

Rural Social Change in Southeast Asia: A Reappraisal

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INTRODUCTION

This paper reasserts the value of a post-Marxist perspective as a postmodern alternative that views the current world as an increasingly decentered and internationalized economy but not an actual globalized economy in which territorial boundaries are becoming blurred. It derives from the chronologically old literature on the dispute between scholars of the 'peasantry' over the issue of rural differentiation and the role played by rural mobilization in transitional Southeast Asian societies. Taking a slightly different view from Tom Brass (1990, 174), I take the position that while the new social movements approach to sociological theories of the peasantry is generally structured by the methodology of discourse analysis and resistance theory such as exemplified in James Scott's *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), such a conceptualization of ideology is not necessarily removed from considerations of class and revolution. In accordance with postMarxist scholars of the peasantry in South East Asia (e.g., Stoler 1985, Kahn 1981, McCoy 1982), I also have found that class struggle is an important force for change but it is not the sole determinant of social change. Social change comes about from a wide array of exceedingly complex and diverse "circumstances and currents" that form an

uneven contradiction in all sites of struggle (Althusser 1969, 99). While this paper does not exhaust the complexity of the overdetermination of class relations and the penetration of capitalism in agrarian communities, it does provide an alternative, decentered, class-focused way of examining the role of rural mobilizations for change in a postmodern epoch. I discuss this again later.

In general, scholars of the peasantry in Southeast Asia all agree that the market and capitalist economy has a disintegrating effect on "natural economies." They are contentious, however, over the issue of how such economies are actually being transformed and in regards to its consequences.

Formalists are of the opinion that the capitalist market improves individual well being by rewarding farmers who adopt new behaviors and farming techniques to maximize productive yields and profits (Eder 1982, Popkin 1979). Substantivists contrarily suggest that the penetration of capitalism disrupts traditional values, agricultural practices, and social relations of production by instituting new classes and outside alliances that undermine the preexisting system at the expense of the common weal (Ledesma 1982, Wolters 1983, Scott 1976). Marxists, finally, contend that capitalism leads to the differentiation

of the independent peasant who becomes either a better off capitalist farmer or a wage worker. Or, if polarization does not occur, they argue that peasants become a more stratified, divisive, and unstable class, or fractions of classes, because they shift between capitalist and precapitalist class relations in a transitional economy (Stoler 1985, Guyer and Peters 1987, Hayzer 1986, Kahn 1981, Kerkvliet 1990, McCoy 1982; see also Hart 1989, Turton 1989, White 1989, et al.).

This essay reviews the above perspectives on the nature and consequences of agrarian change in South East Asia according to the following format. The origins of the disagreement in the classical literature are first reviewed. This is followed by a discussion of its development in contemporary theory. Major works on the peasantry in South East Asia involved in the old substantivist versus formalist controversy are revisited. Then, I discuss some recent research concerning the Marxist interest in how modes of production are transformed and realized. Finally, some conclusions are drawn.

CLASSICAL LITERATURE AND CONTEMPORARY THEORY

In the classical literature, scholars of the peasantry in transitional societies¹ begin their studies with the question that Marx raised, namely, is capitalist penetration the essential force that transforms an integrated community of peasants, controlling more or less their own means of production, into a dispossessed proletariat? Marxists following Lenin start from the premise that capitalism ends by destroying and expropriating the peasantry while post-modern relativists after Chayanov argue

contrarily that although this may be the case, it is not necessarily so. Cox, whose synthesis is used here, points out that Lenin, like Marx, initially posited clear class differentiation among peasants as a result of the penetration of capitalism (1986). That is, Lenin isolated capitalist penetration as the root cause of inequality in peasant society. Accordingly, peasant involvement in petty commodity production led to the unequal distribution of the means of production between households which will end in class polarization and the proletarianization of those households with insufficient means of production (Cox 1986, 17; for an early critique of this view, see Kautsky in Banaji 1980, 77).

However, Lenin later included in his theory other explanations to account for the varying forms of capitalist differentiation taking place in the Russian provinces. That is, as Cox notes, he recognized the possibility of two roads to capitalist farming, namely, through the internal division of the peasantry and as a result of the process of change taking place on large landed estates where peasants were sometimes acting collectively as a "class-for-itself" (Cox 1986, 18-19). Essentially, Cox explains that "the agrarian Marxists theoretical heritage was one which, despite hints to the contrary in Marx, tended to assume that inherent in the growth of commodity production in peasant agriculture was the necessary emergence of capitalist farming and, associated with it, the class differentiation of the peasants" (1986, 29, supported by Chevalier 1983). That is, unless peasants consciously acted against capitalist tendencies, they would necessarily follow from the growth of commodity production in agriculture

(Cox 1986, 29; supported by Chevalier 1983; for a contrasting view of commodity production as a separate and distinct mode of production operating in terms of its own inner logic, see Kahn 1981, 1984; Wolpe 1980; C. Smith 1984). According to Lenin's school of thought, "differentiation was still not understood in terms of the peasantry splitting into separate classes, but rather in terms of differences in wealth or in the ownership of key means of production between households who basically shared the same way of life despite their positions on a scale of stratification" (Cox 1986, 38). But the Chayanovians disagreed because differentiation among the peasantry seemed to occur in predictable cycles. That is, households were known to be relatively rich and relatively poor at different time periods in their life history. Therefore, Chayanov minimized inequalities among peasants. In a nutshell, he considered inequality to be intrinsic to the peasantry in a natural economy and not necessarily a threat to it (Cox 1986, 40; Chayanov 1966, 249-250). However, in my opinion, the Russian peasants Chayanov studied were already involved in the capitalist market. Hence, he committed the fallacy of not recognizing that if the peasantry becomes divided by capitalism they face a certain danger of becoming marginalized or a labor pool.

To recap, Lenin drew on the existing data on inequalities in the peasantry to argue that they represented a preliminary stage in the development of agrarian bourgeois and proletarian classes (Cox 1986, 40). But Chayanov adamantly refused to accept this view. It was not that Chayanov denied the existence of capitalist penetration and subsequent class division

in the peasantry; rather he posited that it was important to distinguish demographic differentiation from capitalist divisions taking place in rural areas (Cox 1986, 54; Chayanov 1966, 249-250, 255). That is, it was important to treat distinct types of differentiation with particular methods and theories and not to confuse them, as ironically Chayanov did. (See below).

Chayanov considered peasant family farms to be a separate and distinct type, and where they were not already compromised by capitalism, they were neither capitalist nor proletariat. Furthermore, they could not compete capitalist farms. In other words, as Makarov, talking about Chayanov, put it,

peasants could undercut capitalist farming by accepting higher costs of factors of production and lower prices for their produce. They could do this because they did not have to make a profit and could, within limits, adjust their consumption levels and deprive themselves in order to keep their farms going (quoted in Cox 1986, 56).

However, pace Cox, Chayanov's research was subject to refute. Kritsman criticized Chayanov and his followers for failing to place the peasants they studied in the perspective of their wider economy and society. In Kritsman's view, the general disintegration of Russian agriculture was a result of the war and revolution. That is, such circumstances were literally "forcing" former proletarians and semi-proletarians into subsistence farming just to survive. He points out that Chayanov mistook these family farms for peasant households persisting in a natural economy. In other words, Chayanov failed to recognize that

the outcome of the war was an intertwining of different social and ideological structures and for Kritsman, with whom I concur, the most telling question to ask in such a case is "how do these different structures affect each other?" (Cox 1986, 66-67)

According to Kritsman, the Russian peasantry represented a "petty bourgeoisie mass, and the point of research on differentiation was to discover how far this mass retained its basic homogeneity and how far it was split into different groups developing the beginnings of different class interests" (Cox 1986, 69). In other words, to use Alavi's expression, peasantries 'are new creations and not simply survivals of a precapitalist past that are "conserved" as such to subserve capitalism' (1982, 188). That is, once peasantries become involved in a capitalist market economy, they are already existing in relation to it precisely because they have lost their precapitalist basis. Kritsman, notably, criticized Chayanov for his failure to understand the nature of capitalist farming. Namely, Chayanov considered capitalist farming largely in the same vein as he did peasant farming, involving a family farm run with the same kinds of technology and organization, except that capitalist farms employed wage laborers in order to increase production. For Kritsman, such an oversight "was linked to a number of other misunderstandings."

To begin with, Chayanov incorrectly supported a view of the peasantry that ignored the forces and relations of production. That is, he stressed the determinant role of "natural" factors of consumption and labor as opposed to the influence of technological ones which

join together with the political, ideological, economic, and social forces of production. Kritsman targets Chayanov's (1924) essay on the significance of machines in different kinds of agriculture for criticism because in it, Chayanov developed the idea of looking at how various types of farm machinery could be best used in different kinds of peasant agriculture and organizational structures without apriori examining the effect of the introduction of machinery on peasant farm organization itself (see Godelier 1986 and Pfaffenberger 1988). In other words,

Chayanov had developed a theory which abstracted from technological progress and the development of the productive forces. This enabled him to assume that the chief sources of change in peasant agriculture were natural factors rather than factors that had been socially constructed (Cox 1986, 71).

Finally, Kritsman argued that Chayanov's inability to comprehend the nature of capitalist agriculture and the differences in its social relations and patterns of organization from peasant agriculture allowed him and his colleagues to see peasant agriculture as a clearly independent type that could survive in the face of capitalism. That is, according to Kritsman, Chayanov did not understand how the influence of a commodity economy would slowly transform the relations of peasant farming giving rise to new forms of exploitation and class interests (Cox 1986, 72). In other words, Chayanov's theory was devoid of a dialectical method. It failed to view peasant farming in history and in relation to other sectors of the society.

In his synthesis, Cox finds that in its completed form the process of class stratification as a result of capitalist penetration could be recognized as

a process of the separation of the worker from the means of production: the conversion, on the one hand, of the worker, the owner of his means of production, into the proletariat, the hired laborer; the conversion, on the other, of the means of production into capital (1986, 87).

However, as he reads it, the road leading to this development is not distinct. In fact, I agree with him that the "widespread democratization of capitalism has resulted in all kinds of reactions in the countryside that do not necessarily fit a conventional model" (Cox 1986, 84). As Kritsman's succinctly put it, "in the contemporary (Russian, my addition) countryside we are in the initial stages of the process of class stratification where those carrying out capitalist exploitation are broadly not the strong but also the smaller peasants possessing the means of production. Hence, conventional categories of rich, middle, and poor are called into question. Clearly "middle peasant" can not be characterized by independent farming, neither exploiting nor being exploited" (quoted in Cox 1986, 84; supported for peasants elsewhere by Bernstein 1979, Bhaduri 1986, Deere 1987, G. Hart 1989, Kautsky in Banaji 1980, Ledesma 1982, and Rahman 1986, among others). In sum, then, the study of the peasantry in history is problematic as witnessed by the question of proletarian households with small vegetable plots or of determining accurately the class bound-

aries between households (Cox 1986, 84; Deere 1987; Rahman 1986).

Students of the peasantry cross-culturally are still grappling with theoretical questions first raised by Marx concerning the direction of social change in non-capitalist agricultural communities that have entered into relation with capitalism. The same arguments can be heard in new contexts. To reiterate, iron-clad Marxists radically contend that under a capitalist system, the integrated and "natural economy" of the peasantry becomes disrupted. Small scale landowners either become capitalists or they lose their control over the means of production and become wage workers. Following Marx, they contend that these polarized classes will eventually produce a revolutionary crisis. But, postmodern Marxist anthropologists (Bernstein, Foster-Carter, Godelier, Kahn, Ong, Stoler, Wolf, and others) disagree with dogmatic interpretations of Marx that do not consider the particular social, cultural, and ecological histories of varied peasant economies in contact with capitalism. In short, they opine that there is no universal definition of the peasantry.

Worsley criticizes dogmatic Marxists who interpret Marx's two-class scheme as a mode for revolution (1984). In my estimation, he is correct to criticize economistic and mechanistic designs in Marxist theory for omitting the essential ingredient of culture. This, of course, is not a new perspective in Marxist anthropology and so, he provides a synthesis of the modern anthropological approaches which find their impetus in Marx. He (like them) argues for a dialectical anthropology to study social changes taking place in the peasantry.

According to Worsley, former Marxist leaders (notably the Soviets) misinterpreted Marx's concept of the Mode of Production as forming the revolutionary core of their theory. They (much like proponents of modernization theory have done for western capitalist nations) misconstrued his theory for dogma and they tried to impose his evolutionary scheme on the history of the South (what used to be called Third World), in particular, as emanating along a series of progressive stages (e.g., feudalism, capitalism, socialism) wherein one mode of production was replaced by another onto other societies chauvinistically. Formerly, the Soviets adopted a paternalistic model towards other cultures and nationalities which they saw as backward in comparison to their own (1984, 271). They set a precedent for what Worsley calls a "deformed socialism" (1984, 337).² Their emphasis on nation as opposed to class is an instance of false consciousness because nationalism, in positing the priority of the interests of the whole, mystifies the reality of exploitation (1984, 276, 291). Although nationalism could combine together with class interests for a successful socialist revolution wherein nations could coexist together, this would require an internationalist ethic promoting equal distribution of wealth (Worsley 1984, 291).

Dogmatic Marxists interpreted the mode of production approach economically. That is, they saw the economic base of society as giving rise to social relations, the superstructure of a society, in all its political and cultural aspects. But, they failed to recognize that as capitalism spread throughout the world, it became (and becomes) embedded and transformed through preexisting cultural and social

relations of power (G. Hart, Ledesma, Kahn, Ong, Stoler, Turton, White, Wolf, and so on). Moreover, in the post-colonial world many of these chains of power are derived from various types of relationships forged between colonized and (outwardly) subdued peasantries and their colonial overlords in an incipient capitalist and mercantile trade economy (Kahn 1978, 1981; Reid 1983; van Leur 1955; etc.). So, capitalism far from replacing non-and semi-capitalist modes of production frequently dominates and exists together with them, albeit in a newly subverted form. (Even socialist nations, e.g., Cuba and the former communist China and socialist India, have to collaborate to do business with capitalists.)

Early Marxist models targeted the working classes, rather than the peasantry, as the chief agents of social and economic change in evolutionary history. But, "the metaphysics of the working class as the privileged agency of social change is supported by neither the experience of advanced capitalism nor dependent capitalism" (Worsley 1984, 230). For Worsley, the idea of the working class as a culture-free economic unit in social history is a myth (1984, 230). "Which class will play the decisive part in the struggle for socialism is not some ahistoric metaphysical absolute. It is a function of the history and resultant social structure of each society" (1984, 230). He calls for a dialectical theory that encompasses all of the exploited classes in rural and urban areas, rather than for one that rejects segments of them as counter to the interests of the revolutionary class. In fact, "new revolutionary movements differ in kind from class-based party politics. Their effective affinity is with all those other groups which struggle against

domination and exploitation" (Worsley 1984, 337). It is these movements, Worsley contends, that need to be analyzed in their historic concreteness to both inform and fulfill a socialist promise superior to the one of humanizing capitalism (1984, 342).

According to Worsley, "exploited classes are not inherently revolutionary, nor reformist, or anything. What they become is a function of the values and institutions available to them" (1984, 232). In other words, class becomes socially meaningful through political and ideological processes in the form of "class consciousness" and political mobilization (Laclau 1977, 159; Lukacs 1971). Marx theorized that peasants lacked revolutionary consciousness (were so many potatoes in a sack); hence, they had to be liberated by outside leaders. Similarly, Lukacs and Lenin both thought that class consciousness had to be brought into the peasantry by an outside revolutionary party. However, Luxemburg, with whom I concur, argued contrarily that "the experience of class struggle" creates the conditions necessary for the development of class consciousness and that "the patronizing of the proletariat (peasant, my addition) by intellectual elites leads only to weakening and to passivity" (in Bottomore 1983, 81). Moreover, Worsley has shown that prior to the penetration of capitalist relations into village communities peasants had the makings of a class consciousness of themselves and for themselves. "By-laws and customary laws were made by the village communities, not imposed by the lord's steward" (Worsley 1984, 94).

To repeat, contrary to Marx's description of the poor, (which includes both rural and urban peasants) as a lumpenproletariat who hindered the revolutionary movement among the working classes because they stood ready to take their jobs, Worsley points out that they are part of the working classes, not marginal to them. He suggests that, in fact, the "revolutionary" consciousness necessary for socialist revolution is frequently derailed by another working class revolution of rising expectations (for an excellent early discussion of this topic see Veblen in Mitchell 1964). Working classes are already stratified among themselves *prior* to their entrance into the work force and their internal divisions are intensified in their relationship to capitalist production. The working aristocracy usually arrests the potential for political militancy among laborers, many of whom are still peasants, by enticing some of its contenders into its ranks (to help control the rest) by giving them decent wages and job security. From this view, one can easily see that the poor are vulnerable to "a wide most of demagogic and hegemonic appeals because they respond to their poverty instrumentally (not ideologically): their main aim is not to be poor" (Worsley 1984, 220). Similarly, to paraphrase Worsley, peasants are not as elitist theory would have it—simply a "disposable mass"—but they persistently pursue their interests (as they see them) within the strictures of their societies and cultures (1984, 220; for a slightly contrasting view, see Wolf 1982, 353, 383).

In like manner, models for the study of peasantries that reduce them to family

farms worked by family members who provision and reproduce the household as the unit of production are inadequate because they omit the wider context in which the families are found. In a word, they are ahistorical. Bernstein succinctly points out that such definitions are unable to differentiate medieval European peasants whose surplus labor was extracted in the form of rent by the feudal land owning class from contemporary peasantries (e.g., in the South) who are distinct in their own right and, more importantly, who exist in relations of commodity production and exchange in a world dominated by the capitalist mode of production. That is, these models look only at the social relations of production internal to the producing unit rather than at the production process which includes the way goods are appropriated and exchanged (Bernstein 1979, 422). So, models intended to study peasants need to account for the "relations between different units of production, between various classes and the relations of the process of social reproduction" as a whole (Bernstein 1979, 422). To reword it, the primary class relations of peasant households cannot be determined apriori; rather, they must be looked at indigenously in terms of the concrete circumstances in which they are ground (Deere 1987, 49; Guyer and Peters 1987).

One model equal to the task of disentangling the relationships between varying classes and production processes at the individual household level is found in articulation theory. Indeed, in South East Asia, some anthropologists have already used such a perspective to separate out different modes of production and contingent considerations of culture, class,

and ideology in order to target those modes of production which are predominantly responsible for the survival, or decline, of select peasant farms in their local, national, and global relation (Banzon-Bautista 1989, Guyer and Peters 1987, Trager 1988, among others). In particular, these anthropologists have utilized the articulation theory to study migration patterns of individual family members and its effect on the wider community. In short, such an approach can account for how family members and different households utilize monetary and material goods derived from varying sources to perpetuate or transform rural social relations.

EARLY PEASANT STUDIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Until recently, most of the literature on South East Asian peasants emerged out of a non-Marxist and widely publicized dispute between the substantivists represented by James Scott (1976) and the formalists exemplified by Samuel Popkin (1979). The so-called moral economy versus the rational peasant debate looked at the interpenetrating structures of capitalism, ideology, and peasants in terms of the relationship between subsistence strategies and peasant rebellion. Initially it sprung from a need by development theorists and policy makers of the Green Revolution for more concrete analysis prior to the implementation of development projects which had previously failed, and often still do, due to a lack of fit between theory and hard data. The *Journal of Peasant Studies* has devoted a special issue to this topic to which interested readers are referred (1983, see also Adas 1980, Baker 1981, among others).

In short, the substantivists, among Southeast Asian specialists known as the moral economists, argue that peasants live in collective communities and work together for the common good. That is, in peasant societies, normative structures work against norms of "individualism" and personal achievement that so characterize Western capitalism. According to this view, members of peasant communities subscribe to a basic subsistence ethic. That is, landowners and peasants who work their land negotiate patron-client contracts which provide farmers with social security. These relationships although by no means equal are based on norms of reciprocity and guarantee peasants their basic subsistence (Scott 1976, 5). This safety first maxim, says Scott, "is a logical consequence of the ecological dependence of peasant livelihood and it embodies a relative preference for subsistence security over high average income" (1976, 29). However, once the promise to provision the basic needs of clients is broken by patrons, peasants will (literally) rebel to regain them (Scott 1976).

Popkin (1979), in contrast to Scott, holds that peasant society is made up of individuals who pursue their own personal interests. Peasants, according to this view, are household utility maximizers who are motivated by individual rationality in ways similar to individuals in Western capitalist society. They will take risks so long as it is profitable to do so and they will go against group norms if it is to their own personal advantage. Popkin points out that traditional peasant villages can be highly stratified and that individual survival is not necessarily the concern of the whole community. From this perspective, the

articulation of capitalism with the peasantry does not so much result from outside penetration as it is actively sought by local elites who cultivate powerful outside allies to strengthen their own power holds in struggles taking place at the local level. Hence, peasants may have been disillusioned with their villages before the appearance of capitalism because traditional norms governing behavior may have already been violated. In such instances, Popkin argues that the Green Revolution can improve the quality of life for many of these traditional villagers.

Like other early students of the peasantry, both Scott and Popkin attempted to develop a theoretical framework for the study of peasant social action. Scott tried to construct a universal theory of peasant behavior founded on a generalized peasant economy. Whereas Popkin took the other extreme and sought to generalize economic man, making institutional rationalism—born of the type of thinking apropos to capitalized industrial society—fit peasant society. Neither offers a sufficient explanation for peasant behavior. Scott overlooked the fact that peasants live in different societies and cultures with their own unique histories and moral economies. His theory is problematic because he separates out peasant economy as a separate category and falls back on functionalism to explain it. Popkin, on the other hand, concentrated on a theory of homo-economus to the exclusion of the moral world in which the peasants live. His methodological individualism can be similarly criticized for sidestepping the necessary dialectical relationship between cultural conceptualizations of self and society. Nevertheless, both theories suggest

a more definitive approach because peasants do make rational choices within the confines of their societies and cultures which includes morals and values.

This point of convergence in the diverse approaches of Scott and Popkin has become common place knowledge in current anthropological discourses. As Keyes has pointed out, it is generally taken for granted today that peasant societies in South East Asia have their own histories and cultural traditions which are in turn connected to a larger world system (1983, 754). Furthermore, both views of peasants as acting in coalition with a community and in terms of their own selfish interests apply to human behavior in general. This holds true for local elites and landlords, as well as common peasants who cooperate on their own behalf and who act individually for their own profit. To repeat, there is no universal definition of the peasantry. As Bernstein put it, models intended to study peasants need to account for the "relations between different units of production, between various classes, and the relations of the process of social reproduction" as a whole (1979, 422).

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTHEAST ASIAN PEASANTS

Nowadays, students of the peasantry in South East Asia have gone beyond the now redundant and archaic Substantivist and Formalist debate by placing their studies in local, regional, and global contexts (Aguilar, Alavi, De Jesus, Fegan, Goodman and Reddifi, Kahn, G. Hart, Higgot and Robinson, Kerkvliet, Larkin, Ledesma, McCoy, Owen, J. Scott, Stauffer, Stoler, Turton, White, Warren, Wolters, among

others). These scholars, not all of whom are Marxists, are nevertheless developing a new set of concepts to deal with problems of the articulation between different modes of production in particular social formations. Most noteworthy in this contingent are previous and current scholars concerned with issues of social transformation in peasant communities under peripheral capitalism and the cultural and historical process of class formation (Fegan, Hart, Kahn, Kerkvliet, Lewis, McCoy, Mojares, Stoler, Scott, Takahashi, Turton, Wolters, et al.) Yet, ironically several contemporary scholars have debated whether or not studies specifically aimed at discerning the dominant type of mode of production and class structure of transitional peasant communities are relevant (Aguilar, Hart, and Turton). They have criticized such studies for being overly concerned with theoretical issues and not substantiated enough by "facts" (Hart 1989, 1; Aguilar 1989, *passim*). Aguilar, for instance, criticizes writings involved in the articulation debates for being guilty of holding a teleological assumption about the end result of capitalism (1989, 41, 47, *ad passim*). As he sees it, Marxist scholars who pursue peasant studies in South East Asia are still laden with a dogmatic and ethnocentric model (1989, 47). Similarly, Hart chides Marxists, in her words, "for having generally been far more concerned with what is and is not, capitalist (and/or functional to it) than with understanding the dynamic processes at work in particular settings" (1989, 1). Both Hart and Aguilar call for more flexible theories and concepts to study "real" peasants in specific nation states that have their own unique histories and structures of economic and political

power (1989, *passim*; Aguilar 1989; supported by Turton 1989; Banzon-Bautista 1989; Kahn 1981).

Ironically, and I do not mean to slight Hart's influential work here, postmodern Marxists, as I read them, have been doing just this type of research in Southeast Asia (De Jesus, Fegan, Hewison, Hayzer, Higgot, Ledesma, Robinson, Kahn, Kerkvliet, McCoy, Mojares, Reid, Stoler, J. Scott, Warren, and so on)! In my own work, I have found that an articulation of modes of production approach is not necessarily outdated and iconoclastic, as Hart and Aguilar would have it; rather, it is *open* to the possibility of different economies and societies premised on grounds other than capitalist ones. Furthermore, I think that Marxist studies attest to the significance of determining *a priori* the capitalist or non-capitalist "nature" of the social relations of production because it is through them that traditional peasant communities are reproduced and transformed. This contention is also substantiated by some "fresh" researches on changing modes of production and contending issues of class done in peasant communities in Malaysia and Indonesia (Scott 1985, Stoler 1985, see also Hart 1989, and Kahn 1981, 1984). So, two major works by Scott and Stoler are discussed here because they represent some of the most exciting developments in studies of the peasantry.³

Recently, Scott looked at the controversial issue of "class" in "A Malaysian farming community" (1985). Building upon his earlier thesis of the moral economy of the peasant, he pursues the question of how small farmers organize

openly or covertly to express their class interest. Scott reasserts that the moral economy becomes eroded by the penetration of capitalism. He describes the objective effects of mechanized farming, double cropping, changes in demography, land tenure, and rents by focusing on how large-scale cultivators, small scale cultivators and landless laborers interpret them. Scott argues that though the Green Revolution has benefited most villagers, it created a situation of greater class division between them and one in which the poor man has become superfluous (1985, 147). The introduction of the capitalist mode of production destroyed patron-client ties (1985, 152). Accordingly, the poor peasant no longer has a legitimate channel (a patron) through which to voice his protest; hence, he expresses his discontent indirectly. Wealthy farmers, on the other hand, "face a classic contradiction of the transition to more capitalist forms of production; their economic behavior is increasingly based on the logic of new market opportunities while their social authority has been based on traditional forms of domination" (1985, 311). That is, the relationship between large scale cultivators and small scale cultivators and landless laborers has been transformed into an impersonal one based on capital. Although Scott's thesis is that the Green Revolution has changed traditional peasant relations into capitalist relations, he argues against theories of hegemony which perceive the peasant classes to be dominated by capitalism because they are mystified by it. That is, they have not, in his opinion, become aligned to it by false consciousness (1976, 231). He cites as evidence for his view the fact that peasants have a "cognitive

structure of revolt" even as they act otherwise in public (1976, 240; 1985 *passim*). That is, their version of a moral economy continues to structure their world ideologically and they express it covertly (see also Kahn 1978).

Grant (1986) argues that this aspect of Scott's thesis is his most controversial contribution. As Grant sees it, for Scott hegemony is institutionalized and embodied in elite values and myths found in bureaucracies, schools, media, churches, and so on. It does not "trickle down" on a uniform basis to the rural sectors. The exception, however, is religion, but Scott stipulates that religion is selectively reinterpreted from core to peripheral areas and these meanings vary according to the organization of the religious intermediaries (Scott 1976, 281; Grant 1986, 18). Grant proposes that Scott "has been searching all along for a social basis of a radical subject other than the proletariat who is fatally compromised because he is "organically linked" to the capitalist class" (1986, 20). Hence, Scott argues that his peasants are not reformists sharing the same ideology as the working classes in urban areas; rather, they share the makeup of "true" revolutionaries because they are fundamentally opposed to capitalism.

However, to use Worsley's expression, "there are factories without roofs" and I am inclined to agree that capitalism covers the gap between rural and urban sectors (1984, 14). It could be equally argued that the specific forms of peasant resistance Scott depicts are further evidence of their having been mystified by their new capitalist relations. Scott argues that peasants perceive the local owners of capital

to be the cause of their circumstances; hence, they are not mystified. But, if they were truly demystified, would not they recognize the unequal and oppressive conditions of the capitalist mode of production itself? Also, it can be argued that Scott's peasants are not made up of two opposing classes; rather, they are stratified in competition among themselves, although they may converge in a wider context as a class in relation to other classes within a national and international class system (Ossowski 1973, 89; Ledesma 1982, xvii).

Scott, contrarily, seems to shuffle his concept of class around as needed. Sometimes he speaks of only two predominant and opposing classes of peasants and local elites while, at other times, he talks of classes stratified into a hierarchy. This makes the question of who is struggling against whom unclear. He cites the destruction of property, tampering with machines, acts of thievery, and the killing of livestock, all in one breath as examples of peasant resistance (1985, 271, 289-290). He questions whether these kinds of acts can be considered collective acts of rebellion. Then he concludes that they can be because numerous expressions of resistance prepare the way for other struggles to catalyze and consolidate peasants to revolt when opportune to do so (as in a coup d'etat) (1985, 273). But, when a peasant machetes a cow, is he really doing it against well-to-do households as Scott claims (1985, 271)? Or by acting so, is he not simply trying to protect his land from overgrazing by his neighbor? Or again, are such secret acts of sabotage done by "thugs" hired to control peasants who are themselves involved in manipulative and

stratified subclasses of the peasantry (see Worsley 1984, Ch.3)? And, if peasants are driven to such extremes, to specific kinds of violence not resorted to in the past, is this not a good case for concluding that peasants have been "mystified" by capitalism? Furthermore, the clandestine forms of peasant resistance Scott cites as evidence for "demystification" are similar to passive forms of protest committed by western urban workers.

Finally, one can evaluate Scott's use of the concept of class in his argument in light of a Marxist debate over the issue of "class" in peasant society. In so far as there is only a local connection between small holding peasants and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national unity, and no political organization, they do not form a class. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interests in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention. They can not represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representatives must at the same time appear as their masters, as an authority over them (Marx 1987, 332).

Do Scott's peasants form a class "for themselves" as Scott claims or are they merely a class "in themselves," as Marx suggests? As mentioned, Lukacs, like Lenin, defines class consciousness as an awareness one has of the total system, "of one's place in the overall system of production at a given point in history and the resulting division of society into classes" (1971, 50-51). Lukacs and Lenin conceive of class consciousness as being brought into the peasantry (or proletariat) by an outside revolutionary party. But, Luxemburg, with whom I agree, argues that class leaders

evolve out of the class struggle itself and that it is through such struggle that class consciousness is raised (1970, see also Bottomore 1983, 81).

One can argue that in so far as peasants exist in a relation subordinate to the elite who extract a surplus from them, they form a class "in themselves." But to the degree that they accept their status and struggle not to change (Marx would say overthrow) the total system, they are not a class "for themselves." Scott's two class scheme for the study of peasant society (in relation to the capitalist mode of production) which depicts peasants as demystified and aware of the unequal relations that affect them adversely can be challenged from this view. Indeed, I concur, the peasants are right in perceiving the local owners of capital to be the culprits in their grievous circumstances (the transformation of "personal dependence" between peasants and landed elite into "material dependence" on capital). However, in my opinion, they are neither aware of the tendentious nature of the whole social system nor of the relationship between classes within it. As I see it, Scott's peasants are not a self-conscious "class for itself" in the full meaning of the term.

Turning to Indonesia, Stoler similarly scrutinizes the conditions that promote or hinder the formation of a "class-for-itself" and supra-class movements that unite, or pull apart traditional peasants in Sumatra's plantation belt (1985). She traces the "hidden" history of the archipelago in which Sumatra is grounded by rereading historic texts that are written for and by a dominant elite. In effect, she reinterprets these source materials from the perspective

of the non-hegemonic groups to whom the writings refer. By so doing, she reconstrues the story of a disintegrating peasantry now poor and, in my view, she disproves the "facticity" of the version of their history proffered by so many so-called Indonesian "authorities" as outlined below.

Prior to the onslaught of colonial capitalism, Indonesia extensively came under the sway of the tributary mode of production in consort first with India, then China, and later with the Moslem middle eastern empire which overrode India as a tutelary power. One may surmise that the early Muslim traders who were religious teachers sought to win the allegiance of Indonesian princes who were in positions of influence over the peasantry who could supply them with surplus wealth. Although Stoler does not discuss these earlier articulations of (Indonesianised) modes of production, she premises that it is through this kind of background that Dutch colonial capitalism moved. The Dutch colonizers who brought with them the capitalist mode of production extracted Indonesia's resources by working directly through, if not outright recreating, local hierarchies of power (classes). And, the empowering of local elite officials, collaborators and contingent work forces was a process shaped, if not coerced, as much by colonial design as it was made in reaction to local movements. In short, issues of contestation and change (not, as the hegemonic paradigm would have it, institutional stability and cohesion) activated the process of capitalist development in Indonesia (1985, 6).

Although Stoler, with whom I agree throughout, is interested in labor relations on the sugar estates of Deli, Sumatra, she depicts these relations against the backdrop of Java (Indonesia's hub). In colonial and contemporary Java, peasants, due in large part to their economic straits, have little recourse but to produce for export; but, they remain in their villages and their relationship to the apparatus of state is buttressed by a layer of indigenous civil servants. In other words, Java's culture is subtly subverted (1985, 25). But Deli, to the contrary, is primarily composed of labor settlements originally owned by the companies who "ran" them (and government controlled agricultural colonies). In these village settlements "both masters and their subjects had to leave much of their cultural baggage behind and in this (artificial) vacuum, a new hegemony was fashioned and transformed" (1985, 29). Under these divergent conditions in the relations of production, distinct types and forms of labor movements emerged.

In Java, for example, collective action against foreign rule was manifested in religious organizations ostensibly (1985, 53) and, I add, similar movements can be seen today under new guise of varied and more numerous small mystic cults (Woodward 1985, 1988; Stange 1975; Hooker 1983; Adas 1981; Supraland 1978; and so on). The latter I read as reactions against the state officially taking over religious organizations (for a contrary view see Stange 1975, 174). In Deli, as Stoler suggests to the contrary, labor protests tend to be activated through other than formerly religious or traditional channels

(1985, *passim*). That is, the Javanese (Chinese and other ethnic groups) of Deli have entered into working relations evolved out of a plantation economy where gender-specific policies of recruitment, wage payment, and job allocations work to obviate collective resistance of this sort (1985, 30).

On company-owned plantations, for example, opportunities for mass organization and protest were largely negated because workers were frequently moved from one location to the next and they were kept intentionally apart from one another.⁴ To use Stoler's expression, "it is not surprising that ties between workers were short-lived and not conducive to collectively planned and sustained action. Assaults, on the other hand, by individual or a handful of workers usually required little planning or long term cooperation" (1985, 85). Hence, labor protest on the plantations did not emerge as a struggle between clearly defined classes; rather, acts of resistance were largely fragmented.⁵ That is, daily confrontations between "coolies" and between them and their overseers, as Stoler put it, "represent a key to the ways in which class interests were obscured and expressed along ethnic, gender, and racial lines" (1985, 91).⁶

The Japanese colonization of Indonesia, however, brought new conditions and possibilities for these peasants turned laborers to rectify felt wrongs. For example, the Japanese, due to economically depressed circumstances, decided to allow plantation workers to cultivate small plots of land to produce their subsistence to reproduce themselves in order to work under duress for the

occupational forces. This started what has become known as the "squatter movement" wherein (predominantly Javanese) laborers and their families moved to settle small farms around the plantations' edge (1985, 156, 160). Stoler, like Wolf, interprets this mass movement as a way of protest. But, she stipulates that it had its own repercussions in that the Japanese took great advantage of these part-proletarians and part-farmers by absconding their produce and forcing them to produce more than they would otherwise have had to (1985, 97).

After the colonial periods and the nationalization of Indonesia the conditions on the plantation estates did not change substantially. For example, as Stoler mentions, there was no change in the working conditions or productive relations on the Deli estates (1985, 45). In other words, there was not much difference between indentured and free wage labor, that is, there was no transition from a non-capitalist system to a capitalist one. To conclude, Stoler rightly points out that it is in the interstices of recruitment policies that noncapitalist (extraeconomic) forms of labor exaction are continued and maintained (1985, 209). Unlike in the past when the plantation estates had to at least ensure the reproduction of their laborers subsistence needs, presently the availability of a large pool of temporary workers beyond that of a permanent (skeleton) crew has freed the companies from providing them with social security. That is, the farming villages around the peripheries of the plantation are not operating in terms of a mode of production contrary to the plantation economy. They are not part-peasants and part-proletariates shifting

gears so to speak. Rather, they are an intricate part of the plantation estates. In short, they are preexisting social and economic systems that have already been subsumed into the logic of the capitalist reproduction of the plantation economy (1985, 5).

Similarly in the Philippines, a number of scholars have been involved in a long and protracted debate over the direction of social and agrarian changes taking place in rural regions of Central and Northern Luzon. The authors (Fegan, Kerkvliet, Lewis, Takahashi, and Wolters) have conducted their fieldwork in different historic moments in Philippine time using distinct theoretical approaches to study issues related to changing modes of production in Ilocano rice farming communities, and I have discussed their works elsewhere (1992).

Wolters (1983, 4) and Kahn (1978, *passim*) have suggested that patron-client relations do not form a unifying state structure; rather, they are a structure tied into wider processes of state development. I agree with this statement but disagree with Wolter's contention that "in the Philippines as in Southeast Asia relatively "unified" country wide classes, complete with a degree of class consciousness and organization, have not yet appeared." In the Philippines, classes (and collective movements) have organized themselves "for themselves" in the face of baffling odds, as witnessed in the crushing defeat of the dock worker's unions of Iloilo (McCoy 1982), the Persistence of the Huk Rebellion (Kerkvliet 1977), the People's Power Movement (Bonner 1987, Poole and Vanzi 1984), and class based Christian

Communities today (McCoy 1984, Young blood 1987 see also Stoler 1985, G. Hart 1989, Turton 1989, among others). Similar examples such as the steady buildup of people in Thailand uniting to end the authoritarian Suchinda regime in 1992 and student-led and mass-based coalition movement in Indonesia that ousted the longtime dictator Suharto in 1998, abound in South East Asia.

CONCLUSION

I have argued for the continuing value of a postmodern Marxist perspective that is different from orthodox, economic, and positivistic readings of Marx's texts and that understands knowledge as being produced and the economy as decentered. Class struggle is an important force for social change but it is not the sole determinant of change. Marx looked at the relationship between classes as actuating social transformation in the capitalist mode of production but he never claimed his model replicated actual social life; rather he put forth a mode of production concept as an "objective ideal." (Althusser 1970, 194). Accordingly, one must define class positions in relation to other considerations such as culture, gender, and ethnicity, and not only from a particular production mode but also from the social formations of which they are part. This is because within any given social formation, typically, more than one mode of production performs together with another, and one of these modes exerts its preponderating influence over the other causing its own dominant reproduction but not in all spheres. In turn, social formations are shaped by the historic epoch (e.g., postmodernism) of which they are part. As

the global political and cultural economy transforms relations between varying nation-states and powers, it is important to emphasize that rural social movements (that are anti-systemic to capitalist farming

and individuation) have responded into the present in the interstices of competing states and contending powers to resist the homogenizing influences of imperial processes.

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