

“Contemporary Issues in Southeast Asia”
10-11 March 2012,
St. Antony’s College, University of Oxford

Panel:
Culture

1. Bornean Post-colonial Dilemma: Between Indigenous Right, Identity and Outsider

Dr Awang Azman Awang Pawi

(Institute of East Asian Studies, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS))

Uncontrolled logging and other environmental changes impact upon the lives the Penans, now a very crucial issue in Borneo. The impact on political economy and political development in the Bornean society is very obvious in the post-colonial era. This research examines “Voices from Jungle”, a novel written by Jong Chian Lai from Sarawak, Borneo, who is a winner of the contemporary Southeast Asian Writers Award (SEA Writers Award) 2006. This text analyses Penan ethnicity and logging issues based on texts and realities to show the quagmire they are in. The Penan is a nomadic indigenous people group living in Sarawak and Brunei and only a few are living a modern lifestyle. Most of the Penan people consider the green jungle as their bank, hospital and recreation in their life daily. In this research, an eclectic approach encompassing sociology of literature and postcolonial reading are used to analyze the text. The analysis revealed that the Penan people experience a post-colonial dilemma between tradition and modernity, underdevelopment and the hastening of capitalism, subaltern group and hegemony. The authority discourse and ordinary discourse evident in the power discourse in the text has held the Penan mind captive. In this context, the author opens up a bigger interpretation space for readers to interpret the truth for themselves based on imaginative and creative texts. The factual data also give expanded facts for the reader to think about the truth between texts. In addition, this text also mentions Bruno Mansel, an allusion to Bruno Manser who is Swiss by nationality and well known for protection of the rainforest and Penan people. The comparative studies between text and contexts in Borneo Island allow an introspection of the outsider into the indigenous right and identity of the Penan group in dealing with the post-colonial resistances.

2. The Burmese in Vernacular School History Textbook

Dr Myo Oo

(Research Professor, Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, Busan University of Foreign Studies, South Korea)

It is well known that modern Burmese nationalism emerged in the colonial period.

With the emergence of nationalist movement, Burmese nationalism sprouted out during the 1920s and gradually reached its peak at the advent of the 1930s. Although there have been some researches on Myanmar historiography and on the definition of the terms "Burmese and Myanmar" from both narrow and wide perspectives, in the Myanmar study especially extending throughout the colonial period up to the independence period, there has been no research on the analysis of the powerful force of school history textbooks which convey both connotation and denotation of these terms "Myanmar and Burmese", that is to say, it is possible to see what Burmese national identity in the colonial period was in a vernacular school history textbook. Therefore, in order to examine the meaning of national identity that the vernacular school history textbook convey to the students of British Myanmar, a vernacular history school textbook should be analyzed here. This article explains the way in which modern Burmese national identity was portrayed in British colony Myanmar.

To serve this purpose, Myanmar-Yazawin (Myanmar History School Textbook prescribed in vernacular schools) by U Ba Than, a teacher who taught history in Shinn Buddhaghosa High School, Mawlamyaing and other vernacular schools, is chosen to analyze here, for it is regarded as conveying national identity of the Burmese and has been published several times up to the 1990s.

On the basis of the textual analysis, from the view point of historical sociology, this research will shed light on the new concept on how "Burmese" has constituted three conceptions of nationalism: race, space and time. Firstly, the historiography of this vernacular school textbook will be examined. Secondly, territories of Myanmar in different eras of the history mentioned the textbook will be studied. Finally, periodization of Burmese history will be analyzed. In order to elaborate on the meaning of Burmese national identity, this article will include six sections. First section will be on the introduction, the second section on historiography, the third section on the discussion of Burmese national identity, the fourth section on different territories of Myanmar throughout the history, the fifth section on the analysis of periodization of Burmese history and the final section on the conclusion of the discussion.

In so doing, Burmese national identity portrayed vividly in the colonial period will be identified as follows: Burmese is a hybrid of Tibeto-Burman and Buddha descendent. British Myanmar was the territory of Myanmar kingdom governed by Burmese kings without any break since the time of Burmese kings. There were three Burmese kingdoms such as the first Burmese kingdom, the second Burmese kingdom and the third Burmese kingdom which had flourished throughout historical eras.

In summary, this historical textbook is composed in the form of national history by newly initiated historiography in the colonial period. In other words, Burmese nationalism based on Buddhist culture, is a product of modern education initiated in the colonial period.

3. Redefinition of Javanese tradition in Yogyakarta and Surakarta

Ofita Purwani

(PhD candidate/ University of Edinburgh, Lecturer/ Sebelas Maret University)

This paper deals with how traditions are being redefined and activated for tourism in contemporary cities. I will compare two case studies which include Yogyakarta and Surakarta, both of which are popularly referred as the centres of Javanese culture but have been in different fate after the Indonesian independence.

The result shows that political situations hold importance in the process of redefinition and activation of 'tradition'. Yogyakarta, whose special status enables it to have a territory in provincial level, to have the king of the kraton (royal court) to hold the executive authority of the territory and to have the kraton retains its property, remains kraton-centred in tourism development. Other 'traditions' are being developed as secondary to the kraton's. Surakarta, in contrast, has the political power of royal courts banished that local government has a freedom in redefining the tradition. The 'Javanese tradition' is being redefined to fit the interests of the stakeholders of traditions which in turn marginalised the role of the kraton of Surakarta and Pura Mangkunegaran in urban scale. Both royal courts are currently being considered as heritage, along with other non kraton-related traditions such as traditional kampong and traditional markets. Local government of Surakarta plays a role of '*mengayomi*' all the stakeholders which used to be claimed as the kraton's role. The same role is still being held by the kraton of Yogyakarta, which leads to the strong legitimacy it has in its people.

4. UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Southeast Asia: a Comparative and Critical Commentary

Victor T. King

(Emeritus Professor of South East Asian Studies, White Rose East Asia Centre, University of Leeds)

This provisional and critical analysis of UNESCO inscribed sites in Southeast Asia has emerged from a three-year cross-national, multidisciplinary comparative programme of research on selected World Heritage Sites across the region. The paper focuses on three countries on which I have been working since 2009: Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines.

The research examines the tensions that exist between the often competing interests, understandings and agendas of the various stakeholders involved in these globally important sites: local communities, national governments and their provincial and local agencies, international conservation organisations (including UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] and ICOMOS [International Council on Monuments and Sites]), tourists (both domestic and international) and civil society institutions. The project also has a policy and practical dimension in that it seeks to determine whether or not these competing tensions and

pressures are being or can be resolved, and what policy options work best in certain given circumstances. International organisations like UNESCO impose a set of conservation and protection requirements on the sites which are designated on the World Heritage List. These requirements derive from the 1972 *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage* and do not always sit easily with national government interest in for example increasing their revenue from tourism and therefore promoting these sites in the international market-place, and in deploying them as centres for the construction and promotion of national identity and in placing them in a national historical context.

Given the status of these cultural and natural sites, the level of international attention and interest in their conservation and management, the importance which governments attach to them as elements of national heritage, and in the case of cultural sites in particular as crucial building blocks of national identity, as well as their role as a focus of tourism interest and activity, they present complex arenas within which a range of pressures, interactions and encounters can be examined and addressed. The paper ranges over several issues: (1) how different constituencies construct, present, re-present, reshape and contest heritage; (2) the ideological control and manipulation of the sites which governments frequently exert on what they consider to be important elements of national identity, nation-building, history, achievement and international image; (3) the pressures which tourism exerts on these sites and the problems raised by government involvement in the promotion of and planning for tourism and other kinds of development; (4) the importance of encouraging the kinds of tourists (whether domestic or international) who are genuinely interested in and wish to be informed about sites as testaments to the cultural achievements of past generations, or at the very least to provide informative literature, signage, audio-visual materials and guides (without these being overly intrusive) so that the sites can be better understood, enlivened and contextualized; (5) the role of sites and what they are seen to represent as expressions of the particular everyday lives, circumstances, views and thoughts of those who engage with them and as expressions of wider political, economic and cultural issues; in other words, they serve not only as subjects of discourse but they enable the creation and elaboration of discourse; (6) the variations in the effects of change and local responses to these across communities and areas within the same site and between sites; (7) the issue of local communities who live in or around the site and their involvement in or exclusion from WHS. Communities were often removed from sites and restricted in their movement and livelihoods in the interest of conservation and to recreate cultural sites as historic parks for the purpose of tourism promotion; and finally (8) these sites provide 'a new genre of community, both imagined and real' comprising 'a new social space, new values and borders'; although the importance of WHS carries their importance and influence beyond their borders in that they are part of national and international flows of people, capital, ideas and values, they can also be seen as defined, bounded and localised spaces within which there are encounters, exchanges and conflicts.