselves Raj-bansé, and in Burmese Myam-má-gyee or ‘great Myam-mas’. They pretend to be descendants of the kings of Arakan, a flattering fiction which they have invented to gloss their spurious descent”.

it consist of three syllables, while in the orthography of Ava, it has only two¹⁶⁾, and the R in their pronunciation is changed into Y or J. Hamilton (1825: 201) also reveals that people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts came originally from Arakan/Rakhine and called themselves “Marama”:

There can be no doubt that these people [Marmas from CHT] came from Rakhain, the language and customs of which they retain unchanged. ... The more intelligent among them acknowledged the name Marama, which the people of Rakhain assume.

In another account dated 18 April 1798 CE, a note by Francis Buchanan is found as follows:

Soon after my arrival I was visited by Kaung-la-pru [Bohmong Chief in CHT] ... He said that the proper name of the Joomeas is Mā-rā-ma, and that they have resided in this Country from time immemorial. (Van Schendel 1992: 87).

In a writing by J. Leyden in 1811 CE, it is stated that:

The national name of the Rukhéng [Rakhine] race is Ma-rum-ma (sic!)¹⁷⁾ (Leyden 1811: 231)

In sum, Arakanese, Burmese and Western accounts tell us that the people of Arakan/Rakhine were once called by the Burmans *Mranmā-krī*: while the people of Rakhine called themselves *Maramā*. Indeed, *Maramā* is an old word for the people of the country of Rakhine or Arakan. Therefore, the people who called themselves *Maramā* nowadays are the people from Rakhine/Arakan who have settled in the Chittagong Hill Tracts a long time ago.

16) This spelling can be no other than “Mran-mā” (with two syllables) and Mran-mā is pronounced Myan-mā (ya for ra).

17) However, Phayre (1841: 681) writes: “The Rakhoing-tha and Khyoung-tha are of the same race. Like the Burmans their national name is Myam-má”. Phayre might have confused the terms *Ma-ra-mā* (mentioned in old Arakanese texts, Hamilton's accounts of 1820/1825 and Leyden's writing of 1811) and *Mran-mā* (pronounced: *Myan-má*).

2.2. The Start of ‘de-Arakanization’

In 1784 CE, the kingdom of Arakan was occupied by the Burmese. Due to oppression which happened some years after the Burmese conquest, many Arakanese fled to East Bengal which is under the control of the British. The Arakanese insurgency from the Bengal area against the Burmese rulers occurred a decade later (Pearn 1933). In some occasions, the Burmese troops invaded the province of Chittagong (Hamilton 1825: 201; Qanungo 2010: 14-17). Hamilton states that the old Arakanese community that had settled in CHT for a long time and the newly arrived Arakanese community following the Burmese invasion and subjugations formed two different communities. Hamilton argues that the old community did not want to associate with the newly arrived Arakanese. The reason he argues was that the former were frightened with the Burmese troops who could probably subdue them for their connection to Arakan/Rakhine. Hamilton (1825: 201) explains:

The invasion of the province of Chatigang [Chittagong] by the troops of Ava in 1794, and the giving up of the several refugees that had fled from Arakan (Rakhain) for protection, had occasioned a very general alarm among the Joomea Muggs [now widely known as Marmas]; for there can be no doubt that these people came from Rakhain, the language and customs of which they retain unchanged. This terror made them in general unwilling to acknowledge any connection with Arakan.

2.3. The Emergence of Bohmong History

Bohmongs are the Chiefs (also known as “Rajas”) of the Marma community from Bandarban Hill District. The creation of the history and genealogy of the Bohmongs in the early 20th century has been a key factor in linking the Marmas to the Pegu city and Mon people of Lower Myanmar. An embellished history of the Bohmong dynasty was presented to J. P. Mills in 1920s and Lucien Bernot in 1950s by the then ruling Bohmongs (See: Mills 1926-27; Bernot 1967: 85-96; Löffler 1968: 189). The earliest

history of Bohmongs in printed form can be found in Hutchinson's *An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts* (1906). According to the Bohmong history, the city of Pegu, the capital of Lower Myanmar in the 16th century was populated with Mon or "Talaing" people and conquered by a Burmese ruler from Upper Myanmar in 1599 CE with the assistance of the Arakanese king. In recognition of the help of the Arakanese, the Burmese lord gave him 33,000¹⁸⁾ "Talaing" prisoners, a prince and a princess of Pegu to the king of Arakan.¹⁹⁾ The Arakanese king married the princess of Pegu and went back to Arakan together with the 33,000 Mon captives to be settled in Arakan.²⁰⁾ Later in 1614 CE, the king of Arakan appointed the prince of Pegu as the ruler of Chittagong that belonged to the kingdom of Arakan (Hutchinson 1906: 109; Hutchinson 1909: 28).

The genealogy of the Bohmong Chiefs was reproduced in G. E. Harvey's article *The Magh Bohmong* (Harvey 1961). However, nobody really knows to what extent this Bohmong history is authentic in relation with the Mon people of Pegu. One scholar even doubts the authenticity of this Bohmong history. As Löffler (1968: 189) notes:

In his most remarkable book '*Les Paysans Arakanais du Pakistan Oriental*', Lucien Bernot gives the fullest account of the Marma Chiefs of Banderban hitherto published. For his account Bernot had

18) Contemporary European sources of 16th century said 5,000 Mons and Burmans headed by some of Nandabayin's son and his brother were taken with the princess to Arakan, the only person named is Ximicolia, one of the sons, on whose companionship (Harvey 1961: 35).

19) In *History of Burma*, G. E. Harvey writes: "the Arakanese deported 3,000 households of the wretched Pegu folks" (Harvey 1925: 183) and "were settled at Urittaung and along the Mayu river. Some of the Talaings were at Sandoway" (Harvey 1925: 141), not in CHT. Urittaung is located 21 miles to the Southwest and Sandoway is located 165 miles to the Southeast from MraukU, the capital of Arakan kingdom.

20) The *Mañ: Rājākrī: Cātām:* (MRCT), originally written in 1602 CE and extended in 1775 CE mentioned the exaggerated number, 30,000 Talaing captives and 3,000 *yui-da-yā:* captives. But it is stated that "Talaings" were resettled in Nga-zan-raing-kywan in Arakan (MRCT: f° 'kho'-v°), not in CHT. Nga-zan-raing-kywan is located in present Minbya township, just 16 miles to the south from MraukU, the ancient capital of Arakan.

mainly to rely on the oral traditions of the people, since the archives of the Banderban dynasty are said to have been lost. When J. P. Mills during his tour in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1926 wanted to see them, he was told that the archives had been destroyed by fire. Again, when L Bernot asked for them in 1952, he was informed that they had been stolen some years ago from the Chittagong station. Ought we may have been interested in the disappearance of these documents?

As traceable in printed books, the Bohmong history which links the Bohmongs to the “Talaing” or Mon of Lower Burma could not have appeared earlier than the beginning of the 20th century. It was only around 1906 that Hutchinson firstly mentioned the link of the Bohmongs with the Mon people (Hutchinson 1906: 109; Hutchinson 1909: 28).

The Golden Book of India compiled by Lethbridge in 1896 CE features the biographies of princely lords, nobles and chiefs of the Indian Empire. There, a biography of the then Bohmong, Tsaneyo Chaudhri (“Sana Yeo” in Harvey 1961: 38; local spelling: “Sa Nhine Neo”), is found. The Bohmong was mentioned as an Arakanese in this book (Lethbridge 1896: 20 & 545). Lethbridge retells a story about the Pakhong [Pegu] princess who married the Arakanese king and the coming of “Tong Bohmong”, son of the Pakhong (Pegu) king to Arakan sometime before 1776 CE. According to this account, the Bohmong dynasty did not start as early as 1614 CE as claimed in the above history of Hutchinson (Lethbridge 1896: 545). The story about the “Talaing” (Mon) people is not found in this account. The description in the golden book may be a reproduction of the memories of the then Bohmong based on the oral traditions and social memories of his ancestors. It is interesting to know how the embellished Bohmong history emerged within a decade in 1906 from their vague memories in 1896.

Until Hutchinson’s account on the Bohmongs, the Bohmong Chiefs considered themselves as Arakanese. In 1798 CE, Francis Buchanan met the then Bohmong Chief in CHT. At that time, the Bohmong told Buchanan that he and his people were *Maramā*, an old name for the people of Arakan (Van Schendel

1992: 87). The accounts of Captain Lewin reveal that the Bohmong considered his ancestors as coming originally from Arakan²¹). Lewin (1869: 53-54 & 1870: 134-138) retells what the Bohmong told him:

In former times, when the Moghuls were Rajahs in Chittagong, and Arracan [Arakan] was an independent monarchy, my ancestors lived on the Koladan River in Arracan. Now, the King of Burmah [Burma] was very jealous of the King of Arracan, and wished to take his kingdom from him ...

Then came the King of Burmah with an army and took Arracan, and our King was killed, and my grandfather took the tribe and fled away into the Chittagong Hills ...

However, conditions had changed up to 1926 and when J. P. Mills made his research, the oral history of the Bohmongs stated that the “Talaing” people were not only the ancestors of the Bohmong but also the ancestors of his people. In 1942-5 CE, some of the Burma officers who were friends of the British ICS administrator-historian G. E. Harvey met the then ruling Bohmong and they were puzzled at the latter’s insistence that he was “a warrior Talaing, descended from warrior Talaings” because the then Bohmong was using the name used by the foreigners, not by the Mons themselves. Harvey (1961: 36) noted:

He [the Bohmong] was echoing the anglo-vernacular idea, current in Bengal during the 1920s and 30s, that anything from Pegu was Talaing: Bayinnaung was a ‘Talaing king’ (sic!).²²)

The idea of “Talaing” ancestry has been established since Hutchinson’s time gradually evolving between the 1920s and 1940s. However, it is not very clear why the Bohmong Chiefs of the Marma people themselves switched their identity from Arakanese (Lewin’s time, in the late 19th century) to Mon descendants (Hutchinson’s time, in the early 20th century).

21) The Bohmong told a story to Lewin.

22) Bayinnung, King of Pegu, is a Burmese national, not a “Talaing” or Mon.

The history of Bohmongs noticeably influenced many writers, not only local Marmas but also Bengalis and Westerners. Under the influence of the Bohmong history, local Marma writers have adopted the “Talaing” (Mon) ancestry. However, Bengali and Western writers notice that Lower Myanmar is not only home for the Mons but that actually most people are Burmese. Then, they rationalize the Marmas’ ancestry as Burmese. The creation of a ‘de-Arakanized’ history of the Bohmongs and popularization of the history by local, Bengali and Western writers are the main reasons which confused the ancestry of the Marmas. As a result, Marmas in CHT prefer to self-identify as descendants of Burmese or Mon instead of Arakanese.

2.4. Marma: the early settlers in CHT

Some scholars would like to emphasize that the Marma are the descendants of the Arakanese refugees who fled to Bengal when the kingdom of Arakan was occupied by the Burmese in 1784 CE (Bernot 1960: 143; Bernot 1967: 33; Ishaq 1971: 29; Khan 1999: 46-48). Bernot (1957: 49-55) acknowledges the migration of people at different moments from different regions as far south as “Talaing” or Pegu. However, he insisted that “the Marma had been settled in the Chittagong Hill Tracts for one century and a half [counting back from 1960]” (Bernot 1960: 143). Khan (1999: 46-48) also holds the idea that most of the Marma migrated to CHT in the late 18th-early 19th centuries although he mentions in one instance (Khan 1999: 45) the arrival of a group of Arakanese to Bengal in 1775 CE, ten years before the conquest of Arakan. It is not very clear what sources inspired these scholars to consider the idea. Captain Lewin might be one of the first writers to argue that these people have arrived and settled in CHT by the time the kingdom of Arakan collapsed. Lewin (1869: 28) writes:

A greater portion of the hill tribes, at present living in the Chittagong Hills, undoubtedly came about two generations ago from Arracan.

Two generations ago counting back from 1869 CE coincided

with the time of the Burmese occupation of the Arakan kingdom. For this argument, Lewin quoted a letter sent from a Burmese governor of Arakan to the British East India Company, dated June 24, 1787 CE. Lewin (1869: 29) states that the tribes of Arakan such as “Domcan Chukma, and Kiecopa Lies, Marring” ran away to the hills of Bengal when Arakan was attacked by the Burmese. They were identified by him as the Chakma and the Murung tribes of CHT. Ishaq (1971: 29) follows Lewin’s argument that they ran away from Arakan together with the Arakanese when the country was plundered by the Burmese invaders. According to Ishaq following Lewin, the Arakanese and other tribes in CHT were recent immigrants of the late 18th century. However, Lewin might have misinterpreted his sources.

After comparing with some other letters of the East India Company, I observe that the individual names of the people who ran away to Bengal from Arakan were mentioned²³). Among the names, “Lohwa Murung” (according to the Arakanese spelling: *Lakwè Mran*) was an important figure. *Lakwè Mran* was the honorific title of an officer at the Arakan court. Some sources mentioned that Lohwa Murung was one of the leaders of the Arakanese resistance forces who took shelter in the jungle in Bengal. In 1794 CE, a large body of Burmese troops entered the Chittagong Division and demanded the surrender of Arakanese rebels including Lohwa Murung (Qanungo 2010: 13-14). “Kiecopa Lies, Marring” quoted by Lewin could be this “Lohwa Murung” mentioned in other sources. While “Lies Marring” (*Lakwè Mran*, Lohwa Murung) was the title, “Kiecopa” would be *Kywan:-up*, meaning a village group chief²⁴). Such an interpretation would invalidate Lewin’s earlier assessment.

Francis Hamilton (Buchanan) who met the Marama people in CHT in 1798 CE, seventy years before Lewin wrote his account, recorded that these people had settled there a long time before the invasion of Arakan by the Burmese. Hamilton (1825:

23) For example, See: The Letter sent from the Magistrate of the Zillah of Chittagong dated November 30, 1798 CE. At that time, “Lohwa Murung” had well established in Bengal (BL/IOR/F/4/71/1583).

24) My thanks go to Dr. Jacques Leider for his explanation on this word.

201) writes²⁵):

It is true, indeed, that they would appear to have retired from their original country about the middle of the last century, that is, between thirty and forty years before the conquest of Rakhain by the King of Ava, while the refugees that were delivered up were insurgents, who had risen against the government of Ava ten years after the conquest.

According to Hamilton, the Marma had already settled in CHT “thirty and forty years before the conquest” of Rakhine/ Arakan by the Burmese, i.e, in the 1740-1750s. Hamilton also mentioned that these people did not want to have any connection with the newly arriving Arakanese refugees of around 1794 CE. As said above, they feared possible Burmese repression if they were connected with the newly arrived Arakanese (Hamilton 1825: 201). There are other sources stating an earlier arrival of the Arakanese in Bengal previous to the Burmese conquest. In 1760 CE, Chittagong Division came under the control of the East India Company. At that time, the British attracted many people from neighboring countries to settle in the unpopulated lands in this region with an ambition to reclaim the waste lands (Serajuddin 1971a). In 1775 CE, ten years before Arakan was conquered by the Burmese, some 2,000 Arakanese came to the East India Company’s territories to settle there (Serajuddin 1971a: 126). This would mean that the Marma are not the descendants of the Arakanese refugees who arrived to CHT after the fall of the Arakanese kingdom.

Arakanese sources claim the establishment of Arakan people in the regions of Bengal, CHT and Tripura as early as the 8th-10th centuries CE (Kyaw Mra Than²⁶) 1993: 3; Sakkinda 1996: 92). An undated Arakanese manuscript entitled *Thoñtaññ Mau-kvan:* (TTMK) explains the establishment of various *thoñ* or “communities” in the Chittagong region in 17th and 18th centuries CE (TTMK: fo

25) Francis Hamilton visited to CHT in 1798 CE when he was known as “Francis Buchannan”.

26) I would like to thank Mong Sing Neo for sharing “*The Extraction of Rakhine Divisional Establishment Gazetteers*”.

'ka' to 'khi'). With regard to the first wave of settlement in the 17th century, TTMK claims that the Arakanese king captured 900,000 "Talaings" and 900,000 Pyus, together with the Princess of Pegu, during his Pegu expeditions in 1599 CE (TTMK: ƒo 'kã'-v^o). The king allegedly established those one million and eight hundred thousand people in Arakan but they later reportedly ran away to Myanmar proper. Then the Pegu princess requested the king to establish *thoñ* (communities) in the plains of Chittagong and CHT around 1612 CE in order to keep the remaining deportees in Arakan (TTMK: ƒo 'ki'-r^o; Sakkinda 1996: 93; Kyaw Mra Than 1993: 4). A similar account about the establishment of communities in this region is also found in J. P. Mills' notes with a lower figure "33,000 Talaing subjects", as stated by the Bohmong at the time. One may speculate if the Bohmong speaking to Mills in the 1920s may have had accessed the text of TTMK and, based on this text, reinforcing his belief of the connection with the "Talaing" people. However, another undated manuscript entitled *Rakhuiñ Jātivamsa Mau-kvan: Cā* (RJKM) originating from the CHT mentions the Pegu Princess and the 900,000 "Talaings" and 900,000 Pyu people as well. This RJKM text relates another story regarding the settlement of those people on the upstream of the rivers (Sakkinda 1974: 137-8). The place is not mentioned as Chittagong plains or CHT in the RJKM. In these texts, we find thus a trace about the "Talaing" (Mon) people from Pegu and resettled in Arakan or Chittagong region. Contemporary Western accounts of the late 16th century stated that the Arakanese king took 5,000 Burmese and Mon captives to Arakan (Harvey 1961: 35). *History of Burma* reports that the Arakanese deported 3,000 households of the "wretched Pegu folks" and were settled in central and southern Arakan (Harvey 1925: 141, 183). An Arakanese palm-leaf manuscript *Mañ: Rājākrī: Cātam*: (MRCT) (written in 1602 CE and enlarged in 1775 CE) states that those "30,000 Talaings" were resettled in Nga-zan-aing-kywan in Arakan (MRCT: ƒo 'kho'-v^o). The numbers indicated here are doubtful, and, the place of their resettlement is not clearly known. We are not sure if the resettlement took place in Arakan or in the CHT or in the plains of Chittagong.

The second wave of settlements in the CHT and in the plains of Chittagong in the 17th century is also mentioned in *Tho'ítaññ Mau-kvan*: (TTMK) by way of the date as 1613 CE (Kyaw Mra Than 1993: 4; Sakkinda 1996: 94). Another wave of settlements in Chittagong region happened again in the 18th century. According to the TTMK, some *tho'í* (communities) were successively established by the Arakanese king in the region in 1711 CE and 1724 CE respectively (Kyaw Mra Than 1993: 4; Sakkinda 1996: 94). As mentioned in the TTMK text, those later settlements of the 17th and 18th centuries only concern Arakanese people.

Although we are not quite sure if the claims in the Arakanese sources are correct, we have to bear in mind that the region of Chittagong was controlled by the Arakanese kings in the 16th and 17th centuries until the fall of Chittagong in 1666 CE. It is true that even after the fall of Chittagong to the Mughals in 1666 CE, the people in CHT still considered themselves to be under the control of the Arakanese kings. In 1711 CE, a “Raja” or Chief in CHT was appointed by the Mughals, but he still had to be confirmed by the king of Arakan (Serajuddin 1971b: 52). This context makes Arakanese settlements in the region likely. The statement of Hamilton (1825: 201) on Arakanese who had settled in CHT before the exodus of Arakanese refugees confirms this hypothesis.

There were different waves of Arakanese migration to Bengal. The last wave of migration took place around 1794 CE after the conquest of Arakan. The Arakanese settlements during this period can be seen especially in the coastal areas in present Bangladesh such as Cox's Bazar and Patuakhali regions (Khan 1984: 119; Khan 1999: 46-47). Now, these Arakanese from coastal Bangladesh (both from Cox's Bazar and Patuakhali) consider themselves as “Rakhaines” (Rakhine) or Arakanese. For example, the Arakanese from Cox's Bazar always identify themselves as “Rakhaine”, not as “Marma”. However, Patuakhali people do not have any problem in identifying themselves as either “Marma” or “Rakhaine” (Ahsan 1995: 8). In ancient times, the Arakanese of Patuakhali called themselves “Marma”. Recently, some youths

from Patuakhali identified themselves as “Rakhaine” (Khan 1984: 117). Khan (1984) argues that it was an effect of the rise of “Rakhine” nationalist movements from Arakan in post-independence Burma/Myanmar. However, it can be observed that the Arakanese descendants of CHT were unaffected by the “Rakhine” nationalist movements. The Arakanese descendants of CHT identify with reference to different ‘clan’ names such as “Regre tha”, “Khyong tha”, “Maro tha”, “Kokkadain tha”, “Longadu tha” as well as maintaining the ancient term “Marma”. Due to the geographical isolation of CHT, the “Rakhine” nationalist movements from Arakan could not affect the old Arakanese community in CHT which migrated there a long time ago²⁷). In 1951, the East Pakistan government started to use the term “Marma” in the censuses (Sattar 1971: 197). After that, the “Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council Act 1998” (Act 12 of 1998, Bangladesh) included the term “Marma” and the term became fully legalized officially identifying the people. As a result, the Arakanese from CHT are seen as the “Marmas” nowadays.

III. Conclusion

As discussed above, the newly arrived Arakanese community in Bengal around 1794 CE and the old community that had settled in CHT for a long time formed two different communities in what is now Bangladesh. The unwillingness of the old community to associate themselves with Arakan (Rakhine), the creation of the Bohmong history supporting the “Talaing” ancestry, the popularization of the Bohmongs’ claim in local, Bengali and Western writings and the legalization of the term “Marma” by the Bangladesh government strengthened the ‘de-Arakanization’ of the Marmas. However, ethnographic and linguistic studies show that the Marmas of CHT are of Arakanese descent. Shared culture is prevalent among the Rakhines from Arakan and the Marmas from CHT. Old Arakanese folk songs, dances, folk tales, literature, oral traditions, and customs still exist in the Marma community. Nowadays, the

27) Online discussions with Mong Sing Neo on September 21, 2015.

language of the Marmas can be considered as a slight variation of Arakanese/Rakhine (Davis 2014). However, studies show that Marma is an archaic form Arakanese. In ancient times, Arakanese from Arakan and CHT might speak an earlier form of Arakanese language. After Arakan became part of Myanmar in 1784 CE, Arakanese/Rakhines came under a greater influence of Burmese. Linguistic studies of early 19th century show that the language spoken by Rakhines/Arakanese from Arakan at that time was almost exactly the same as the language spoken by present-day CHT Marmas (See: Leyden 1811)²⁸). Closer analysis of the vocabularies in the Marma language sheds some light about the time when they had already settled there. The name of their community “Marma”, which is an archaic term for the people of Arakan, also shows that they came originally from Arakan. In conclusion, one may reasonably assume that the Marma of CHT were present in the area long time before the conquest of Arakan by the Burmese in 1784 CE.

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28) For example, Rakhines from present-day Arakan pronounce “Chaung tha” referring to the “Chaung tha” community in northern Arakan. But, in ancient time, Rakhines from Arakan pronounced “Khyong tha”. The Marmas of CHT are still maintaining this archaic form of pronunciation (cf. Leyden 1811 and Davis 2014).

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Art and Sculpture of Bagan Period: Women in Bagan Sculpture



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[*Abstract*]

This paper will reveal the legacy of women in the Bagan Period (10th to 11th century A.D.) traced through the early evidences of female figures that could only found in the stones of KyaukkuUmin and in the terracotta of Shwesandaw and Phetleik temples. There have been some writings on the women of the Bagan Period from different perspectives. The role of women from the Bagan Period mentioned in different records and as empowerment of Myanmar Women in the past will be analyzed. Through these female images and other unearthed artifacts found in Bagan, portrayals of womanhood in Myanmar early sculpture will be studied. The role of women in the Bagan will be observed by looking closely at what remains of the sculptures, as well as the craftsmanship applied to the works, which are usually in terracotta, wood, or stone.

Keywords: Bagan sculpture, Buddhism, female empowerment

I . Introduction

A study on art is presumably based on the aspects of aesthetics and art history as well as religious studies. Sometimes art works are mythical and metaphysical rather than representational. Sometimes they are found to be generic, social or individual. In most of the Asian countries, art is related to folk wisdom, myth and literature. It is the metaphysical reality that in its imaginative form or image which becomes accessible to man for his contemplation, worship, and artistic treatment.

Another common characteristic of Asian art is animism. The sun and moon, bodies of water, entire forests and mountains, and all living things are usually considered gods out of collective fear and awe. Trees and plants have become objects of worship since the time immemorial. Great ideologies, concepts, and beliefs made Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam to be as religions. Indian culture can be seen in Pyu, Rakhine, Mon, Bagan, and latter periods. Sriksetra reveals that Indian cultural influence may be seen in the appearance of Vishnu the Hindu high god of Brahmanism, which made Vaisnavism flourish. A comparative study of art works coming from the Buddhist tradition of India, China and Myanmar explores the emergence of life in the region. Their art works may be interpretational, historical, or chronological, in relation to Buddha's birth story.

Chinese Buddhist art gradually developed a superb blending of spiritual impersonality and transcendence with human charm and elegance. Artists created frescoes for the dynasty, in their treatment of ethereal Avalokitesvaras and Amitabhas of the Chinese paradisiacal dreamland, and in their rendition of realism and transcendence.

Indian Buddhist art accordingly reveals the transcendent reality in the manifoldness of the phenomenal world in life, in all its levels, depth and breadth. It embodies a sense of the intertwining exuberance and voluptuousness of life, abstract and concentrated. It is at once sensuous and symbolic, luxuriant, and poised. The love of the dignity and opulence of man, the

thought and power of god, the delight and suppleness of woman, are all shaped in Indian sculpture and decoration by a serenity and harmony inspired by supernatural myth and metaphysics. Indian Art stresses the interconnectivity of all the arts: architecture, painting, and sculpture.

Moreover, Buddhist and Hindu philosophies form a background to Indian artistic thought. It is also significant to note that the various invaders of India also contributed to the unique culture of India. Hindu Art is known as religious and focuses on naturalism and expresses unity in all life forms whereas Buddhist Art focuses on spirituality, calm, by way of transcendent images of Buddha, and Bodhisattvas that reveal renunciations of worldly pleasures.

II. Bagan and Its Art Works: An Aesthetic View on the Artistic Objects

Bagan and its sculptures have been selected for this paper because of the concentration of art works in the locality. Bagan, situated in the Mandalay Region of Myanmar, is situated in the Chin Twin River and 20 miles along the east bank of the Ayeyarwaddy River. According to the Glass Palace Chronicle and the Great Chronicle, the ancestors of Bagan came from the 19 villages of Yon-Hlut-Kyun (Island of the Hare's release) founded by King Thamudarji, who knew the capital Thiripyitsaya, founded by King Thelegyaung (334-387), the 7th King of Bagan Dynasty. The later was transferred to Tampawaddy (Pwasato), built by Thaiktaing (516-523), 12th King (Glass Palace Chronicle 1999:118-219). As described by the Books of Glass Palace and MaharYarZa Win, King Pyinbya founded present-day Bagan City Wall, and was the 34th King of the Bagan Dynasty in 874, when it transferred to the capital city from Tampawaddy (Pwasaw). By epigraphic evidence, the reign of Anawrahta (1044-1077) founded the Bagan Dynasty which collapsed in the reign of Sawmunnit (1325-1369) (Than Tun 2002: 135-154).

Bagan is covering a tract of land measuring about 16 square miles, its land covered by the monuments, stupa, temples,

and monasteries. The number has been pegged by the Archaeology Department at 2,834 (Pichard 1994). 378 monuments are protected, conserved, and are being monitored by the same department.

The early Bagan period monuments were built mostly in the 11th centuries A.D. (MyoNyunt 1999: 19). Even when the Bagan Dynasty fell, the city still flourished and the building of structures continued. It is interesting to note that only religious monuments are found in the area and not a trace of ancient public buildings. It is assumed that the King's palace, or that of royal families, ministers, court people, lawyers, and local people, were built using wood and bamboo. The materials being perishable might explain why the structures vanished.

The exterior of monuments were decorated with stucco carving, glazed plaques, and stone carving, while the interiors with mural painting. The mural paintings not only aimed to decorate but also to enlighten the people about Buddha's principles, life (547 *Jataka*), and the eight epics of Buddha life. Moreover, the figures of Divas, *Grudha*, animals, and various lotus arabesques were also painted (MyoNyunt 2011: 117).

The art of wooden sculpture also developed in the Bagan Dynasty. There would be various wooden sculptures in Bagan but they would not withstand time. Rarely could we find remaining wooden pieces inside bricks of the temples. Evidence of wooden sculptures may be found on the door of the North Side of Shwezigone Stupa. There are 15 wooden sculptures, and one of them is damaged. 7 figures of men and 7 figures of women sculptures are depicted dancing and playing musical instruments.

Stucco curving is very rare in Early Bagan period due to wear and tear, vandalism, and earthquake. Stone and metal craft are also part of the sculpting. There are free-standing and relief sculptures in Bagan Dynasty. Free-standing sculptures like a bronze alloyed standing Buddha is on display at the Bagan Museum. They are of average heights. Also very rare in Bagan sculpture are the two types of high reliefs and low or bas reliefs. Relief sculptures are set against a flat background, for example,

glazed plaques about Jatakas, or stone carving on pillar oval moldings and terraces. Both types of sculptures have stucco and stone carvings (Luce 1970a: 130-224). Both Theravada and Mahayana sculptures are carved on Bagan religious buildings.

III. Female Sculpture Shaped by Mahayana and Tantric Beliefs

Buddhism in Bagan evolved from Sriksetra (Pyu Era), where Theravada Buddhism co-existed with Hinduism (Than Tun 2012: 88-92). Moreover, in early the Bagan era, Tantric¹⁾ Buddhism from northern India was introduced in Bagan. The ways of A-Yee-Kye Monks in Tha-Ma-Htee were derived from Tantric Buddhism (Duroiselle 1999: 82; Pho Latt 2008: 14-19). However, by the time Anawrahta (1044-1077) obtained the Three Pitakas from the Mon king Manuhal, Theravada Buddhism was adopted at Bagan. When Theravada Buddhism gained primacy, other beliefs such as Tantric and Mahayana Buddhism gradually faded from Bagan culture (Le May 1954: 51-52). When Mahayana beliefs flourished in Bagan, the worshipping of the female Diva was introduced. As Mahayana interfaced with Hinduism, the worship of Sarasvati (the consort of Brahma) began. Statues of Sarasvati were carved with palm-leaf and lotus placed on his left hand, his right hand in the Varada Mudra position, signifying offering, giving, compassion, and sincerity (KumudMohan 2014: 9-12). Although the statue of the Sarasvati cannot be found in Bagan Era, it was seen in a Mural painting in Abeyadana Temple and in Kyansittha cave Temple (Than Tun 2002: 2-7).

Moreover, the stone inscription of King Kyansittha regarding the founding a royal capital stated that a golden statue of Siri Diva²⁾

1) Tantric belief is considered an inferior sect, derived from two sub-beliefs of Mahayana. The tantric sect is believed to practice witchcraft, spells, and charms. It is not certain where Tantric belief originated but it was widespread around 10 A.D. The combination of the spiritual energy of man and woman is called Tanta. The belief came down from ancient Indian savages who based their faith on the sexual intercourse of the male and the female.

2) SiriDiva was called as KyāikSri in ancient Mon language. In Hindi she was called Laksmi (Luce 1970: 203)

(Consort of Vishnu) was carved and kept in the palace (Chit Thein 1965: 40).

Also, Siri Diva was sculpted on top of a perforated stone window of the Bagan Nan Paya (Luce 1970b: plates 122c, 123b) <Figure 1>. Other statues of SiriDiva were located on both sides of the entrance of the KyaukkuUmin cave temple, together with guardians also sculpted in stone. The statues stood on the lotus, their left hands holding a *Kalasa* pot. The figures are well-proportioned and svelte. The statues stand about 38 centimeters. Only the head of the statue and the *Kalasa* pot can be found on the left side of the entrance because the stone is detached <Figure 2>. This kind of sculpture may also be seen at Hindu temples in West Bangal, India. Professionals assess that the sculpture follows the Pala style of East India (Luce 1970b: plate 315) <Figure 3>. *Siri* means full of graceful power (TheinHlaing 2000: 177), and as it is full of auspiciousness, these figures were placed at the palace, the entrance of caves, or tunnels of pagoda.

<Figure 1> Sri Diva



Location: on the top of the perforated stone window at Nanpaya Temple

<Figure 2> Sri Diva



Location: Diva at the side entrance of Kyaukku Umin Cave Temple
(West Jamb of Kyaukku Umin Cave Temple)

<Figure 3> Guardian sculptures



Location: At the Hindu Temple at West Bangal (Old Burma, Plate 315)

In Bagan, there was the worship of one of the Divas of Tantric faith, Parvati (the consort of the Shiva). Mahayana Buddhism regards Parvati as an important Diva. Parvati's statue

is carved as standing or sitting on a lotus, the lotus flower shooting up through the stalk in the figure's left or right arm. The standing statue of Parvati found in Bagna was cast in bronze. The height of the statue is 2 feet and 6 inches. Although the left hand and arm were damaged, the right hand is intact. The body is a tri-figurine called a *tribinga*. It wears earrings, an arm band, and a waist strap. Specialists estimate that the statue was sculpted in between the 11th and 12th centuries. That statue used to be at the Bagan Museum but is now lost (Ray 1936: 45-46) (Luce 1970b: 196, plate 447b) <Figure 4>. The bronze statue of seated Parvati can be found in the Magawe District, in the Myothit Township, Mahnawgone village <Figure 5>. The statue is 3 inches in height. It posed in Varada Mudra, sitting on a lotus with the right hand stretched out downwards. The left hand is on the chest, with the tip of the thumb touching the tip of the ring finger. The rest of the fingers are up, in a pose as if giving a sermon (Dhamma). The flower of lotus shoots up through the stalk of the lotus from the left or right arm (Luce 1970 Vol. 3: Plate 447c). The statue of Parvati found in Magwe looks like the figure in the mural painting at the Apeyadana Temple (Mya 1968: 75, figure 27).

<Figure 4> Saravasti Bronze Statue Sculpture



Location: Bagan

<Figure 5> Saravasti Bronze Statue Sculpture



Location: Magway (Old Burma, Plate 477c)

Indian influence has definitely traversed all of Asia. It spread from as far as Bactriana, Cambodia, Japan, Java, and has also spread by way of land routes to Afghanistan, Assam, Manipur, Upper Myanmar, passing through the Himalayas to China and Tibet, where Indian cultural influences flourished (Mukerjee 1959: 27).

IV. Female Sculpture and Theravada Buddhism

For Indian sculpture, the dualism of the masculine and feminine aspects of all phenomena in the cosmos and the human mind is stressed. It underlies the mythopoeic and pictorial outlook of life in India. Indian art and literature always highlight the permanence and movement in nature and the severity and tenderness in human character as rhythms or accents of existence. This explains the strange combination of opposites, of classical balance and harmony with pliancy and abandon, in Indian sculpture as in poetry and drama. Indian sculpture has produced idealized,

ethereal, yet thrilling figures that miraculously blend masculine dignity and vigor with feminine passion and tenderness, subordinating human attributes, including sex, to an abstract and supernatural type. Illustrating these virtues are Siva, Vishnu, the Buddha, Bodhisattva and Devi in India, Java, Thailand and Cambodia.

The Buddhism that entered Bagan from the Indian Peninsula through Sriksetra was deemed to be Mahayana Buddhism because of Bagan paintings and sculptures, portraying Buddha images accompanied by the Bodhisattva. Many terracotta tablets with Nagari and Sanskrit inscriptions were also found. However, by the time Anawrahta (1044-1077) obtained the Tipitaka of the Pali Canon from the Mon king Manuhal, Theravada Buddhism was already in practice at Bagan. Mon culture, from that point, was largely assimilated into Myanmar culture based in Bagan. When Theravada Buddhism gained extensive following, Tantric and Mahayana Buddhism gradually faded from Bagan (Le May 1954: 51-52). In relation to this, the Buddhism found in Thaton and Sriketra was said to have come from the east of the Indian Peninsula, where Mahayana Buddhism flourished in places like Kalinga, Telinga, Anadhra and Amaravati. Later, when Buddhism vanished in East India, Theravada Buddhism moved to Sri Lanka. Eventually, Southern Theravada Buddhism dominated the region. These show that the Buddhist history of Pyu, Mon, and Myanmar was shaped by Mahayana beliefs (TeikSoe 1976: 75-87; Pho Latt 2008: 36).

During the Bagan Era, female sculptures related to Buddhism include scenes from Buddha's life like the Nativity, the dream scene foretelling the birth of Buddha, and the scene where the female figure asked the king Suddhodana for his son Rahula's inheritance were created. The statues of the Nativity scene may be found in the Ananda Temple, Myin Gabar Gubyaukng Temple, and Stone Cave tunnel. The earliest-dated statues are found at Ananda Temple (11th Century) <Figure 6>, Myin Gabar Gubyaukng Temple (12th Century) <Figure 7>, and Stone Cave Temple (13th Century) <Figure 8>. The Mother Maya statue at the Stone Cave Temple is incomplete.

<Figure 6> The Nativity Scene



Location: Ananda Temple (Sand stone relief sculpture gilt by the later donor and pagoda trustees)

<Figure 7> Sand stone relief of the Nativity Scene



Note: Myin Kabadubyauk Nge Temple.

<Figure 8> The Scene of Nativity



Location: Kyaukku Umin Cave Temple (Old Burma, Plate 141a)

In the Nativity sculpture, Mother Maya and Stepmother Gotami were favorably sized. Gotami came with a female attendant. The weak Mother Maya held the branch of Sal tree with her right hand, her left arm leaning on the shoulder of sister Gotami, helping her and giving her strength. As the Buddha was born from the right side of the abdomen, he emerged sitting cross-legged on the right waist of her mother Maya.³⁾ The face of mother Maya was staid and the sister Gotami was smiling. The images of Mother Maya and Stepmother Gotami wore craggy head bands and big earrings. Their hair were combed back and engraved with floral designs. They were also wearing bracelets, necklace, and belts. The beautifully pleated belt hang at the fringes. The sculptures had curvy breasts, thighs, and knees emphasizing beauty (Luce 1970a: 157).

The hair knots and ornaments such as head bands, earrings, necklace, arm bands, wristlets, belts, and anklets, reflect the female ways of the Bagan Era.

3) Prince Siddhartha was said to have been born from the right side of the waist, according to the Mahayana tradition. The Hindu on the other hand say that he was born from the mouth, chest, and legs. (Ashin Oakkahta 2014: 46).

The depiction of the Nativity scenes from the Bagan Era and from India, Andhra, and Amaravati [(3rd Century A.D.) now in British Museum, London] are different. In Amaravati, the birth of Buddha depicted the mother Maya holding the branch of the Sal tree as the Buddha was being born from the right side; and the four guardians caught him with the golden net and Stepmother Gotami paid respects by putting her hands together and raising them to her forehead as she sat beside Maya (Kramrisch 1955: 219, figure 8) <Figure 9>. In the Bagan Era, the Nativity scene was molded in bronze, found in a relic room of the Shwesantaw Stupa. The sculpture was 4.25 inches high and 2.25 inches thick. The sculpture depicts mother Maya on a lotus flower, together with her sister Gotami Buddha was on her side. The right hand of Maya used to hold a Religiosa flower, but it was destroyed and lost. The crested headdresses, ornamental ear plugs, and necklaces are still visible (Luce 1970b: 159, plate 433d) <Figure 10>.

<Figure 9> The Scene of Nativity by Amaravati



Location: Now in British Museum, London

<Figure 10> Bronze Standing Buddha crowned in Nativity Groups



Location: AnawWatat Lake (Old Burma, Plate 433c)

The dreams of mother Maya and the scene of where she addresses King Suddhodana were to be seen in Arnanda Pagoda. The dreams include Divas carrying her Anaw Watat Lake <Figure 11>; she sleeping on a divine bed with four Diva Queens in the golden palace of Anaw Watat Lake <Figure 12>; she being carried by four Diva Queens and bathed in a suitable place at Anaw Watat Lake to cleanse her human essence <Figure 13>; and the four guardian Divas of the world guarding the royal chamber of Maya during the pregnancy to Lord Buddha <Figure 14>. In the scene where mother Maya addresses the King Suddhodana about her dreams <Figure 15> and in the scene where she tells the king that she wanted to go to Davadaha to give birth <Figure 16>, Maya's figure was depicted with a crested headdress, big ornamental ear plugs, bracelets, arm ornaments, necklaces, and waist ornaments, as in the scene of her giving birth to the Buddha. The waist ornaments were beautifully sculpted with many fringes. The Divas were also sculpted beautifully.

<Figure 11> The dreams of mother Maya are; Divas carrying mother Maya to Anaw Watat Lake



Location: AnawWatat Lake (Old Burma, Plate 278 c)

<Figure 12> Mother Maya sleeping on divine bed of four Diva Queens in the golden palace



Location: AnawWatat Lake (Old Burma, Plate 306a)

<Figure 13> Mother Maya



Note: Mother Maya was carried by four Diva Queens and was bathed in a suitable place of Anaw Watat Lake to cleanse the human essence (Old Burma, Plate 278d)

<Figure 14> Maya



Note: The four guardians Divas of the world guarding the royal chamber of mother Maya during her pregnancy for Lord Buddha (Old Burma, Plate 280a)

A dream scene involving mother Maya may also be seen in Nagayon Temple. The sculpture was made of sand stone, and displays four Divas Queens posted at the feet of the sleeping mother Maya <Figure 17>.

<Figure 17> The scene of Mother Maya dreaming (11th Century)



Location: Bagan Museum

The head of the mother Maya, now displayed in Bagan Museum, and was earlier found in Temple no. 820 and dated 11th AD is incomplete. The hair knot and crested headdress broke off from the head. The hair knot pointed backward (Chignon) and the crested headdress had many pointed ends. The face of mother Maya was round and the lips seemed to smile <Figure 18>.

<Figure 18> Head of Mother Maya



Note: Head of Mother Maya Stucco carving found in Pagoda No. 820 from Bagan (11th Century)

The sculpture of Rahula asking his inheritance, a Bagan Era artifact made with sand stone, was found in Nagayon Temple <Figure 19>. It is now displayed in Bagan Museum. The sculpture was ruined. Rahula and Yasawdayar stood at the sides of Lord Buddha. The heads of the Buddha and Yasawdayar were broken.

<Figure 19> The scene of Rahula asking for inheritance



Location: Bagan Museum

V. Conclusion: Women in Bagan Sculptures

Buddhist belief in the Bagan Era basically shaped a society that did not discriminate women. In religious practices, women had the same opportunities as men, except for becoming Buddha. An exceptional case however was noted in a stone inscription by Saw Mi Phwar, the aunt of King Nara Siha Pate. Written in A.D. 1265 and found in Ku Tha temple at Phwar Saw village in Bagan, it contained how she had prayed to become Buddha (Ku Tha Pagoda Temple Inscription, line 10, obverse).

Women could become monks like men. There are women monks who would be prefixed as “Thakhin” and the sacred

monks who would be prefixed as “Hte”. Those female monks could go to religious ceremonies together with male monks and perform religious functions (Khin Khin Sein 1986: 232-233). Buddhism basically placed women as equal to men.

As Mahayana doctrine informed Buddhism in the Bagan Era, women in Bagan Era included Mahayana images in their donated pagodas and temples, especially in the mural paintings. The famous temples and pagodas were Abeyadana, Thambula, Ku Tha, and Su Taung Pyae. The Mahayana doctrines were not so common in that Buddhist monument; Thanbula temple contained the Mahana Bodhisattva and Shkti. Only Sarasvati and Parvati were included as Hindu Divas (Mya 1986: 86-107).

The sculptures from Bagan are similar to those of India. The face and body structures however are distinctly in Myanmar style. Although Mahayana doctrine has been in much practice, Mahayana women sculptures and mural paintings were rarely seen. Few Mahayana women sculptures have no prominent gender. Mahayana doctrine may be seen as not completely overwhelming Theravada Buddhism.

In Indian classical art, feminine beauty has been described in this manner: “full breasts that resemble blooming lotuses and inverted golden pots... rounded and symmetrical thighs that resemble plantain-stalks,” and “slender waists that resemble the middle of an altar”. The swell of the full bosom in contrast with the thinness of the waist also makes the female figure appear “as if (it is) breathing” (Mukerjee 1959: 240-241).

Nevertheless, the image of women in Bagan era can be seen in the sculpture of Mother Maya and the scene of Nativity which do not really focus much on the serene charm and purity of the female nude. The shape of the body is willowy and the ornaments and head crest showed the style of the royalty of the Bagan period. In another way, the sculpture of Mother Maya is the symbol of female perfection in the Bagan era. Although very few female sculptures were found in Bagan, the ones that were found showed the concept of beauty, like the female relief sculpture of Umadati Jataka no. 530 in West Phet Leik temple,

which was beautifully composed. The figures also resembled styles coming from India and Ceylon—their peculiar coiffure, clothing, and ornaments reveal these influences. What is missing however is the articulation of the role of women in the Bagan Period. These works which were part of the emergence of Buddhism in Bagan provides a clue for this ongoing research.

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Study on *Mahāsammata* Model of Kingship in Mrauk U Period(1430-1784)



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[*Abstract*]

This study on *Mahāsammata* Model of Kingship in Mrauk U Period from the 15th to 18th centuries attempts to demonstrate how the kings of Mrauk U or royal officials tried to claim this legitimating model of kingship and how they accepted this model of kingship and under what conditions the legitimate order of this model was lost. Vital to the adaptation of *Mahāsammata* model of kingship in the Mrauk U period is the claim that Mrauk U's rulers were direct lineal descendants of the first Buddhist king of the world, *Mahāsammata* and thence the clan of *Gotama* Buddha, *Sākiya* clan. This ideological model of kingship has a recognizable effect on the political stability of Mrauk U kingdom. While the *Mahāsammata* model of kingship performed as a belief of legitimizing kingship within the arena of royal court, the kings of Mrauk U tried to perform the related models of *Mahāsammata*, the ideal models of Buddhist kingship as *dharmarāja* and a *cakkavatti*. However, the conditions that fail to maintain the *Mahāsammata* model

of kingship saw the weakening of the other related models of kingship, which eventually led to the decline of the kingdom.

Keywords: Mrauk U's ruler, *Mahāsammata* Model of kingship

I . Introduction

Mrauk U¹⁾ was the capital of Rakhine for over three centuries till 1784. In 1430, the kingdom of Mrauk U was founded by King Min Saw Mon. The city is located around the Bay of Bengal via the Kaladan River and its tributary, the Theingyanadi. Mrauk U occupies a lowland area within a series of parallel ranges trending northwest, commanding the Lemro and the Kaladan valleys. The city was defended by massive walls and ramparts build between the ridges, moats created by damming the streams between the ridges, and immense tanks to its north, south and east (Collis 1923: 244-25) (Thin Kyi 1970:1-3). In the middle of the fifteenth century, a thriving kingship of Mrauk U dynasty grew more and more powerful and pushed military expeditions up to Chittagong. The reign of King Min Bin (c. 1531-1553) marked a culminating point in the history of the kingdom. The king not only fortified the city of Mrauk U but also led military expeditions against Bengal. At the end of the sixteenth century, propitious circumstances also led King Min Razagri (c.1593-16120) to launch an invasion of Lower Myanmar. Therefore, in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Rakhine assumed the role of a regional power that represented a challenge to its two bigger neighbors, Lower Myanmar in the east and Bengal in the west. After 1634, Mrauk U entered its decline. Usurpations became the rule. The kingship of the country became weaker until its annexation in 1784.

The study of Mrauk U period of over three hundred and fifty

1) After the annexation of Rakhine by the British, they moved the administrative center of Rakhine to Akyab (Sittwe). In the 19th century the city was usually known as Mrohaung or "the old city". The name "Mrauk U" was restored in 1979.

years reveals a lot about how the strong kingdom emerged based on its kingship model that shaped the political development of the state. Despite some research by scholars on the monarchical history of Rakhine in Mrauk U Period (1430-1784), the way the kings in Mrauk U Period were initiated and legitimated by the way of kingship was not properly described. The overall images that emerge from some researches of Rakhine monarchical history in Mrauk U Period suggest key ideas about the rise and fall of the kings, their campaigns to Bengal and Lower Myanmar (Bago), their religious deeds, and their relations with Bengal, Portugal and Dutch. However, when power was established and diffused it was difficult to lead by force alone. Some kinds of ideology functions to sustain the legitimacy of kingship. In legitimating some ideological functions, some symbolisms, ceremonial rites and legitimizing myths were introduced to initiate the legitimizing models. However, according to Max Weber, the validity of a legitimate order is ultimately based on the consent of or voluntary obedience of followers or subjects. The validity is achieved only when followers accept, believe in or grant the claims for legitimacy (Weber 1968: 31-32). Weber's theory of "validity of a legitimate order" has been largely accepted in the modern theory of legitimation. I am, however, hesitant to agree that this validity of a legitimate order is agreeable with the legitimizing models of kingship practiced in the kingdom of Rakhine in the 15th to 18th centuries. This arouses me to investigate: (1) how the kings of Mrauk U or royal officials tried to claim the legitimizing model of kingship by introducing the legitimizing myths which are also key elements of legitimation, (2) how they accepted this legitimizing model of kingship and their actual purpose in introducing such legitimizing model of kingship?, (3) the conditions that led to the legitimate order's loss of legitimacy?

II. *Mahāsammata* Model of Kingship in Mrauk U Period

The study of existing Rakhine historical sources shows that like the other Theravada Buddhist societies of Southeast Asia, pre-Buddhist origin myths linked monarchies to a solar spirit, tracing royal

descent from the clan of Gotama Buddha. From here, and thence the first Buddhistic- king of the world,- *Mahāsammata* and the consequent model of kingship can also be traced. Most of the major Rakhine chronicles of the early and late 18th century and the early 19th century, as in Myanmar chronicles, opens with the beginning of the universe, the creation of the world, and the appearance of *Mahāsammata*. In the epilogue of *Nga Mi Rakhine Razawin* and *Rakhine Razawin Gri*, it is stated:

.... (The chronicle) will state the lineal descendants of *Mahāsammata* who ruled the golden kingdom of Rakhine.... Nga Mi (cir. 1837-1844: 3), *Rakhine Razawin Gri* (1851: 2a).

Min Razagri Sartam, which comes down to us from the early 17th Century, also provided some information about the sacred geography of India that relates related Buddha and pre-Buddhist origin myths of the monarchy to the first Buddhist king of the world, *Mahāsammata*. A solar spirit yielded to claims of royal descent from the clan of Gotama Buddha, the *Sākiya* clan. At the start of this *Sartam*, the author *Amat Korangri*²⁾ Maha Zeya Thein mentioned the number of Buddhas who attained Buddhahood and the name of the places where they attained it. (Min Razagri Sartam 1775: 2a-b). Then, he described the number of kings from the First King *Mahāsammata* to Prince *Siddhattha* (Later Gotama Buddha). After describing this, he revealed the sacred geography of *Majjhima* Taik³⁾ and the kingdoms from which he tried to connect the kings of the kingdoms of *Majjihima* Taik, who consequently established the cities in Rakhine. Maha Zeya Thein explicated several narratives of the founding of Dwarawaddy by the Vasu Deva brothers⁴⁾, Vesāli by Brahmin Thu Diriya⁵⁾, and Dhannyawady by Marayu⁶⁾ (Min Razagri Sartam 1775: 2b-4a).

Min Razagri Sartam continued to provide a legitimizing

2) Korangri' is one of the chief four ministers of Mrauk U court.

3) The country of Central India.

4) The nephews of Tansa king from Majjihima Taik.

5) the brother-in-law of Vesu Deva brothers.

6) Son of King Ajjana from Kaṇḍiaw.

model for the Rakhine kingship by demonstrating a fuller elaboration of the genealogy of a clearer lineage from *Mahāsammata* to the Rakhine kings, through the intermediary of the solar race of the *Sākiya* clan with the *Abhirāja* myth, which comprised the three faces of the palm leaf. The myth begins with the war between the King Daragu of the Pinsala country, a kingdom of northern India, and King *Abhirāja*, who is said to have led *Abhirāja's* migrations to Myanmar proper. This *Sākiya* clan king *Abhirāja* moved to Upper Myanmar and allegedly founded the city of Tagaung. His elder son Kan-rāja -gri surrendered the throne to his younger brother Kan-rāja-nge, moved to Rakhine where he founded the city of Kyaukpadaung and married a princess from the dynasty of Marayu, the founder of Dhanyawaddy (Min Razagri Sartam 1775: 4b-5b). The mythic connection by way of marriage of the son of the *Sākiya* - clan king of India, *Abhirāja* and the Rakhine princess, establishes that the Rakhine kings are of direct lineal descent of the *Mahāsammata*. (Charney 2003: 187)

Although a caste system has not emerged in Southeast Asian society, with the emergence of more complex political formations enabled, elite families to maintain their positions at the top of the social ladder, claiming that Mrauk U's rulers were descendants of the first Buddhist king of the world, *Mahāsammata*, and because of this, also related to the clan of Gotama Buddha, the *Sākiya* clan.

In Mrauk U society, the description of *Amyo-lei-pa* or the four main divisions of the classes can be found. One of the orders of Min Raza Gri promulgated that:

The lineage of kings descended from *Mahāsammata* ancestry were called the *Kshatriyas* (*Sākiya*); the rich people who served near the kings and do mercantile business were called the *Maha Thala* (*Vaishyas*); the *Brahmas*, who only conducted the procedures of coronation for the king were called *Beiktheik* and avoided learning astrology and fortune telling; ... the *Sudras* ... performed as astrologers, fortune-tellers, physicians, merchants, fishermen, hunters, blacksmiths; elephants and horses herders were named as *Amyo-lei-pa*. (Min Razagri Sartam 1775: 34a)

The Mrauk U's four-class and the caste system of Indian society are slightly different. The Indian society placed the *Brahmans* and the *Kshatriyas* as the two higher social classes (Majumdar 1965: 46) while the Mrauk U's society placed the king as the highest class and the rich people who served near the kings and do mercantile business called the *Maha Thala* (*Vaishyas*) as second in rank. It also and placed the *Brahmans* as the third in rank. In Indian society, the *Brahmans* were more powerful and prestige, and are often pitted against was increased immensely and contested to the ruling class or the *Kshatriyas* (*Sākiya*) (Majumdar 1965: 46). The royal families or the members of *Kshatriyas* however remained the highest class in Mrauk U society.

It must be noted that the king and the court officials claimed the legitimacy of *Mahāsammata* ancestry and the relation to the clan of Gotama Buddha in the Mrauk U period by introducing the associated sacred geography of India, as well as the connections of the lineage of Rakhine kings with that of kings of Majjhima Taik, who allegedly related with the first king of the world, *Mahāsammata*. It also used the legitimizing myth of *Abhirāja* and the description of *Amyo-lei-pa* or the four main divisions of the classes. In one occasion, Maha Zeya Thein, the minister of King Min Razagri, formally related to King Min Razagri (c. 1593-1612) that the Rakhine kings are direct descendants of *Mahāsammata* *Wintha* (the genealogy of *Mahāsammata*) and the *Sākiya* clan kings, and had never broken their lineal connection (Kawisara 1787: 54a).

Regarding the process of claiming the legitimacy of *Mahāsammata* and the *Sākiya* clan kings, and the acceptance or granting of the claim, Weber proposed some challenges: How does “the validity of a legitimate order” maintain for the subjects or followers the acceptability or believability of claims for legitimacy? , What are the conditions of losing legitimacy?

Since existing Rakhine historiographic writings, like other Myanmar chronicles, generally centred on kings, we are not able to figure out the response of the subjects to the claim of

legitimacy. However, it is noted that the court officials were the chief organizers to support this claim. Regarding lineal descent, the chronicles in the Rakhine tradition mentioned that King Min Bin (c.1531-1555) assumed that he has descended from the *Mahāsammata Varisa Sakya Sākiya* lineage, and that their lineage was nobler than others (Kawisāra 1787: 28b). The court officials adhered to the claim of legitimacy because this helped maintain influence, position and power.

The formulation of the *Mahāsammata* lineage appears to be deeply rooted in Mrauk U's ruling class, as well as in court officials, which made non-royals ineligible to the throne. It is stated that beginning the reign of the first king of the world, King *Mahāsammata*, the *Sākiya* clan insulted themselves from mixed marriage and marriage with other groups or clans. An analysis of the royal successions during the early and middle of the Mrauk U dynasty shows that most of the kings who reigned from 1430 until 1638 were the legitimate nominees as being *Einshee Min* (heir-apparents) and were broadly accepted as eligible persons to the throne. The royal succession of the said period was hereditary⁷⁾ in keeping with the desire to maintain the lineage of *Mahāsammata*. It is evident that the claim for legitimacy of the *Mahāsammata* and the *Sākiya* clan kings in the Mrauk U period was treated as “valid” by the royals, and helped maintain political stability among the ruling elite families.

2.1. Models of Kingship Related to *Mahāsammata* Model

In *Myanmar Min Ok-Chok Pon Sartam (The Administration of Myanmar Kings)*, “*Mahāsammata*” is defined as a “king appointed by popular consent” (Tin 1965: 2). Similar definitions are given to “*Mahāsammata*” as “acclaimed by the many” or , “the great elect”. Tambiah (1976: 93-94). Tambiah remarked that *Mahāsammata's* election and “acclamation by the many” seemed to indicate that his “elective” status implied a “democratic” and “contractual theory”

7) There are a few things about the struggle for successions which need to be mentioned; Min Pa (c.1531-1555) and Min Phalaung (c.1571-1593) were the strong contenders with the royal blood who willfully took the throne by filling in vacuums in power.(*Min Razagri Sartam* 1775: 21a, 23 b).

of kingship in the sense propounded by Rousseau. Tambiah (1989: 107). As far as the history of Rakhine, especially Mrauk U Period (c.1430-1784) is examined, there were no kings in Mrauk U period, who were democratically elected by the will of the people, but only succeeded hereditarily according to kinship. The early pre-Buddhist or Brahmanical theory of *Mahāsammata*, its so-called “contractual theory of kingship” and “the great” did not seem to apply in Mrauk U’s legitimizing model of *Mahāsammata* but rather claimed that Mrauk U’s rulers were descendants of the first Buddhist king of the world, *Mahāsammata* and thence also related the clan of Gotama Buddha, *Sākiya*. However, the legitimizing model of *Mahāsammata* did not intend to be utilized for the above-mentioned purpose alone. The early and middle period of Mrauk U’s kings tried to use another aspect of *Mahāsammata*, that of being a man who “charms others by the Norm (*dhamma*) and whose virtues clearly marked out as the chief among men”. Tambiah suggests that this aspect of the *Mahāsammata* links up with other canonical formulations of the ideal Buddhist king such as being a righteous king, a *dhammarāja*, an upholder of “morality” and as a *cakkavatti* (universal ruler). Tambiah (1989: 107).

The first king who took the title of *Dhamarāja* in the Mrauk U period was Min Bin (c.1531-1553) whose Brahmanic title was *Srisūriya Canda Mahā Dhammarāja* (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851: 121a). In the ideology of the *dhamarāja*, the Mrauk U’s kings portrayed themselves as more than providers of political power. Like Asoka, he sought to provide moral order as well. In terms of spiritual redistribution, the Mrauk U’s kings continually demonstrated their role as the chief patron and purifier of the religion. Temple building in the Mrauk U period was usual. Most of the rulers of Mrauk U period were in the habit of building pagodas and shrines throughout the Mrauk U period (1430-1784) (Pamela Gutman 2002: 163-175). The maintenance of *Samgha* and the cultivation of *vinaya*⁸⁾ are essential tasks of the *dhamarāja* king. On the controversy of the *araññavāsī* and *gāmaṇvāsī* monk, the monk *Dhammasāmi*, spiritual adviser of King Min Razagri

8) the disciplines of monkhood.

told the king that the Lord Buddha himself could not discipline the monks who did not observe the full set of the *vinaya* rules. For that reason, he relegated the *sāsana* (religion) into the hands of the powerful kings. From then on, it was the duty of these kings to maintain the order of the *Sangha* (Min Razagri Sartam 1775: 33b; Leider 2003:108). Religious integrity was maintained by purification. In its Theravada school, Buddhism was not only prophesied to last only 5,000 years; it was the function of the *Dhamarāja* to ensure, as Asoka had done, to maintain the *Sangha's* purity. During the reign of King Min Razagri (c.1593-1612), the *araññvāsī* monks maintained a strict observance of the *vinaya*, opposing the practice of the so called *gāmaṇvāsī* monks. The *gāmaṇvāsī* monks are described as *alajjī*, or shameless monks; they were also known as *pwé kyaung* who mix with the villagers, eat their food and make their own Pāli scriptures. King Min Razagri meted extreme the punishment against these monks who respected the *vinaya*. He arrested monks, marked them with tattoos and put them in various royal service groups, such as elephants and horse guards. (Min Razagri Sardam -36b-37a).

Of course, Rakhine rulers established their authority over former royal centers by building Buddhist edifices⁹⁾ in them as they did in their capital city (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851: 165a). Rakhine rulers also built pagodas and monasteries in new Buddhist communities in the countryside¹⁰⁾ (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851: 135b). By going into the countryside, royal patronage of Buddhism fostered the rural recognition of central authority. Local religious belief formed a potent field for establishing kingship. By building a pagoda or a shrine, a ruler connected the periphery to the royal center and connected himself with the sites of charismatic power in the local area. With the patronage of monks and monasteries, he portrayed himself as a great donor to the religion. The king was regarded as the lay head of

9) In 1622, King Srī *Sudhammarāja* visited the ancient city of Dhanyawaddy and renovated the pagodas, built by his grandfather King Min Phaloung and also put up other religious edifices.

10) King Min Phaloung (c.1571-1593) occupied the non-Buddhist community of Thet country and built religious edifices. He also made Thet people convert Buddhism.

Buddhism and the protector of *sāsanā*. (Charney 1999: 133)

The *dhamarāja* also upheld custom and civil law by ensuring that the *Dhammathat* (Civil Code) is followed, through by his exemplary behaviors and his active enforcement of it as by his active enforcement of it. Civil Law was not the concern of the king. Criminal Law, however, was his concern and it defined crimes against the state, and known formally as the *Rajathat*. Murder, theft, arson, and rebellion were in the domain of *Rajathat*.¹¹⁾ The Mrauk U king divided the judicial administration into specific offices. The most important ministers were Korangri¹²⁾, Pyisogri¹³⁾, Hsinkegri¹⁴⁾ and Dhapainggri¹⁵⁾. (Min Razagri Sartam 1775: 30b)

The Dhapainggri was appointed as the supreme judge. As one of the chief four ministers of Mrauk U court, “Dhapainggri” which also means “the owner of the sword” ruled on meting out capital punishment or death sentences. The four courts were situated at the four corners of the capital, which made the judicial administration more accessible (Min Razagri Satam 1775: 10b, 26b).

As I have previously mentioned, the aspect of *Mahāsammata* model of kingship and the complex state of religious activities achieved ideal form in the bodhisattva tradition of Buddhist kingship (Koenig 1990: 65). In fact, the assumption of kingship is considered a step in progressing towards Buddhahood (Tun Aung Chain 2002:5). The chronicles of the Rakhine tradition mentioned how King Min Bin became a “*bodhisatta*” who had matured in

11) *Traditional Statecraft in Southeast Asia*, a lecture by Dr. Kyaw Win (Secretary, Myanmar Historical Commission), Dagon University, from July7- July 28, 2009.

12) Korangri was not only in charge of the palace guards, Korans. Korangri also advised the king in the state affairs.

13) Pyesogri could be compared to a modern-day prime minister who in behalf of the king ruled the country when he is not in the palace.

14) The task of Hsinkegri was not only to supervise the elephants and elephant keepers but also to be in charge of royal hunting expedition in search of elephants.

15) The obligation of the Dhapainggri was to “serve as the consultant about the affairs of the state as a wise man of the law court”.

his past lives and compassionate to all even the enemies, ... he ever forgave King Tabinshwehti when came and invaded the land". (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851: 126a). The king was responsible for maintaining the religion's unity and purity, providing for its well-being and securing the arena within which good Buddhists could acquire merit and thus guarantee for themselves a better next life (Koenig 1990: 66-67). The Mrauk U rulers consistently relegated lands and laborers to Buddhist monasteries¹⁶⁾, built major religious edifices¹⁷⁾, and sought to obtain Buddhist ritual and sacramental objects, including religious texts (i.e. Tripitaka) (Min Razagri Satam: 25b).

Conceptually related to the *dharmarāja* was the *cakkavatti*, the world conqueror or universal monarch. Rulers in Rakhine also legitimized themselves by relating to internationalist Indic and Buddhist norms. Min Pa (c.1531-1555), adopted the Sanskrit imperial title of "*Rajādhirāja*", "king of kings" which are basically associated with "*cakkavatti*" or "world-conqueror":

Lord "*Rajādhirāja*" who ruled India, Ayuzapura and Rakhapura, decreed that from the time of the first king of the world, *Mahāsammata*, the great grand king Thagara, Wathudeva... ruled over Rakhapura Taing in the west and (Slyet?) in the Northwest (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851:18a)

King Min Bin was the founder of the remarkable "Shit-thaung, 80,000 Images" shrine after the invasion of Bengal.¹⁸⁾ This massive Buddhist temple attributed to King Min Bin who saw himself as a "*cakkavatti*, world conqueror", was a monument to the kingdom's triumphed over the forces of Islam. At the four corners of the temple, the reliefs are interspersed with images in higher relief which appear to represent aspects of the *cakravartin* king as portrayed in the Buddhist texts on cosmology current at

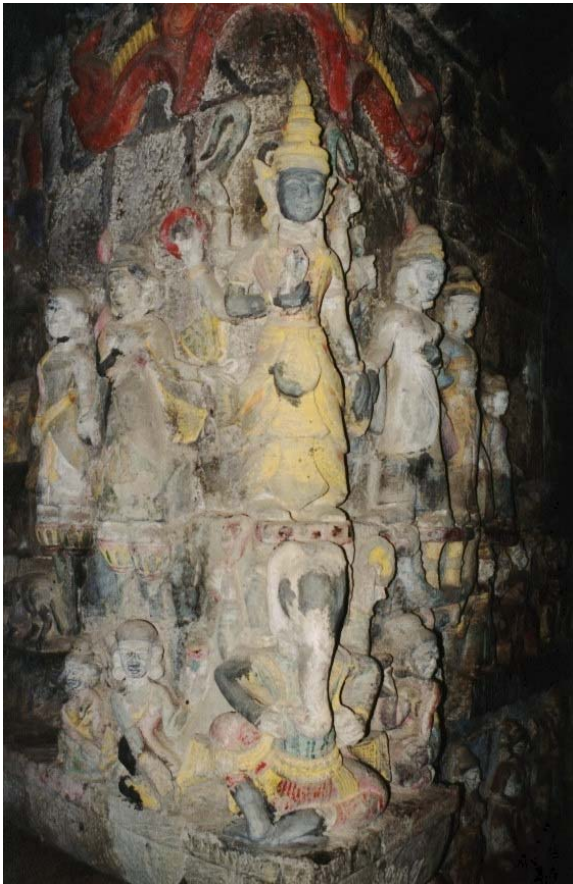
16) The followers of the rebel prince Min Phalaung were donated as pagoda slaves at Ratanabon Phaya (5000 followers) and at Maha Muni (500 follwers) (*Min Razagri Satam* 1775: 23b).

17) Building the remarkable Shit-thaung Shrine by King Min Pa in 1536 is the best example.

18) *Rakhine Razawin Gyi. Ti* - Obverse.

the time. Pamela Gutman suggests that these images in higher relief were possibly representing King Min Pa himself. Gutman (2002: 169-170). The corner figures all wear crowns and other ornaments and elaborate lower garments in the royal Rakhine fashion of the day. The figures have six arms, each carrying various divine attributes: the flywhisk, a disc, an elephant goad and so on <Figure 1>, all connected with the functions of power and protection. Gutman (2002: 169-170).

<Figure 1> King Min Bin



Note: Depicted as *cakkavati*, stands on *Ganesa*, holding the flywhisk, a disc sculptured at the interior corner of Shit-thaung Shrine, Mrauk U, Rakhine State.

Source: Photographed by author, April 27, 2007

While the *Mahāsammata* model of kingship legitimized rule within the arena of royal court, the kings of Mrauk U tried to perform the related models of *Mahāsammata*, the ideal model of Buddhist kingship as *dhamarāja* and a *cakkavatti*, by way of instituting a properly functioning judicial administration, of religious patronage, and acquiring merit and self-legitimacy as a *cakkavatti*.

2.2. The Decline of Mahāsammata Model of Kingship

The reign of King *Srī Sudhamarājā* (c.1622-1638) was hounded by the palace intrigue. His Chief Queen Nat Shin May kept a secret lover, Nga Kuthala, the appendage holder of Laungret. Nga Kuthala succeeded kill the king (Collis 1923: 236). Later on he also made Nat Shin May, poison her own son, Min Sanei, *Srī Sudhamarājā's* heir (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851: 163 a-b). Nga Kuthala's attainment of the throne by the title of King Narapatigri was immediately challenged. The governor of Chittagong, the middle-son of King *Srī Sudhamarājā*, a legitimate successor to the throne, prepared to rise against Narapatigri. Narapatigri was not a part of royal family, and this caused a dissent among Mrauk U's royal elites and court officials. The ministers and court officials including Nga Lat Rone, a descendent of Maha Pyinnya Kyaw and Maha Zeya Thein fled to Kantha¹⁹). (Rakhine Ayedawbon 1787: 55b). The lineage of *Mahāsammata* or the *Sākiya* - Clan was said to have been severed by the usurper Nga Kuthala when he took the throne of Mrauk U. The episode of the succession of King Nga Kuthala *alias* Narapatigri was later described in *Vijaya Min Sit Aung Eigvin*²⁰) (*Eigvin of King Vijaya Rajā's Victory*) in this manner:

Since the beginning of the earth, Rakhine was ruled by the individuals from the lineage of future Buddhas , from the

19) Rakhine chronicles identified Kanthar as Chittagong.

20) *Vijarā Min Sit Aung Eigvin* was supposed to be written around 1710 AD. *Eigvin* are poetical works or songs, often tracing the genealogy of the person for which they were written.

lineage of *Mahāsammata*...However, when the queen of *Srī Sudhamarājā* ignorantly plotted with Nga Kuthala, the appendage holder of Laungret for the throne...(she and her) own son ... perished and the old tradition (the lineage of *Sākiya* clans) was broken. (The kingdom may be compared to a) falling star (when) the appendage holder of Laungret became king... (T)he lineage of the noble *Sākiya* clans (*Mahāsammata* lineage) and the elite court lineage...soon perished. Moreover, the tribe of Thet and Bengali from the western part of the kingdom also revolted, and the ceremonial procedures were (performed in the wrong way) (Rakhine Ayedawbon: 58b).

Nga Kuthala tried to connect the *Mahāsammata* lineage by claiming that he was not a commoner but the great grandson of King Min Bin. However, he was not supported by royal elite families and court officials. He was compelled to organize monks whom he could trust as his advisors. Upon the advice of monks, he further connected himself by building new pagoda and enshrining in them the relics of Buddha once offered by King Min Bin (Rakhine Ayedawbon 1787: 55b-56b). Though Narapatigri tried to reconstruct the lineal succession of *Mahāsammata* lineage and embodying the *dhamarāja* model by patronizing the religious activities, the resistance to Narapatigri's rule from members of the old royal family led to prolonged instability in the Rakhine kingdom. The lineage of King Narapatigri was continued and ended in 1710 AD. A *dhani gaung* (nipa palm appanage holder) named Ton Nyo became king, taking the name of Vijaya Rajā. King Vijaya also tried to claim to be a great grandson of King Narapatigri although he was commoner who became king. (Tejarama Inscription 1716: Lines 16-17). The king also tried to reconnect the lineage of the *Sākiya* clan, who had fled to Kanthar by inviting them to come to Rakhine kingdom. When the grandson of King *Srī Sudhamarājā*, Hla Aung arrived, Mrauk U King Vijaya arranged for his marriage with his daughter. However, Hla Aung went back to prevent his *Sākiya* clan from associating with King Vijaya. For over a decade, the Koran, the royal bodyguards, exerted an unprecedented influence over the royal court. They became king-makers and the

ascending on the throne depended on the sentiments of the Koran at any given time (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1787:170b).

<Figure 2> Coin of *Mahāsammata Raja* (c.1782-1784)



Obverse & Reverse: 1144 *She Nan Thakhin Mahāsammata Raja* [1144 M.E (1782 A.D), Lord of the Golden Palace *Mahāsammata Raja*] (Source: San Thar Aung 1978: 52).

<Figure 3> Another Coin of *Mahāsammata Raja* as *Agaw Punya Saw Raja* (c.1782-1784)



Obverse & Reverse: 1144 *Shwe Nan Thakhin Agaw Punya Saw Raja* [1144 M.E (1782 A.D), Lord of the Golden Palace *Agaw Punya Saw Raja*] (Source: San Thar Aung 1978: 53).

In 1782, the last attempt to revitalize the *Mahāsammata* model was initiated by *Letwei Myan*²¹⁾, Thado Aung. He was local chief like his predecessors. Chronicle of the Rakhine

tradition state that he earned the title “*Mahāsammata*” because he was raised to the throne through the will of the people (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851: 203a) (Sanda-mala 1932: 297-298) <Figure 2>. However, it is also important to consider the legitimacy of *Letwei Myan Thado Aung* as *Mahāsammata* for two reasons. The first reason has to do with the time of Thado Aung’s succession in Rakhine kingdom. It was a chaotic time and there were many strong local contenders who could challenge the throne which also means that it is not improbable to win the support of the local elites (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851: 203b). The second reason mentioned in the chronicle of the Rakhine tradition something to do with how the Rakhine people welcomed the idea of Burmese forces from Amarapura arriving to restore law and order in Rakhine kingdom and install a good king (Rakhine Razawin Gri 1851: 208a). Thus, it is not very improbable to assume that he earned “the validity of a legitimate order through the will of the people”. This may be changed when King *Mahāsammata* changed his title to “Agaw Punya Saw Raja” <Figure 3> upon the advice of a learned monk who told him that the title “*Mahāsammata*” should not be used since it is the noble title of the first king of the world. Apparently, the monks, who had been spiritual advisers of Mrauk U’s kings since the time of Narapatigri, considered *Letwei Myan Thado Aung* unworthy of the title as he was a commoner and not a descendant of *Mahāsammata* or the Sakya clan, or “the great elect” by the people. Thus, *Letwei Myan Thado Aung* or King *Mahāsammata* was not able to revive *Mahāsammata* model of kingship by which he intended to legitimize his position in that chaotic situation period in the kingdom.

III. Conclusion

In this study of Rakhine kingship during the Mrauk U period (1430-1784), the *Mahāsammata* Model of kinship played an

21) The minister who has to serve at the left side in the occasion of the royal audience. (Ashin Satkinda, “Zardi Wuntha Mawgun Sar”, *Rakhine Tazaung Magazine*, Vol.13., No.13, 1973-74, 141)

essential role in maintaining the political stability of kingdom. However, this model of kingship practiced in Mrauk U polity is not an exactly like pre-Buddhist *Mahāsammata* model of kingship. Mrauk U rulers, being despotic, neither followed the conception of the *Mahāsammata* model of kingship as “acclaimed by the many” nor the principle of the, “the great elect” or Weber’s modern theory of “validity of a legitimate order”. It is not improbable to adopt a “democratic” and “contractual theory” of kingship” in a despotic kingdom. This ideological functioning of the *Mahāsammata* Model of kingship was mostly initiated by court officials and broadly accepted by royals and elite families. The process of claiming the legitimacy of the *Mahāsammata* and the *Sākiya* clan kings only concerned members of the royal court. Clearly, what the kingdom had is a horizontal process of “validation the legitimate order”. In claiming the *Mahāsammata* model of kingship, Mrauk U’s rulers claimed were direct lineal descents from the first Buddhist king of the world, *Mahāsammata*, and consequently the clan of Gotama Buddha, the *Sākiya* clan. However, the ideological function of kingship could not sustain a kingdom. Though Mrauk U’s rulers did not adopt the conception of *Mahāsammata* as ‘great elect’, they tried to apply another concept of it as man who “charms others by the Norm (dhamma)”. In realizing this concept, they tried to embody the qualities of a righteous king, or a *dhamarāja*, an upholder of “morality” and as universal ruler or a *cakkavatti* all related to the concept of *Mahāsammata*.

Nga Kuthala’s usurpation of the throne caused to the decline of the ideological legitimizing model of the *Mahāsammata* kingship. Most members of royal families and court officials, who considered Nga Kuthala’s succession illegitimate fled from Mrauk U. The resistance of these old royal families from Kanthar (Chittagong) led to a prolonged instability of the royal court. When the ideological legitimizing model of kingship was lost, it was not possible to gain the support of the court elites; other practical legitimizing models of kingship also relatively weakened. The decline of the central kingship encouraged rural rebellion and warfare. Rakhine villages suffered from the decline of the

royal centers. There was also an increased were increasing competition among the local headmen in the rural communities. As the central court offered little protection to the rural Rakhine communities, the protection of the outlying villages was entirely in the hands of the local headmen. Thus, some headmen were unable to protect themselves began to seek the help of external rulers to bring order such as the Rakhine who sought help from the powerful kingdom of the Konbaung dynasty. On October 16, 1784, the Rakhine campaign started and was completed on January 2, 1785 (Than Tun 1986: 441).

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Submitted manuscripts should be original pieces of work that have not been published in other places or are not being offered to another publisher. Manuscripts should be written in a clear, concise, and direct style, intelligible to readers who may not be specialists in the field. When contributions are judged as acceptable for publication on the basis of content, the Editor and the Publisher reserve the right to modify typescripts to eliminate ambiguity and repetition and improve readability. If extensive alterations are required, the manuscript will be returned to the author for revision.

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Manuscripts should be submitted with author's curriculum vitae (less than 100 words), an abstract (150-200 words), five key words, and contact information in a separate file. They should be emailed as attachments addressed to the Journal editor, <editor@iseas.kr>, with a clear note that the manuscript is intended for submission for publication.

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ARTICLES

Vol 7, No 2 December 2015

Articles

Postcolonial Criticism and Southeast Asian Studies : Pitfalls, Retreat, and Unfulfilled Promises

Rommel A. Curaming

Constructing Southeast Asia and the Middle East: Two Corners of the "Victorian World"

Stephen L. Keck

A Multidisciplinary Frame for Studying Democratic Shifts in Southeast Asia

: Mixing Politics, Sociology And Psychology Across Historical Time

Cristina Jayme Montiel

The Khmer Rouge Genocide Trial and the Marcos Human Rights Victims

: the Quest for Justice and Reparations

Meynardo P. Mendoza

Emotions and Awareness of Rights among the Thais

Niti Pawakapan

The Marma from Bangladesh: A 'de-Arakanized' Community in Chittagong Hill Tracts

Kyaw Minn Htin

Art and Sculpture of Bagan Period: Women in Bagan Sculpture

Nanda Hmun

Study on Mahāsammata Model of Kingship in Mrauk U Period(1430~1784)

Zaw Lynn Aung