

# CAPITALIST SOUTHEAST ASIAN PEASANTS: SOME MORE THOUGHTS ON AN OLD DEBATE

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## Introduction

In the light of recent rejection of Marxian concepts and arguments as rigid and "dead" since the break up of the Soviet Union, it is not surprising that studies which look at the capitalist, semi-capitalist, or non-capitalist "nature" of the peasantry have been criticized by some authors as being outdated. In particular, Hart (1989) and Aguilar (1989) in their recent reviews of Philippine peasant studies, respectively, criticize those which look at the relationship between capitalist and pre-capitalist relations of production in the peasantry for being overly concerned with dogmatic categorization, rather than with "facts." They consider studies which focus on the relationship between modes of production and class structure in agrarian Southeast Asia to have lost their continuing relevance in relation to changes taking place locally, and in the large world.

Aguilar argues that modes of production studies are guilty of holding a teleological assumption about the end result of capitalism. He contends that these kinds of studies in the Philippines are still laden with dogmatic ethnocentric model. For her part, Hart faults similar studies in Thailand "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." Both Hart and Aguilar in their [excellent] reviews 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. Their views also find support in the works of Turton (1989), White (1989), Banzon-Bautista (1989) and Kahn (1981).

I take a different view from Hart's and Aguilar's appraisal of prevailing trends in peasant studies in Southeast Asia. I argue in this paper that studies concerned with determining the types of modes of production in the peasantry continue to progress and to build upon previous research, and that they are relevant.

To expound on my view, I first summarize the early debate between the moral economists as represented by James Scott and the methodological individualists as represented by Samuel Popkin who were interested in the issue of the capitalist versus the non-capitalist "nature" of the peasantry in Southeast Asia in the late 1970s. Second, I look at

James Scott's well known "Weapons of the Weak" (1985). In this latter work, Scott improves upon his earlier views by dialectically looking at the question of "class" in relation to capitalism in the peasantry — a question that came to preoccupy scholars of Southeast Asia in the 1980s. Finally, I review the history of peasant studies in Northern and Central Luzon in the Philippines from the perspective of this continuing debate taking place in the wider region.

The overall argument of this paper is that studies that are concerned with determining the type of mode of production in peasant societies are generally not only open to considering local specificity and difference but are able to place these considerations in the contexts of broader international tendencies and influences. It is worth noting that the mode of production debate is generally a Marxian problematic, although Marxists and non-Marxist scholars have debated one another over issues regarding modes of production, especially with regard to the peasantry. Indeed, these different scholars often use the same terms, for example, class or capitalism, when these terms have different meanings in their respective discourses. It is one of the aims of this paper to clarify these key terms. It is beyond the scope of this paper, however, to detail all the nuances of the mode of production debates and interested readers are referred to Wolpe (1980) for a start in this direction.

#### Early Peasant Studies in Southeast Asia

Early studies of Southeast Asian peasants emerged out of a non-Marxist, and widely publicized dispute between

moral economists represented by James Scott (1976), and methodological individualists exemplified by Samuel Popkin (1979). Indeed, it was not until recently that critical and dialectical approaches to the study of peasants have eclipsed this debate. The moral economy versus the rational peasant debate looked at the interpenetrating structures of capitalism, ideology, and peasants in terms of the relationship between subsistence modes of production and peasant rebellion. Initially it sprung from need by development theorists and policy makers of the Green Revolution<sup>1</sup> for more concrete analysis prior to the implementation of development projects which had previously failed, and often still do, due to a lack of correlation between theory, different disciplines, and hard data.<sup>2</sup> The Journal of Peasant Studies has devoted a special issue to this topic from which the following synthesis is derived (1983; see also Adas 1980, 1981; Baker 1981).

The moral economists argue that peasants live and work together as a group in peasant communities for the common wealth. They have customs and mores that are opposed to norms of "individualism" and the personal achievement strategies of the West. According to this view, members of peasant communities practice a kind of subsistence ethic. Landowners provide their peasants workers with "social security." The relationship between landlords and peasants, although unequal, is based on norms of reciprocity (Scott 1973, 1976). This "safety first" mechanism "is a logical consequence of the ecological dependence of peasant livelihood, and it embodies a relative preference for subsistence security over high average income" (Scott 1976:29). If landlords

renege on their promise to provide peasants with their subsistence needs peasants will literally rebel.

Scott proposes that the penetration of capitalism into peasant villages in Southeast Asia<sup>3</sup> leads to widespread family discord and breaks in traditional patron-client ties because earlier patterns of reciprocity no longer structure the village economy (1973, 1976, 1986). Accordingly, the Green Revolution disrupts the traditional balance of patron-client exchange in these communities and the traditional subsistence ethic. Landowners and machine operators in such agricultural communities no longer need the support of peasants to legitimize their authority because they can rely on the powerful backing of an outside state apparatus. They can monopolize the infrastructure which includes its monetary and technological aspects to take advantage of peasants who need cash to live in the new economy. In effect, mechanization of agriculture in Southeast Asia, at least, leads to the loss of the farmers' traditional social security system as many peasants become unemployed.

Scott argues that in Southeast Asia peasants hesitate to adopt the new farm technology and seed crops of the Green Revolution because they entail high risks in the face of such indeterminacies as weather, and outside social forces (1976:4). In order to lessen these uncertainties, peasants help each other to maintain a given level of production, even if they may not be maximizing yields. Peasants near the subsistence level<sup>4</sup> have no other recourse but to produce crops for home consumption, rather than for sale on the market. They

select time-tested seeds that have proven successful, even if they produce less than the newer high yield varieties (1976:23). In like manner, they tend to diversify their risks by farming dispersed plots with variable crops, rather than integrating them in a single area.

However, Feeney (1983) points out that Scott borrows Roumasset's safety first model for the study of the family farm which posits that the family acts first to maximize its profits, unless the risks are too high. That is, to paraphrase Feeney, if the risks are too high the family will seek to ensure that its income will not fall below a certain danger zone (*Ibid.*:770-771). He contends that what Scott describes as risk aversion behavior can also be interpreted as maximizing behavior. Feeney suggests that a farmer may choose to diversify his crops and plots if there are different types of land on his farm, and such a strategy would, in effect, maximize his profits. Or, the farmer may seek to optimize his profits by working into his calculation such considerations as the availability of family labor in terms of time factors and seasonal variations. Furthermore, when a peasant is faced with an unpredictable market where prices change at random, he may have more incentive to produce for home use rather than for sale on the market.

Another model that Scott uses is that of Chayanov's (1966) for the study of the family farm. But Chayanov's formula, namely, that the degree of self-exploitation is determined by a peculiar equilibrium between family demand satisfaction and the drudgery of labor itself does not work for Scott's peasants. Scott, like Chayanov, focuses on the provisioning of

a "secure subsistence" as the stabilizing factor in peasant communities. He argues that so long as a family's basic subsistence needs are met it no longer strives for profit. Furthermore, says Scott, "peasants are not interested in social mobility" (1976:186-187). However, Chayanov developed his hypothesis in relation to family farms in a "natural economy," and he did not place his peasants in the historical setting of a wider society of interpenetrating structures. He saw his peasant households as a distinct type, where social differentiation occurred demographically through the fusion and fissioning of families. However, Chayanov did consider social stratification occurring in peasant societies in relation to capitalism, resulting from such economic factors as commodity production (1986:249-250). In so doing, he stressed the distinction between demographic differentiation and the development of classes due to capitalist penetration in the peasantries, and he stipulated that it is important not to confuse the two kinds of social classes because each type calls for a different theoretical framework.

Chayanov's scheme for the study of the family farm in a "natural economy" based on use value is not applicable to the particular agrarian communities in Southeast Asia of Scott's study. These communities have long been dominated by capital (Scott's peasants do compete and desire to get ahead economically, it is just that the system works against them). Some of the characteristics of a capitalist class structure, wrought from the capitalist mode of production, have already entered the communities Scott studied. Hence, a model founded on Chayanov's theory of peasant behavior in

a natural economy is inadequate in explaining underlying motivations and behaviors of peasants in a wider capitalist economy. Furthermore, Southeast Asia has a long history of involvement in production for export under varying colonial regimes, and earlier kingdoms in a maritime trade economy based on semi-feudal, lineage, and tributary modes of production. Paternalistic features of landlord-peasant relations are intimately connected to patterns of dominance and exploitation evolved under such "traditional" settings. One might question Scott's hypothesis which explains peasant behavior and reproduction of such behavior as an outcrop of having their basic needs met, on the grounds that Chayanov's model does not fit Scott's peasants.

In contrast to Scott, Popkin (1979), argues that peasant society is made up of individuals who pursue their own personal profit. He views peasants as economic maximizers who are motivated by individual rationality in ways similar to individuals in Western capitalist societies. Accordingly, peasants take risks so long as it is profitable for them to do so. Popkin points out that traditional peasant villages can be highly stratified, and that individual survival is not necessarily the concern of the whole community. According to Popkin, the articulation of capitalism with the peasantry does not result from outside penetration. Rather, it is actively brought into the village by local elites who cultivate powerful outside allies to strengthen their own power bases in struggles taking place at the local level. In such instances, Popkin argues that the Green Revolution can improve the

quality of life for many of these traditional villagers.

Popkin criticizes Scott for being guilty of the fallacy of romanticism and chides him for being unrealistic in his assertion that "pre-capitalist closed economy is their (the peasant's) utopian goal" (Scott cited in Popkin 1979:8). In Popkin's view, peasants seek out patrons to provide them with social security, and not the reverse, just as patrons are, also, clients to more powerful patrons. In other words, self interest and instrumental rationalism is what lies behind patron-client relations. Another example of this self-interested logic, according to Popkin, is the tendency of peasants to have large families for the purpose of providing them with security in their old age. Popkin then puts the blame on individuals who manipulate each other for selfish ends for the emergence of social and economic inequality in peasant societies. Peasant societies are open and plural, "more stratification within the village resulted from differential access to and control of the bureaucracy and other ancillary institutions of the market rather than from the market themselves" (*Ibid.*:28).

Lastly, Popkin argues that peasant rebellions do not result from violating a code of ethics which promises to provide farmers with social security. Rather, peasants seek out political leaders, and if they deem it profitable, they will rally behind one in rebellion. Feeney points out that although Popkin recognizes the peasants' need for political leaders, he does not explain the underlying motivations on the part of the leaders themselves, which may or may not derive from altruism (1983:781). Greenough (1983)

also provides evidence to suggest that both Scott and Popkin's interpretations of peasant rebellion are based on European assumptions which do not apply in every context likewise supported by Adas 1980; Baker 1981; and Peletz 1983). Polachek (1983), on the other hand, cites evidence in partial support of both approaches. He takes Popkin's lead and advocates the importance of using traditional competitive frameworks to determine how peasants perceive and respond to opportunities of revolutionary coalition politics. At the same time, while Polachek points out that revolutionary mobilization appeals to ideas of redistributive justice, he distinguishes his view from Scott's notion of unitary consciousness because of the widespread emergence of rival factions in peasant society.

In sum, 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 thinking apropos to capitalized industrial society — fit peasant society. Neither offered 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 treats the 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 faulted for side-stepping the

necessary dialectical relationship between man and society.

Nevertheless, there is a point of convergence in the diverse approaches of Scott and Popkin. Both theories suggest a more definitive approach for the study of peasants because peasants make rational choices within the confines of their societies and cultures which include morals and values. As Keyes (1983) has pointed out, it is generally taken for granted that peasant societies in Southeast Asia have their own histories and cultural traditions which are in turn connected to a larger world system. 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. It is well known that there is no universal definition of the peasantry. As Bernstein (1979) summed it up, 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" (*Ibid.*:422).

#### James Scott's Concept of "Class" in the Peasantry

Building on his earlier thesis of the moral economy of the peasant, Scott in his *Weapons of the Weak* (1985) pursues the question of how small farmers organize (openly, or covertly) to express their class interest. Scott affirms that the moral economy is diminished by capitalism. He describes the results 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 the Green Revolution, even though it benefited villagers, increased the class division among them.

Scott's thesis is that the introduction of the capitalist mode of production destroyed patron-client ties (*Ibid.*:152). Poor peasants no longer have patrons who listen to their complaints. So, they vent their 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." (*Ibid.*:311).

The relationship between large-scale cultivators and small-scale cultivators, and landless laborers, has been transformed into an impersonal one based on capital. Scott's thesis is that the new form of commercialized agriculture (the introduction of chemical fertilizers, mechanized farming, and production for sale in the market as opposed to production for use by the local community) has changed traditional peasant relations into capitalist relations. He disagrees with theories of hegemony which perceive the peasant classes to be dominated by capitalism because they are mystified by it. They have not, in his opinion, become aligned to it by false consciousness (*Ibid.*:231).

Scott supports his view with the fact that peasants have a "cognitive structure of revolt" even as they act otherwise in public (*Ibid.*:240; 1985: *ad passim*). Their

version of a moral economy continues to structure their world ideologically, even as they express it covertly. Grant (1986) proposes that this is because Scott looks at hegemony in terms of institutionalized elite values and myths found in bureaucracies, schools, media, and churches. These elite values and myths do not "trickle down" on a uniform basis to the rural sectors. The exception is religion, but Scott stipulates that religion is selectively reinterpreted from core to peripheral areas. Religious meanings vary according to the organization of the religious intermediaries. For Grant, this aspect of Scott's thesis is the most controversial (Scott 1977:281; Grant 1986:18).

Grant suggests 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. Instead, they share the make-up of "true" revolutionaries because they are fundamentally opposed to capitalism.

I take a different view from that of Grant. To use Worsley's (1984) expression "there are factories without roofs," I am inclined to agree that capitalism covers the gap between rural and urban sectors (*Ibid.*: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 mys-

tified. If they were truly de-mystified, would they not recognize the unequal and oppressive conditions of the capitalist mode of production?

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. They may converge, but only in a wider context as a class in relation to other classes within a national and international class system (see Ossowski 1973; Kahn 1985; Ledesma 1982).

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. 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. 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 (e.g., coup d'etat). However, when a peasant mashes a cow, is he really doing it against well-to-do households as Scott claims or is he not simply trying to protect his land from over grazing by his neighbor? Or, are 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)? 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 "de-mystification" 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. 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 peasants form a class "for themselves" as Scott claims, or are they merely a class "in themselves," as Marx suggests? Lukacs (1971), 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" (*Ibid.*:50-51). One can make a case that insofar as peasants exist in a subordinate relation to the elite who extract a surplus from them, they form a class "in themselves." However, if they accept their status can they be said to be a class "for themselves?" Scott's two class schemes for the study of peasant society (in relation to

the capitalist mode of production) which depicts peasants as de-mystified and aware of the unequal relations that affect them adversely, can be challenged from this view.

Indeed, I agree with Scott that 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). This change is an empirically perceived relation between peasants and the landed elite in the Malaysian village Scott studied. However, in my view, 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.

#### Peasant Studies in the Philippines

Philippine specialists have been studying "real" peasants in their wider national, historical, political, and economical context (de Jesus 1982; Fegan 1972, 1981, 1982, 1989; Kahn 1981; Kerkvliet 1977, 1983, 1990; McCoy 1982). An articulation of the modes of production perspective is *open* to the possibility of different economies and societies premised on grounds other than capitalist ones. I now demonstrate this thesis by way of the following review.

Most Philippine specialists on the peasantry have studied the direction of social and agrarian changes in rural areas of Central and Northern Luzon. No other single region in Southeast Asia has been covered as extensively by dif-



ferent scholars over time, as this region. The remainder of this essay concerns the works of Fegan and Kerkvliet above and of Lewis (1971); Takahashi (1969, 1972) and Wolters (1982, 1983). These authors conducted their fieldwork at different historic periods using distinct theoretical approaches to study the changing modes of production in Ilocano rice-farming communities.

While Aguilar dismisses the importance of modes of production studies in the Philippines, I suggest that they remain important because these studies are concerned with finding out the capitalist, or non-capitalist, "nature" of the social relations of production. It is through these relations that peasant communities are reproduced, and transformed. The *Philippine Sociological Review* has devoted a special issue to this topic which partially informs the following review (1972).

The scattered settlement communities of Cagayan Valley in the eastern part of Northern and Central Luzon became populated by Ilocano farmers at the turn of the century as a result of American colonial policy which governed "land reform" in the Philippines (Takahashi 1969; Lewis 1971; and Krinks 1974). Traditionally, Ilocano (subsistence) farmers lived along the coasts of Northeastern Luzon but which communities became overcrowded and impoverished over time (Lewis 1971; Takahashi 1969).

Hence, typically poor Ilocano (nuclear) families, or more specifically their sons, were "pushed" from their homes to the Cagayan Valley, Mindanao, the United States, and Saudi Arabia in search of economic opportunities (Lewis

1971; Banzon-Bautista 1989; Griffith 1988; Trager 1988). Landholders would sell or mortgage their land to send their children to urban schools. They also hoped to launch their children into political positions. This began a process of weakening traditional patron-client ties (Lewis 1971; Wolters 1983).

Cagayan Valley was initially the home of the Ibanags who were the original farmers along the Cagayan river and the "Kalingas" (a catch-all phrase designating so-called "wild" peoples from surrounding mountains and plains). They were pushed out of their homeland by the American colonial regime to prepare the way for the coming of the Ilocanos (Lewis 1971:34, 36).<sup>5</sup> The American colonizers did this by purchasing large friar estates, and selling them again piecemeal (Takahashi 1969:129; Lewis 1971:30). Then, formerly uncultivated regions in Cagayan Valley<sup>6</sup> were cleared (literally taken from the indigenous Kalinga, Ibanag, and Gadang) by the Ilocanos who were "granted" (sold) homesteads in the area by the American colonial government (Lewis 1971:34, 36, 75). The colonial regime, then, helped to initiate the production of crops for cash (in the name of capitalism) to promote agricultural development in the valley. That is, capitalism was articulated together with pre-capitalist relations of production, and with force.

Building upon Lewis's study, Kerkvliet (1977) argues that the peasants in Northern and Central Luzon have been actively rebelling against the changes brought by capitalists to their way of life since the turn of the century. Although the Americans in collusion with

Filipino elites had "targetted" them as communist insurgents, Kerkvliet correctly refutes this claim. He sorts out propaganda from local facts, and he sets forth a theoretical perspective explaining the probable causes of the peasant-based HUK revolution that culminated in the region after World War II.

Kerkvliet takes us back to the beginnings of the early American regime in the Philippines, after its purchase from Spain. At that time, the peasantry had been formed (although not subdued) by the Spanish who colonized them. They were steeped in patron-client relations that were uniquely negotiated out of local and colonial conditions. These relations were renegotiated at the onslaught of the American colonial period because the Filipinos had technically won their own independence from Spain only to be colonized again. The relationship between landlords and peasants was an unequal one, but because it was flexible it allowed peasants in time of need to turn to their landlords for aid. Peasants needed their landlords, and landlords needed peasants. The landlords were able to legitimize their control over valuable resources by acquiring a "following" of peasants who worked their soils.

Peasants could take alternative courses of action if their landlords treated them unfairly. They could collectively negotiate, or move to new places where other landowners promised to protect them. In short, there was a system of checks and balances in their relationship. Nevertheless, the traditional articulated mode of production changed with the coming of new relations of production under the American capitalist mode of production. The once

"symbiotic" relationship between landlords and peasants was transformed. In Kerkvliet's opinion, this "change" caused the peasants to rise in rebellion in hopes of regaining their former patron-client ties (Kerkvliet 1977:255; see also Scott 1976, 1985).

The American regime brought its capitalist mode of production by utilizing landed and official elites to promote American business interests. This empowering of the landed elite provided additional legitimation for their authority. Hence, landlords could change the terms of agreement between themselves and their peasants. They could forget their custom of providing social security for their peasants. In time, peasants became transformed into tenants and wage workers who shared similar working conditions, and who began to organize to protect their own interests (Kerkvliet 1977:259). In this regard, Kerkvliet proposes that peasant unions were formed to re-establish traditional patron-client bonds (*Ibid.*:255). I counter that peasants did not seek to return to the past. They were proceeding forward: peasants reacted in the context of capitalist relations of production by unionizing (much like workers in America had done) to promote their own interests in the face of their newly formed competition (property owners and connected officials). Their efforts can be seen not so much as an attempt to re-align patron-client ties as to contract better conditions of employment.

However, unlike in the early days of unionizing in the U.S., where laborers struggled for better working conditions from owners of property who resorted to tactics within the structures of their cul-

ture to retaliate against or negotiate with them, in Luzon, the landed elite and connected officials were backed by a powerful outside force. They were backed by the colonial government under the Americans and then the Japanese and then again the Americans even as the Philippines gained its formal independence. They were armed with monetary and military might superior to that of the peasants who were struggling to create a wider structural support for themselves.

Kerkvliet suggests that the working class in Manila opposed joining together with the peasants because they thought themselves to be the vanguard of the revolution rather than the peasants (1977:265). I think, as Kerkvliet mentions, the lack of unity between working classes in the city and the countryside was a result of the labor divisions within the ranks of the working classes. Contrary to their long-term interests, these classes competed among themselves for immediate and locally affiliated gains.

Fegan (1972) and Takahashi (1972) were among the first scholars to directly look at the question of whether, or not, peasants in Northern Luzon were being proletarianized by their relationship with a developing capitalist mode of production. They conducted their studies at a time when Central Luzon was "targeted" to be a showcase for development. This was just prior to the imposition of Martial Law under Marcos. The tenants of the region received government incentives in cash and kind (largely drawn from outside aid) to increase their farm production.

At the time of Takahashi's first study in 1964, tenants were organized to "outwit" their landlords. Landlords ex-

acted 50 percent of their harvest as rent, and a large portion of the other 50 per cent in payment for debts. As a result, tenants were not interested in increasing production. They depended on cash-income for their subsistence (e.g., they had to purchase their rice from the market, and they could not sell the rice they produced). Hence, tenants cooperated and hired each other for work, rather than working on their own individual plots. In this way, quantities of rice remained within the village, not in the hands of the landlord.

Families did not work their land together as a production unit, and Takahashi saw this as evidence indicating that the farmers had been effectively proletarianized. There was little socioeconomic difference between small landholders and landless workers. Tenants were also hired laborers. Hence, Takahashi concludes that the socioeconomic structure within the village is horizontally stratified rather than vertically differentiated.

Takahashi returned to the field in 1971 and found that most of the tenants of his earlier study had changed their status from tenant farmers to leaseholders. They were increasingly utilizing mechanized farming techniques, new rice varieties (double-cropping), and improved irrigation systems. Leaseholders were working their own land as a family unit, and they exerted efforts to increase crop production. Crops were produced for both home consumption and sale on the market. The family farm had become self-sufficient. That is, a family farmer could provide his family with a "decent" livelihood by farming. I interpret this to mean a family farmer could afford to

send his children to school. Takahashi interpreted it as evidence for their being "re-peasantized:" family farmers.

Fegan questions Takahashi's predictions made on the basis of his field study. He criticizes Takahashi for not making a controlled comparison of behavior of farmers under different classes of tenure (lessees, owner-operators, share-tenants). If he had he might have found that family farming is not necessarily the most productive behavior for all lessees (1972:135). With regard Takahashi's first study, Fegan argues that the conditions defining an assembly-line style proletarian workers are only found in fully capitalist countries such as in Japan or the U.S. so Takahashi incorrectly defined the tenants of Northern Luzon as proletarians (1972:135). I think that Fegan is incorrect in this regard, for the agrarian economy of Northern Luzon is linked into the capitalist economy, and the opportunities for employment there are part of its informal sector: a proletarianized condition (Long 1972).

Fegan argues that there are two sectors in the agrarian economy of Northern Luzon: a bureaucratic sector and another sector open to skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled laborers. Farmers tend to qualify for positions in the latter sector. This sector, according to Fegan, is characterized by dyadic relations between small capitalists who supply equipment, positions, and credit to workers who use it in some version of use-rent, contract agency, or simple debt system (1972:135; 1981). He argues that these operatives are dependent-petty entrepreneurs rather than proletarian. I think, he would do better to separate the small capitalist from the farmers (who are

proletarianized) because the former can more easily revert from capitalist to precapitalist relations of production with an aim of making a profit from farmers who, in turn, may not have such options. Fegan is right, though, to state that "this system (of dependent-petty entrepreneurs) rest on capital shortage and labor surplus, and accounts for the weakness of unions" (1972:135).

On the other hand, Fegan does not seem to see how the capitalist system itself can perpetuate a precapitalist one in order to provide its workers with the social security benefits that it (the capitalist system) would otherwise have to provide (to reproduce its labor force) (see Meillassoux 1978). Fegan considers only that farmers may find it rational to make ends meet to supplement their income with off-farm work (1972:135-136). Furthermore, Fegan suggests that those farmers who do withdraw from off-farm work to work their own farms tend to do so not because it is more "rational" but because they prefer leisure to work (1972:136). Is this latter remark not indicative of Chayanov's definition of a family farm (a self sufficient peasantry in a natural economy)? If this is the case, does it not give wind to Takahashi's sails?

Finally, Fegan predicts a number of non-peasant-like responses from Northern Luzon farmers. He predicts that as farmers engage in off-farm employment, those who acquire steady work will tend to devote less time to their farms. Some of them will hire helpers to work their farms. His own research indicates that some kinds of farm work require cooperative efforts between farmers. These efforts, whether done by hired workers or not, will continue. House-

holds will continue to fission into nuclear households, and children reaching employable age will *not* (says Fegan) do unpaid farm work for their families. In short, Fegan argues, "Land reform will not make peasants of all Central Luzon tenants. They, like the landless who exploit diversified and essentially incentive paid niches, will remain difficult to organize" (1972:141). This, in my view, is indicative of proletarianization although Fegan does not think so.

Going a step further, Wolters (1983) in his study of the scattered land settlements in Northern Luzon, asks if Martial Law instituted in 1972, was able to change the pattern of politics in the region? He asks whether these political patterns were changed into local class-based parties and organizations. As he puts it, Martial Law was declared to "replace a personalistic system of politics by a well organized authoritarian system" (*Ibid.*:xi). Although I disagree with him over the reasoning behind Martial Law, his interesting analysis of the problem is worth repeating.

Wolters takes a different view from those who perceive the Philippines as a state structured along patron-client lines. Patron-client ties have "changed" into "new" types of relationships that do not fit traditional patterns. There are patron-client relations between the president and the upper class politicians, and between them and local brokers who bring in the votes, but the relations between local elite and peasants has none of the security of traditional reciprocity (*Ibid.*:206, 214).

Accordingly, "these new relations between politicians and the electorate are short-term, instrumental, impersonal,

and based on a specific transaction if any. They are completely different from multi-faceted, dyadic relations that link landlords and tenants in the good old days" (*Ibid.*:228). Landlords tried only to outwit tenants, and to make a profit from them (also supported by Takahashi 1969:27 and Lewis 1971:122), while tenant farmers were still thinking in terms of a subsistence economy (Wolters 1983:106; Takahashi 1969:137). Takahashi in his early study explained that this absence of capitalistic tendencies among tenants (or, hired laborers) is primarily due to their "helplessness" in the face of landlords who would only increase their rent (or, debt) if they were to produce more.

Wolters suggests that patron-client relations do not form a unifying state structure in the Philippines at all. Instead, they are a structure tied into wider processes of state development (1983:4; Kahn offers a similar analysis of patron-clientage in Indonesia 1978). I agree with this statement, but I disagree with him when he says 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 as in Southeast Asia generally, classes (and, collective movements) have organized themselves "for themselves" in the face of baffling odds, as witnessed in the crushing defeat of the dock workers' unions of Iloilo (McCoy 1982; Mojares 1986); the persistence of the Huk Rebellion (Kerkvliet 1977; Takahashi 1969:75); and the popular support lent to the People's Power Movement (Bonner 1987; Poole and Vanzi 1984), and the class-based Basic Christian Communities (McCoy 1984;

Rush 1984; Youngblood 1987, see also Stoler 1985; Hart 1989; Turton 1989; among others).

### Conclusion

A number of recent scholars have suggested that studies concerning the "nature" of modes of production in the peasantry in Southeast Asia are stagnating, rather than progressing. According to their point of view, these studies are inflexible in their approaches to the peasantries. In contrast, I have shown that studies dealing with issues of modes of production can be drawn upon to address dynamic issues of the peasantry in a constructive manner. They are open to debate, and they can be critically used by other scholars to obtain a picture of the larger developments taking place within the field. Studies of modes of production are equal to the task of looking at economic and social changes occurring in real life communities with their own unique configurations and cultures, resulting from interactions taking place locally, and beyond. In fact, many Southeast Asian scholars engaged in the articulation of modes of production disputes have been constantly engaging these very issues, and improving upon their studies all along. It is not that Aguilar, Hart, Turton, and White are incorrect in their call for more locally based studies to account for the element of "human agency" in processes of political and social change at the regional, and national level. It is that they fail to see the importance of looking at rural social relationships against the backdrop of the different modes of production which orient them.

### End Notes

<sup>1</sup>The term Green Revolution refers to a strategy for economic development in Southeast Asia initiated in the early 1960s. Accordingly, communities targeted for development were introduced to new high yield seed varieties, and "improved" technology, in an effort to increase production (see Concepts and Terms in the *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1974:386).

<sup>2</sup>Interestingly, critics have been quick to note that in Southeast Asia these programs for agrarian reform are usually implemented by indigenously "powerful," manipulating, and consorting elite recipients of similarly duplicitous foreign aid packages (or, transnational corporation contracts), to curb peasant resistance to the commercialization of agriculture (Dahl and Jhort 1984; Fegan 1972; Kerkvliet 1977; Hart 1989; Ledesma 1983; Stoler 1985; Takahashi 1969; Tai 1974; Turton 1989; Weeks 1986; White 1989; Worsley 1984; Wurfel 1983).

<sup>3</sup>Scott, in his earlier work of *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1976) derives his theory from secondary sources, namely, through library research into other scholar's published works on different peasant communities throughout Southeast Asia, rather than from fieldwork as he later does in Malaysia (1985).

<sup>4</sup>Scott stipulates that his argument only applies to poor peasants or tenants (1976:26).

<sup>5</sup>Lewis considers the Ibanag people to be an earlier wave of immigrants into Cagayan Valley (1971:28). But, I found

in my own research on the Ibanags that they were the indigenous people living along the fertile shores of the Cagayan river at the time of the arrival of the Spanish who "used" them (and their language) to gain further inroads into the Northern regions of the Philippines (1980:30).

<sup>6</sup>Indigenous swiddens and farms not being recognized by the colonial government.

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