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Past Inscription:

The Mythopoetics of Angkarn Kalyanapong

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Notes Bibliography

> So nowadays when people have been touched by some hardship, they say, 'We've had it, it's given out on us!' They recall the original primary word(s) but they don't understand what they mean. (Collins, Agganna Sutta, 630).
>
> As a matter of fact, how can you count poetry? It's just like this ... you can't count the grains of sand on a beach or the trees in a forest ... poetry is part of my heart beat, part of my breath ... when I die I'll either be a spirit or a deity ... I am a *'kawi'* (poet). (Angkarn, Interview from *A Contemporary Siamese Poet*).

What is the status of myth and language in modern Thai poetry? Radical Thai poets from Cit Phumisak to Khomthuan Khanthanu search classic Thai epics, archaic Brahmin oaths, and core Buddhist sutras for the origins of poetry. Buddhist reform poets and writers, like Sulak Sivaraksa, find poetic vision in the foundational texts of empire and religion. It becomes apparent that the texts of the past, their myths and forms, bear weight in the expressions of modern Thai poetry. The role of the past appears as a source of inspiration, meter and language. Yet it also reveals a portentous path for writing into the future. The Thai

poet Angkarn Kalyanapong is often called the doyen of contemporary Thai poetry (Chetana, "Sense," 12). [1] Angkarn's poetry calls upon the poetic conventions of the past and the potent myths of both Buddhism and the Thai State. In examining the use, rewriting and recreation of myth in contemporary Thai poetry, Angkarn's poems *WakThalee* (Scoop up the Sea) and *CaarukAdiit* (Past Inscription) present a fertile ground between the evocation and exploration of mythopoetics by the poets of revolution and the poets of reform.[2] The purpose of this study is to explore the poetry of Angkarn and the myths he accesses, yielding a framework of the relationship of myth to poetry.[3]

In order to better understand the use of the myth in contemporary Thai poetry, the work of Sulak offers an excellent frame for a study of Angkarn. Sulak is, in part, responsible for the myth of Angkarn as a national and international poet. Angkarn's first collection of poems was published under Sulak's encouragement and, in addition, Sulak has worked to promote and translate Angkarn's poetry (Manas, 47). It is in Sulak's vision of the past that one can find a companion or comparative approach to Angkarn's mythopoetics. Donald K. Swearer, in "Sulak Sivaraksa's Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society," explores Sulak's use of a Buddhist past that offers paths for contemporary reform.

> For many people today the confusions of the present seem to promote a nostalgia for the past. In some cases the nostalgia is an escape back to a romanticized, secure, comfortable and less threatening time. For others the past provides a critical perspective form which to inform the present and guide the future. The latter use of the past typifies Sulak's view of the Buddhist tradition. It is a "living past" with the power to inspire people to be more generous and compassionate, and to incite societies to be more just and nonviolent (Swearer, 39).

The past is caught somewhere between escape and action. It is important to note that both escape and action are tensions within an approach and appreciation of the past -- within nostalgia. Even when turned towards action, the past, inscribed into tensions under nostalgia, produces and provides only the distance for a 'critical perspective.' As poetry delves deeper into myth, it can yield much more than perspective. Although this work is not about Sulak or Buddhist reform, Sulak's distance from and use of the past can provide some tentative first terms for this study.

In his appropriation and appreciation of the past, Sulak concentrates on several core texts. The Buddhist historical moments that are of primary concern to Sulak are: "King Ramkhamhaeng's model of benevolent, righteous kingship; King Lithai's synthesis of Buddhist cosmology, politics and ethics; King Mongkut's neo-orthodox Buddhist revivalism; and Buddhadhasa Bhikkhu's reformist Buddhism, especially his utopian ideology of Dhammic socialism" (Swearer, 40). It is important to point out that these historical moments (and figures) were periods of poetic productivity as well. King Ramkhamheang's Sukhothai inscription is considered one of the most potent vestiges of Thai poetry and the Thai State and is often referred to as the first pillar/post (*laknung*).[4] King (Phya) Lithai is accredited with the sermon *The Three Worlds*, a text that accesses classical Buddhist cosmology and "may well be the earliest elaborated Therevada cosmology" (Swearer, 41). Although Sulak uses these texts for their ethical import, especially in outlining the effects of virtues and vices, these core texts also inform Angkarn's myth making. The Thai poet Angkarn Kalyanapong explores/exploits the past as a source of myth, language and poetic convention. The poems, *WakThalee* and *CaarukAdiit*, yield Angkarn's mythopoetics at the intersection of myth, language, and poetic convention.

What are the terms and tensions of mythopoesis? In order to understand Angkarn's relation to the past and his use of myth, it is important to set some limits to the relation of myth to language.

> **Mythopoeia**: (Gr 'myth-making') the conscious creation of a myth. In literature, the appropriation and reworking of mythical material, or the creation of a kind of 'private' mythology (Cuddon, 527).

This first definition informs our discussion of Angkarn. Angkarn's use of myth must lie somewhere between myth-making, as mythopoesis, and convention (and its re-working) of myth, mythopoetics. The answer to this dilemma of definition revolves around the status of language and the past in the poetry of Angkarn. The literary theorists Paul de Man and Jean Luc Nancy provide a framework for this questing after mythic language.

In *The Inoperative Community*, Jean-Luc Nancy points out the properties of mythic language. "It [the language of myth] is no longer the language of their exchanges, but of their reunion -- the sacred language of a foundation and an oath" (Nancy, 44). Mythic language, then, is the language of sacred foundations which produces and acts. Angkarn's poetry accesses this sacred language. The poem *WakThalee* calls upon the language of the *Agganna Sutta*, the Buddhist creation myth, the *Oong Kaan Chaeng Nam*, the Oath of Fealty (the Water Oath), and the *Ramakian*, the Thai rewriting of the Indian epic Ramayana and the foundational text of the Chakri dynasty (the current Thai dynasty) (Nitaya, 322). Thus, Angkarn's poetry already sets itself within the limits of sacred language. In *CaarukAdiit*, Angkarn evokes the place and time of mythic inscription and the inscriptions of classical Thai poetry. It is this moment and monument of inscription that allies itself to Nancy's scene of myth.

> It is not just any scene: it is perhaps the essential scene of all scenes, of all scenography or all staging; it is perhaps the stage upon which we represent everything to ourselves or whereupon we make appear all representations, if myth, as Levi-Strauss would have it, is primarily defined as the which or in which time turns into space (Nancy, 44-5).

Through Nancy's work, myth can be set as the sacred language of foundation which creates a special relationship between time and space. An exploration of Angkarn's poetry must pay attention to how these poems deal with sacred language, foundations and the past.

Paul de Man presents another understanding of myth. In his reading of Schlegel, de Man refers to Schlegel's understanding of myth and poetry. "And then he [Schlegel] says 'This is the origin of all poetry, to suspend the notions and the laws of rational thought and to replace us within a beautiful confusion of fantasy in the original chaos of human nature (for which mythology is the best name)'" (de Man, 181). Yet in de Man's study of Schlegel, he reveals that this chaos of nature is not one of beautiful symmetry. The language of myth, the authentic and authenticating language, is radical and arbitrary. "The authentic language is the language of madness, the language of error, and the language of stupidity" (de Man, 181). De Man's reading points out the unreliability of mythic language. In a search for mythic language, the search must always be interrupted by the madness and errors of language.

This study has outlined two approaches to myth, one of sacred and foundational language and the other of the authentic confusion of language, yet both these languages suffer interruptions. Sulak's vision of the past presents a model of these interruptions. In Swearer's discussion of Sulak, the past and the myth are always in the distance. But it is this distance that provides both the trajectory of escape and of action. The mythic texts remain locations of critical distance from the present. This view of the past highlights the difference between mythopoesis as the immediate and unmediated place of myth and action and mythopoetics with critical distance to re-work the myth as potential for action. For Nancy, the interruption of myth is a central point.

> It is here that things are interrupted. The Tradition is suspended at the very moment it fulfills itself. It is interrupted at that precise and familiar point where we know that it is all a myth (Nancy, 52).

Nancy's interruption of myth is what denotes the lack of myth-making; myth no longer has the power to fashion the world.[5] Myths no longer make, instead they, themselves are re-made and re-fashioned. De Man's reading of myth returns to mythopoetics, myth as trope.

In his discussion of the trope of irony, de Man presents some interesting rhetorical considerations for myth.

> "A pattern of words that turns away" -- that turning away is the trope, the movement of the trope. Trope means to "to turn," and it's that turning away, that deviation between literal and figurative meaning, this turning away of the meaning, which is certainly involved in all traditional definitions of irony, "such as meaning one thing and saying something else," or "praise by blame," or whatever it may be -- though one feels that this turning ways in irony involves a little more, a more radical negation than one would have in an ordinary trope such as synecdoche or metaphor or metonymy (de Man, 164-5).

Considering the mad and arbitrary signification of mythic language pointed out by de Man, it seems that mythic language 'turns away.' Myth as the telling language and as the language that creates or makes is, potentially, its own trope of language. For de Man, the mythic language can never escape its rhetorical position as 'mythic language.' Thus in approaching Angkarn's poems, the nature of language (sacred and mad) becomes an essential key in discerning Angkarn's myth-making or rhetoric of myth.

With these paradigms in consideration, Angkarn's poetry can help probe the relationships of myth, language and poetry. *WakThalee* is considered one of Angkarn's best poems and is often cited as source text for understanding the aesthetics of Angkarn's poetry (Chetana, "Art," 218-9). Yet the images and beauty of the poem fall before the potency of his language and his re-writing of myth. Before turning to the exploration of Angkarn's poems, it is necessary to confront the layers of Angkarn's reception and interpretation. Angkarn's poetry directly confronts the poetic traditions of classical Thai poetry.[6]

> Of course it would be easy to look at Angkarn's poetry as breaking with convention since his attitude towards the world is very different from that of ancient poets. Angkarn regards all things in the universe as equal, whereas the convention classifies both animate and inanimate things as good or bad, high or low, godly or earthly, king or commoner, heroes or villains etc. (Manas, 47).

According to Manas, Angkarn's confrontation of classical conventions is both a break with the past traditions but also an adherence to them. Angkarn's breaks with tradition occur within poetical convention.[7]

> This does not mean, however, that the poet ignores the rules of convention or creates his own rules. For Angkarn, who has studied deeply the convention which he regards as Thai heritage, the basic structure of the form is observed but the minor interior arrangements may be manipulated and altered (qtd in Manas, 49 from Suchitra, 76).

It is this tension between poetic convention and creation that marks Angkarn's works. Angkarn's poetic forms seem to take on convention at the level of poetic creation. It can be said that Angkarn, in his study of archaic and classical poetry has recreated the poetic forms. As Manas has pointed out, Angkarn's poetry is markedly different than that of classical poets. Whereas ancient poetry classified and divided the world into its separate orders and hierarchies, Angkarn's poetry breaks down these orders making them universally equal. In this movement and moment, Angkarn re-inscribes the world (and perhaps recreates it).

Angkarn, himself, points towards the relationship of language to creation and myth to poetry. An appreciation of Angkarn's understanding of 'the work of poetry' is essential to this enquiry. In one of the quotes that starts this study, Angkarn responds to a question about the number of poems he has written:

> As a matter of fact, how can you count poetry? It's just like this. you can't count the grains of sand on a beach or the trees in a forest ... poetry is part of my heartbeat, part of my breath ... when I die I'll either be a spirit or a deity... I am a 'kawi' (poet). (Angkarn, Interview from *A Contemporary Siamese Poet*)[8]

In Angkarn's answer to this question, lies the foundation of his understanding of the relationships of poetry, language and myth. The counting of poetry is an impossible task. Poetry (and language) has a correlation to nature. Poems are (somehow) equal to sand and trees, countless in their multitude but beating a rhythm in breath and pulse. Poetic creation is a presence that is bound to the body of the poet and carries over into celestial abodes.

The word *kawii* is especially significant. This word denotes a poetic presence that is related to creation and language. A poet is a *nakkawii*, a person of poetry, while a poem is a *botkawii*, a piece or part of poetry. It is the presence of the poetic that marks the poem and the poet. Although *nak* is contemporarily defined to mean expert and authority, as a part of language it is a 'bound stem' that creates an 'agent noun' (Haas, 260). The poet is the bound agent of the poetic, of poetry. *Bot* is a noun that signifies the text, the lines and the subject (of discussion), yet it also quantifies the sections of proverbs, lessons and verse (Haas, 280). Poems, thus, partake of and are part of the poetic. Poems are separate pieces of and the subject of poetry. But what is this poetic, this *kawii*?

Kawii is a Thai word that includes all the different forms and genres of poetry and song. *Kawii* is etymologically from Pali and it is this link that provides a deeper understanding of the creative potency of poetry. Pali is the language of Thai Buddhism and Buddhist texts. It is the sacred language of the Buddha and the language of sutras and sermons. Poetry is of the sacred tradition, of birth and death, and of creation and enlightenment. Thus when called upon to count and account for his poetry, Angkarn answers (can only answer) 'I am a bound agent of poetry and the poetic.'[9] In response to the parameters of myth and language set forward by Nancy and de Man, it seems that the poet and poem retain the foundational nature of language necessary for mythopoesis and the distance from poetry to poet is the beating heart, punctuated (and perhaps interrupted) by breath.

As the poet and poem are part of the creation of the world, it is only fitting to look at Angkarn's recounting of the coming into being of the world. Angkarn's poem *WakThalee* (Scoop up the Sea) is, in part, a recreation of the Buddhist creation myth, the *Agganna Sutta*. The *Agganna Sutta* (also called "The Discourse on What is Primary") is a speech/sermon of the Buddha that recounts the creation of the world and this sutra is later incorporated in the cycle of time and creation in *The Three Worlds of Phra*

Ruang. In the *Agganna Sutta* the world comes into being through a series of steps involving the de-evolution of spirits into material being. These steps revolve around the coalescence of spirit matter into earth essence. "Then (on one such occasion) an earth essence spread out on the waters" (Collins, 629). Once this essence appears it is only (or not yet) a matter of time before consumption (and greed) begin the advance to materiality. The physical description of this consumption depicts the material effect of this first cause.

> Then, monks, a certain being, greedy by nature, thinking "What can this be?", tasted the earth-essence with his finger. As he tasted the earth-essence with his finger he was pleased, and Craving came upon him. Other beings imitated that being, tasting the earth-essence with their finger(s). They too were pleased, and Craving came upon them. Then, monks, these beings started to eat the earth-essence taking (big) mouthfuls of it with their hands. (Collins, 629)

In this description, greed and physicality are conjoined. The physical actions of scooping this essence, its mouthfuls and handfuls, lends and leads the world into its divisions of being, labor, wealth (caste and class). It is through the consumption and greed that materiality, differentiation and order are put to the world.

With handfuls of "earth-essence spread out on the waters," the creation of the world begins.

Scoop up the Sea[10]

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Scoop the sea onto a plate              feasted with white rice
Grasp for a handful of stars            mixed with salt to eat
Watch the crabs and oysters circle      dancing, singing folk songs
Chameleons and millipedes fly           to eat the sun and moon
A toad mounts the golden palanquin      floating tour on currents of heaven
A bull-frog goes with him               Angels flee into a coconut husk
Earthworms seduce maidens               Apsaras who sleep in the sky
Every cell and spore                    raises their face shining success
Gods bored with celestial mansions      swoop to earth to eat shit
Praising waste that has a               taste wonderful in surplus of words
Jungle groves and thickets              can speak deep philosophy
Sawdust murmuring in sleep              calculates the weight of shadows
Who, wonderful, can reign the sky       Who remains, earthly, low, a buffoon
World of avarice and drunken wrath      Fools, Let's possess excess -Euy[11]
                                                    Angkarn: 2533 B.E
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The title and first line of this poem carry with them the first cause of the world's materiality and suffering. The word *wak*, to scoop, starts the poem and references the physical action of scooping mouthfuls by hand, the arc of the action and the verb leading to the mouth that consumes (and speaks). Angkarn's poem exists at the nexus of poetry, language and myth drawing on the foundational text, words and action of the world's origin.

Thematically and linguistically *WakThalee* invokes the language of sacred beginnings. Considering Nancy's sacred language and mythic scene, *WakThalee* calls out and upon myth. The sacred language that the Buddha speaks is spoken in the poem and the poet speaks the words of that telling. The poem

articulates the scene and language of origin. The first lines of the poem set the primal scene, the mythic action by which the world comes into being. As pointed out by the research of Manas, Angkarn engages the orders and hierarchies of archaic poetry. In Angkarn's order of the world, the differentiation of being is accounted for but is also upset. Beings are divided and differentiated, but in the act of creation/ consumption they are also confused. Interestingly enough, this confusion seems to evoke de Man's view of mythic language as "madness, error and stupidity." This topsy-turvy world is one of "avarice and drunken wrath." The essence of the world and its consumption are the result of fools. The mythic scene is one of chaos, abundance and abandon.

The first action of the world's origin and division is immediately turned around. The mythic consumption of earth-essence is turned back towards the sky as the handfuls grasped are those of stars.

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Scoop the sea onto a plate    feasted with white rice
Grasp for a handful           of stars mixed with salt to eat
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It seems that the mythic scene, its primal essence, is also already interrupted at the moment of its (re-) enunciation. This movement and moment mirrors the 'turning away' of de Man's trope and the 'interruption of myth' of Nancy. The first action and first words turn away from the myth and towards the stars interrupting the de-evolution of being.

Again the poem is caught between mythopoesis and mythopoetics. In addition to the *Agganna Sutta*, this poem evokes its own abundance of foundational texts and poems. The language of the poem also invokes the *Oong Kaan Chaeng Nam*, the Oath of Fealty (the Water Oath) and the *Ramakian*, the Thai rewriting of the Indian epic Ramayana which is also the foundational text of the Chakri dynasty (the current Thai dynasty) (Nitaya, 322). Angkarn's mythic scene is one of confusion, not only of the creation myth, but also of all foundational myths. The abundance of myth creates problems for interpretation because the mythic abundance plays as the creation of myth or the technique of myth.[12] In order to essay this problem, it is necessary to address myth's presentation (presence) in language.

At the same time as these myths are evoked, invoked and inverted, the poet inserts idiom (Nitaya, 322). Idiom presents an interesting new turn. The idiom itself is a play with(in) language but Angkarn plays with this play. Angkarn (bound to poetry) plays within the play of language. This idea bears more analysis. Angkarn's play within the free (loose) play of language reinforces the abundance of myth with an abundance of sound and sense.

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Gods bored with celestial mansions     swoop to earth to eat shit
Praising waste that has a              taste wonderful in surplus of words
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The primal myth of creation is bound to slip within language and a surplus of sense-taste which includes the denigration of the earth-essence to bodily waste. This movement which makes earth-essence equal to shit and seemingly turns away from the myth also speeds the myth up; shit is the result of the materiality of being. The consumption of the sea is a shitty choice based on greed and as eating will eventually produce itself.

In order to get at the language of myth, it is necessary to consider the implications of "a taste wonderful in surplus of words." There is slippage in language at this moment in the poem. The Thai text creates even more concerns as alternate translations yield "taste most wonderful than telling words" and "taste

wonderfully superlative to/at the telling worlds." This moment of indeterminacy of language is also the location of language "at the place of the telling words." Thus Angkarn presents us with a language of confusion and excess. In a telling moment Angkarn reveals his own relation between language and earth:

> We [Angkarn and his mother] would take turns to read out aloud, my mother and I. Once when I recited the sad parting of Inao and Busabe, my mother began to cry. I'm very sensitive, you know ... sometimes I cry too. Before my birth, my mother had a craving for the soil. She ate the soil, the earth ... and then I was born ... and the earth became part of me (Angkarn, Interview from "A Contemporary Siamese Poet").

Angkarn, the poet, suffers the words of indescribable taste. Earth and language are at the mouth. Is this the mythic unification of time and place, soil, shit and song? At this moment of slippage, the cry is expressed.

The *Agganna Sutra* also presents this slippage in language at or around the time of myth. In addition to the repetition of consumption, the myth repeats the slippage of language. After a long time of consumption, the earth-essence is exhausted.

> When it had disappeared, they came together and lamented, "Look (*aho*) the (earth) essence (*rasam*) (has disappeared), look.the essence." So nowadays, when people have tasted something good they say, "Oh the taste, oh the taste!" (*aho rasam*). They recall the original primary word(s), but they don't understand what they mean (Collins, 630).

Nancy's definition of mythic language and mythic scene bears more on this moment in the text than, perhaps, the recounting of the myth itself. It is at the moment of absence that language (and song) becomes most present within the myth. The cry becomes a language of union in the myth and the sound of lamentation. The cry and utterance are related to the withdrawal of abundance. The remnant of the mythic scene lies within language, but it is a language that slips from meaning and emerges from sense.

The final lines of Angkarn's poem mirror this union based upon absence and abundance. Throughout the poem, there is a vacillation in address. The poem begins with an elusive address. The statement (or command) 'scoop the sea' does not refer to the reader or a figure in the poem. This ambiguity is followed up with lines of descriptive chaos with the figures identified by name: chameleon and toad, apsara and angel. This descriptive frame alters the immediacy of the first lines and converts them into a retelling of mythic events. This determined chaos is upset by the final stanza.

The first two lines of the final stanza begin with an open address which is also the question: "who?" It is important to note that this 'who' could also be 'anyone who?' The poem upsets the determined description of the world as retelling and potentially makes the poem a recreation (or creation). 'You' could be the 'who' of which the poet speaks and the poem addresses. It could be you who scoop sea and dines but it could also be anyone. The final lines (a translation nightmare) are filled with hortatory (command) participles but with no term of address and superlatives. Into this drunken world of consumption a strong command is given to the yet ambiguous addressee. The final line is one of union and cry. Each syllable is a command to consume the excellent abundance of the mad world and is the equivalent of 'now,' 'hurry,' and 'let's.' The union is implicit in the mad rush of intoxication and greed and ends with a breathy cry. The final syllable euy is a stable component of poetry and the complement of meter. It is often used to fill out metrical forms, but is often ignored in translation. This syllable is used to show endearment and intimacy to most nouns and names. *Euy* elicits union and lament. Thus the poem

ends with the soft sounds of intimate abundance.a final cry and gasp.

Returning to the *Agganna Sutta,* the withdrawal of meaning continues throughout the sutra as the world gets ordered and takes shape. In two more instances meaning withdraws, beings come together and cries are uttered. The second cry again occurs around consumption while the final cry is uttered around intimate union.

> When it had disappeared, they came together and lamented, "We've had it, the creeper has given out on us!" So nowadays, when people are touched by some hardship, they say, "we've had it, it's given out on us!" They recall the original, primary word(s), but they don't understand what they mean (Collins, 630).

This second interruption of the myth with language repeats the original formula presenting both a new cry and a poetic convention.

> As they were looking at each other with intense longing passion arose in them, and burning came upon their bodies; because of this burning they had sex. When the (other) beings saw them having sex, some threw earth (at them), some threw ashes, others cow-dung, (saying) "Away with you and your impurity, away with you and your impurity!", "How could a being do such a thing to another being?" So nowadays, people in certain areas, when a bride is being led out, throw dirt, ash or cow-dung. They recall the original primary (actions) but they don't understand what they mean (Collins, 631).

This final cry of the *Agganna Sutta* returns us to the confusion of Angkarn's poem. The seduction of Asparas (celestial dancing maidens) by earthworms and the intoxicated cavorting of the animals recreates the burning passion of the beginning of sex. It is important to note the terms of these cries. While the first cry was one of the loss of taste (or words that could correlate to taste), the second cry is one of hardship and suffering. It appears that with each successive cry meaning and abundance further withdraw into and away from language. The final cry is both an abundance of passion and the absence of purity and of order, but is yet the next necessary step in the evolution of humanity. This final cry (of sex) loses even words and language returning to the hoarse cries and actions of passion and intimacy. Thus the mythic scene of language is also the poetry of sense, suffering and sensuality. At the mythic scene of language and creation, language is already in withdrawal and already an utterance of excess and an interruption.

The *Agganna Sutta's* status as sutra presents interesting concerns for this study of myth. These concerns stem from the sutra's framing and interpretation. Interestingly, this sutra is often considered a humorous lesson from the Buddha, yet it is also a poignant discussion of language and creation (Reynolds, personal interview). The discourse on what is primary begins with an argument about class (about the best caste and the best body) by those who have renounced caste (Collins, 627-8). Thus the myth is already framed (although perhaps of later addition) as a sermon on class and caste. The Buddha disrupts (interrupts) this argument with a recollection and a telling of how the world came into being.

The sutra's framing both inserts and strips away the distance of the mythic scene. "At that time there is nothing but water, (all) is darkness, (just) deep darkness" (Collins, 629). The appearance of the "earth-essence" marks the cycle of creation leading to being and language. Interestingly enough, the appearance of the consumption substance also marks the beginning of seasons and time.[13]

> Then, monks, monks these beings started to eat the earth-essence taking (big) mouthfuls of it with their hands. As they did so their self-luminosity disappeared. When their luminosity disappeared, the moon and sun appeared; when the sun and moon appeared, the twinkling stars appeared; when the stars appeared, night and day appeared; when night and day appeared, the seasons and years appeared. Thus far, monks, did the world evolve (Collins, 629).

In this cosmology, the world, time, material and language come into being with greed and consumption. This world is not denounced by the Buddha; it is the nature of the universe to "expand and contract" and to come into being (Collins, 629). The emergence of time in the recounting of creation creates distance between the myth and language.

As a religious text, the sutra is subject to Buddhist hermeneutic and exegetical practices. Whitman's account of Christian allegory provides some perspective to the interruption of this particular myth.

> The word *allegoria* also refers frequently in Christian exegesis to one particular transfer among a series of allegorical transfers from the literal sense: the 'allegorical' meaning, the 'tropological' or 'moral' meaning, and the 'anagogic' meaning (Whitman, 267).

In addition to the distance implied in the framing of the 'discourse' and the stripping away of time to the primal myth and its subsequent creation of time, the myth (and Angkarn's poem) must now contend with the moral and rhetorical interpretations of the text. The structure of the sutra lends itself to allegorical interpretation, as the Buddha (in the framing) is using this myth as a parable to demonstrate the creation (and unimportance) of class and caste. Morally the world is an impure place and caste a product of greed, suffering and sex.

As "the discourse of what is primary" describes the progression into being, the question of what is primary lingers to the end. In the final section of the discourse, what is primary turns out not to be what has come to pass, what has come to be past and cried for, but an action located in the present:

> Of these four classes, monks, he who is a monk, an Arahant, who has lived the (holy) life, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, in whom the fetters of existence are destroyed, who is released by Right Wisdom - he is properly called what is primary among them. (Collins, 634).

The primary of action displaces the primal scene of poem, myth and language. The ethical interpretation supports the myth's withdrawal into language and "myth as myth" and converts the creation into a rhetorical device for making disciples less argumentative.

Yet even these ethical interpretations cannot completely distance the interruptions of the poem and the myth. Angkarn's poem does not make judgements on the moral abuses of the world and its wrathful intoxication, instead the final cry of the poem revels in its own ambiguity and abundance. This tension is supported by the final framing of the *Agganna Sutta*. The sutra winds down with the verse of a Brahmin which is re-sung by the Buddha (repeated twice).

> For those who rely on clan, the Ksatriya is the best in the world; (but) the person endowed with wisdom and (good) conduct is the best in the whole universe (Collins, 634).

The sutra ends with a verse, which is not created but is re-sung. Although this verse contains moral and ethical conducts the final words of the sutra mirror Angkarn's last and lost cry: rejoice. "The Blessed One said this. Vasettha and Bharadvaja were pleased, and rejoiced in the Blessed One's words" (Collins, 634). Poem, myth and sermon are disrupted by language and the call/cry to join in. Thus, although it seemed that the sutra as sutra already presents itself in distance from the mythic scene and as allegory, the eruptions and interruptions of language destabilize its retelling and invoke instead a (re-) creation of the myth of language and poetry.

For this study, there is one final treatise on the creation of the world. *The Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, presents a final step in the stripping away of myth from language. *The Three Worlds* is a 14th century cosmological treatise on the nature of kingship and righteous behavior. Sulak's nostalgic use of this treatise (and of Angkarn) further presents the tension between mythopoetics and mythopoesis. For Sulak, the myth exists as a place of critical perspective from which to alter the future. Thus, time (as timeline and separation) and distance are essential in his understanding of myth. Time, in this account, precedes creation and language (Reynolds, 321). Sulak's desire for critical perspective needs myth as a convention (of ethics and rhetoric) and not a disruption. *The Three Worlds* presents the creation myth as a logistical, geographical and temporal account, but even within this account, language (through repetition) disrupts the necessary distance. This text, more than any other, is a detailed differentiation of the world (three worlds): the divine, the human and the hellish. Within these three worlds, only at the end does the creation myth rear its disruptive tongue.

This account of the creation is an embedded one. The evolution of materiality and impurity is strictly tied to ethical and moral concerns. The account of creation begins with a textual retelling of the digression to materiality (Reynolds, 321-3). But another telling disrupts this retelling.

> The peoples see what has happened and are surprised and marvel. They then meet, consult and speak as follows. (Reynolds, 323).

Again, at this moment in the creation myth, the myth returns to language. The communal retelling is embedded with and repeats almost word for word the textual retelling. But in these moments, time is an aspect not a tense (before, after and already) disrupts the description of the previous account. This retelling (and interior recreation) of the myth is bound to the conversational complaints of the group united in surprise and worry. Their language efforts are disrupted by recall and absence, by the disruption of language. It is in these two counts of the myth that the difference between Sulak's positioning of the past and Angkarn's possession by it reinforce the intersections and interruptions of myth, language and poetry in Angkarn's work.

Throughout this study of Angkarn's poem, language reveals the tensions between mythopoetics and mythopoesis. *WakThalee* breaks between the conventions of poetry and poetry's play within language. Angkarn's poem (and the sutra) revel in and reveal not the myth of the world's creation but language of myth and the myth of language. "It is such because this authentic language is a mere semiotic entity open to the radical arbitrariness of any sign system and as such capable of circulation, but which as such is profoundly unreliable" (de Man, 181). The final cry of the poem and the eruption of language break down language, as communication, into creation. The surge of this mythopoesis exposes language as the lost and last cry of suffering in ambiguous (undifferentiable) union. The intersection of poetry, language and myth that Angkarn channels is the crash of language back upon itself.

One final turn: what are the intersections of the writing of poetry, language and the past? In his article "The Sense of the Past in the Poetry of Angkarn Kalayanapong", Chetana Nagavajara points towards the immediacy of the past in the works of Angkarn. "The past that matters so much to poet here is a very remote one, not of historic, but rather of pre-historic, primordial and cosmic dimensions" (Chetana, "Sense," 15). The past of Angkarn is in the immediacy of language and its disruptions. For Chetana, Angkarn's possession and interruption by language yield an unfortunate "tyrannical power over the present" (Chetana, "Sense," 23). Yet this tyranny is not unfortunate, it is the potential making of poetry and language.

> The sense of the past, in this case in not characterized by representational faithfulness, for a poet, and not a historian, is at work (Chetana, "Sense," 23).

The poetry of Angkarn is of the earth and of language and, as such, reveals and revels the slippages and interruptions of the myth of language. In bondage to poetry, Angkarn can only yield to language. The inscriptions of poetry and myth are the unmediated and undecipherable interruptions and deceptions of language from the mythic earth.

Past Inscription[14]

```
This world fakes a large library          scripts old and new to be read
Amusing stories on each leaf              of many kinds, under the sea and sky
Past inscription hidden in earth          in stone all writings of the sun
The earth-mother is kindhearted           teaching more than can be understood
Water letters stored in cliff shadows     stream scripts tell excessive tales
Evolutionary animals dried and dead       leave philosophical legacy of thought
Much value in every element and grain     comparable to brilliant diamonds
Emeralds would have what value            lacking sand and dirt
Everything balanced worth                 weighed on scales to a mote
Earth and sky contest  in thought         that imaginative spirit exceeds
Some places beautifully aesthetic         hide language, poetry pure
rhythmic songs of jungle seas             brew immortality gainst ages' tides
Hone vision razor sharp                   choose wisdom skilled and brave
Study languages of earth, water sky       searching for bliss that endures
To meet life's meaning                    written testimonies in smoke
Use creation to shine life                for immortals conquer death
Placed above a minute                     then supernaturally beyond
To be born sacred surplus                 worth every breath that does not fade
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The earth tricks itself out in languages immeasurable that possess the poet and propel the poem. The aged stone chronicles of empire and poetic convention vie against the ageless rhythm of the sea of language crashing upon (and eroding) attempts at inscribed meaning.

Endnotes

[1] An initial note on orthography, transcription and references: the Thai poets' names are transcribed into English following standard practice in Thai literature and other translations. There is inconsistency within cited texts as I have stayed faithful to the citation -- this indiscrepancy indicates a certain

indeterminacy in contemporary scholarship regarding Thai writers and poets. In transcribing Thai titles into English I have endeavored to follow vowel lengths and consonants, following Haas. Thai poets, writers and scholars are cited by their given name and listed in the bibliography given name first followed by family name as is the accepted style for Thai authors within Chicago style and the Library of Congress.

[2] The term mythopoetics, in this work, stands for the intersection of poetic conventions (language and meter), myth and the rewriting or recreation of myth. For this study, it is a working term for the exploration of the tensions in language and poetry that appear around the invocation of myth.

[3] Angkarn's poetry offers an excellent initial model of the contemporary use of myth in poetry because of his high standing as a contemporary poet and that Angkarn's rewritings seem to be independent of the political and social motivations of other contemporary poets. In addition, Angkarn's poetry is often 'put to use' by different political and social movements, highlighting the importance of myth and poetry in Thailand.

[4] The poet Khomthuan Khanthanu uses the meter of this inscription and rewrites its definition of the Thai state in the poem *PharaSawathi* (City of Devils). This poem mimes the meter and language of the original inscription but converts it into social critique of the inequities of Bangkok (Krungtheep -- City of Angels). The title of the poem comes from Buddhist scripture outlining improper (unvirtuous) city life.

[5] The *interruption of myth* is Nancy's response and interpretation of Bataille's absence of myth.

[6] Manas Chitakasem's "Poetic Conventions and Modern Thai Poetry" places Angkarn (and Naowarat Phonpaiboon and Khomthuan Khanthanu) within and in response to the genres and traditions of classical Thai poetry. His study points towards a need for further investigation into the core poetic texts of the Thai tradition and the rewriting and recreation of this tradition by contemporary Thai poets. Texts of special importance to this study are the *Cindamanii*, a treatise on versification, and the *Klon Konlabot Siriwibunkiti*, a *klon* poem which constructs and outlines the possibilities and potentials of the klon as a verse form.

[7] Angkarn is known for his manipulation of the *klon 8* form of Thai poetry. Although the style calls for meters of eight syllables, Angkarn often uses 7-11 syllables in each line although still adhering to the exterior and interior rhyming conventions.

[8] This interview has already been translated into English and I do not have access to the Thai copy, yet I suspect that the word translated as written may be the word '*taeng*' which has special implications for poetry and song. It implies to create not just to write.

[9] This etymological approach and the following readings of Angkarn's poetry and the *Agganna Sutta* are influenced by the methodology of Agamben's *Language and Death*.

[10]My translations of these poems and the research of this article emerge from my dissertation (in progress). I was first initiated into the study of contemporary Thai poetry as a research assistant with the Thailand Research Fund's Research Program: "Poetry as an Intellectual and Spiritual Force" from January to September of 1998.

[11] Interestingly enough, the end lines of these poems appear differently in different poetical and critical

editions. It seems as if the poem is of uncertain ending.

[12] The mythic abundance and surplus of language become increasingly important openings into the study of contemporary and classical Thai poetry.

[13] It is at this intersection of sacred, language, poetry, and myth that yield Rimbaud and Holderlin as excellent companion works for an appreciation of the poetry of Angkarn and provide avenues for future comparative work.

[14] For comparison please consult alternative translations of both poems *WakThalee* and *Caaruk Adiit*. Alternative translations of *WakThalee* are available in Manas (pg 48), Three Thai Poets (pg 15) and Angkarn (pg 41). An alternative translation of *Caaruk Adiit* is available in "A Sense of the Past in the Poetry of Angkarn Kalayanaphong" by Dr. Chetana Nagavajara.

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Capital Punishment in the Philippines

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Introduction

One of the striking features of post-Cold War Southeast Asia (SEA) is the prevalence of capital punishment in their justice systems. So pervasive is its use that Amnesty International has remarked that the region is riding "against the tide" towards abolition (Amnesty International Annual Report, 1997). In fact, of all the ten member states of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), no country was willing to abandon capital punishment under the Second International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights' (ICCPR) Optional Protocol (Eldridge, 2002, p. 67). What's more, during the 1990s, the numbers of reported death sentences in SEA increased considerably, and underreporting remained a common practice, especially among countries run by a military government (See Table 1).[1]

Many experts have pointed to the presence of capital punishment in Asia as reflective of the distinctive Asian view of human rights (Tatsuo, 1999; An-Naim, 1999; Chan, 1999), which emphasizes punitive sanctions for transgressors and absolute authority by the state (Christie & Roy, 2001; Domikova-Hashimoto, 1996; Eldridge, 2002). However, discourse on capital punishment focusing on Southeast Asia remains limited to frequency studies and public opinion polls (Gallup International Millennium Survey, 2000; Simon & Blaskovich, 2002). Furthermore, discussions of the subject are largely framed or cited in reference to the nature of the death penalty in the United States and Europe (Hood, 2001; Zimring & Hawkins, 1986; Zimring, 2003). Surprisingly, the social and political influences of these laws are ignored for the most part. This gap in the literature causes many to question the popularity of capital punishment in Southeast Asian countries.

While an examination of the social and political currents of each country would perhaps be the best way to answer the question "Why is there strong support for capital punishment in Southeast Asia?", this paper will begin this effort by looking specifically at the Philippines, a society that has received more exposure to democratic tenets and human rights advocacy than other Southeast Asian countries (Blitz, 2000).

The post-Marcos administration wavered on human rights issues by initially abolishing the death penalty only to reinstate it six years later. Given the local abolitionists' fervor after twenty years of dictatorship, vacillation on the issue was surprising. To attempt to understand, one must consider both the political dynamics within the Philippine government as well as the influence of the media on public sentiment and perception of crime. Regarding the latter issue, a corollary to the overthrow of the Marcos authoritarian regime was the rise of freedom of the press in reporting human rights violations and other forms of abuse. Media reporting had engendered public frustration over the government's inability to reduce crime. To some extent these reports pushed the public to lobby for tougher anti-crime measures and seek the reinstatement of the ultimate punishment. The option to use capital punishment by the Philippine government was realized by executing seven individuals beginning the year 1999 until a temporary moratorium was enacted in 2001.

Understanding the content of the law on capital punishment may be crucial in explaining Philippine exceptionalism with respect to capital punishment but it cannot itself explain the various factors that influence its enactment. This paper suggests that the likelihood of the emergence of capital punishment in the Philippines can be better understood in the context of (1) the swing toward political conservatism, (2) the social timing, and (3) the impact of the populist movement that emerged after the Marcos overthrow. The rest of the article will compare the Philippines with the American model of capital punishment. This comparison will consider how factors such as state and prevailing social forces mutually transform the degree and directions of change in legislative policies, in particular the historical context and social structure.

Background of the Study: The Practice of Capital Punishment in the Philippines

In the Philippines, the practice of capital punishment predates recorded history (See Chart 1), and only with the accession of Mrs. Corazon Aquino to presidential office, and the drafting of the new Constitution, was capital punishment abolished in 1987. The Aquino government was responsible for restoring various democratic institutions, including the Congress once regulated by Marcos. In 1993, the Philippine government under the Ramos administration reinstated capital punishment through the Republic Act (RA) 7659. The law argued that certain criminals deserve to die because of their horrendous acts; such crimes are considered so evil that killing the perpetrators is the only just way to deal with it. Accordingly, RA 7659 included thirteen classes of crime, but was later expanded to 46 capital offenses (Chan Robles [on-line], retrieved 2002).[2]

As of June 2002, the mandate was responsible in bringing 1,007 (including women, minors, and aged) inmates to death row at the New Bilibid Prison and the Correctional Institution for Women in Manila (FLAG 2002). The Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG) estimated that the numbers were higher since inmates sentenced from the provincial prisons are still waiting to be transferred to the death row in the capital. FLAG further stated that the majority of the prisoners are poor and barely educated. Sixty percent of them earned less than the government mandated minimum wage prior to conviction. Eighty-six had had their death sentences confirmed, mostly for rape (crimes involving rape, rape of a minor,

incestuous rape, and other aggravated forms of the crime). The death penalty law allows two years and six months after the inmate's sentence is confirmed. The law maintains death only by lethal injection.

Data and Methodological Concerns

While studies of lawmaking are intertwined with many factors in both modern punishment and sociology, my objective here is to explore the implicit meta-narratives that underlie the reinstatement of the Philippine death penalty.[3] Following Margaret Somers' (1998) method, this paper appropriates "historical narratives" that are based on a relational mechanism that generates causal explanations. Unlike the effort to invoke a "general theory" in research, Somers appropriated Kuhnian realism by privileging causal narratives (mechanisms) and pathway dependence instead of relying on general theories in investigating social phenomena (Somers, 1998, pp. 766-768). Somers pointed out that the success of any explanation resides in its accounting of the relational processes of interaction, between and among identities within the temporal process of the event. This meant, according to Somers, that research on certain social phenomenon must take into account the contextual conditions (such as motivations, information, and institutions) "under which maximization and rational calculation manifest themselves in pure form, under which they assume different forms, and under which they break down" (1988, p. 767).

Attempts therefore to understand the Philippine case of capital punishment depend on the "pathways of agential interactions" that result from past choices and temporally remote events that explain subsequent paths of its development. Earlier studies of Mann (1986), Skocpol (1979), Stichcome (1978), and Tilly (1984, 1990) have demonstrated that social phenomena are both empirically and historically accounted through causal explanation (the relational unit of interaction) that incorporated degrees of path dependency. Hence, as advocated by Somers, the absence of law-like generalization or theory does not prevent us from causal analysis; rather such historical solicitation explains the variation and relational linkages, and can best elucidate how and why capital punishment continues to exist in the Philippines.

Written accounts available from the timeframe before, during, and after the Death Penalty Act was reinstated in the Philippines (1986-1999) were reviewed for analysis. I gathered information for this study from 25 Philippine periodicals, journals, government and non-government organizations, and religious publications.

My data highlights two significant episodes of capital punishment history in the Philippines: first the reinstatement of the law in 1993, and second the execution of Leo Echagaray in 1999. These events became points of national contention regarding the practice and were a lightning rod for both supporters and opponents of the law.

There are several limitations of the study. One is the restricted access to the full records of the Philippine legislature. Therefore secondary materials, worldwide web postings, and other publications within the public sphere were utilized.

Theoretical Consideration: Capital Punishment and State

Despite numerous investigations as to why capital punishment still exists in modern times, the

contention over its rationale remains unresolved. Neo-liberal thinking, since Becarria's Essays on Crime and Punishment was published in 1764, ignited modern debates about the morality and efficacy of the practice (e.g. see debates on Baird & Rosenbaum, 1995). This preoccupation with capital punishment is hardly the result of a special attraction of many modern scholars to the relationship between punishment and the state (Bedau, 1997; Foucault, 1977; Garland, 1990; Hirsch, 1991; Kirchheimer, 1969; Mitchell and Lefton, 2000; Radelet and Borg, 2000; Rushce and Kirkhheimer, 1968; and Torr and Egendorf, 2000). Social scientists drawing on Neo-Marxism have addressed this issue in discussing the role of the "law" and how the modern state became a significant player in enacting mandates, which serve as an apparatus to protect the interest of the capitalist class and to maintain their control over the "dangerous classes" (Chambliss, 1964, 1994; Lynch & Groves, 1986; MacLachlan, 1974; Vold, 1958; Vold & Bernard, 1986; and Vold, et al., 1998). Marxist theory states that the law cannot be understood solely on its content, but rather on the basis of its historically specific interrelationship with other non-penal aspects of social policies. As Quinney (1980) pointed out, the system of punishment is designed not just to control crime, but along with other institutions of capitalist state, to repress the people. Furthermore, it is argued that the laws on punishment in capitalist societies are organized around a series of bourgeois values and ideological conceptions that tie punishment to the logic of capitalist economic relations (Rushe and Kirkhheimer, 1968). Marxist theory argues that the law is created by the state to appear that it is serving the interest of the whole society. It is intended to appear relatively autonomous from the dominion of the ruling class, and functions entirely against the interest of the elites. But in reality, its long-term tendencies are instrumental in giving the dominant class a larger role in the practice of state power to preserve their status quo (Garland, 1990, pp. 89-110).

Among Marxist thinkers, the law is viewed as both a form of ideological legitimation and also a political instrument of the bourgeois state to promote ruling class power. The work of Rusche and Kirkhheimer (1968) suggests that the law on punishment is not only a social response to criminality, as advocated by Durkheim and Foucault, but is primarily a mechanism operating the struggle between social classes. Based on their account of the late Middle Ages and the middle of the twentieth century penal practices, they explain that choices of penal methods are determined by "the basic social relations" in every regime in history. They further argue that it is the labor market that influences the state's choice of penal methods. According to them, punitive penal policies are a kind of "coercive ancillary" to the labor market, ensuring that the poorer classes are unable to sustain a living by criminal means, and threatening severe penalties for those who are tempted to try. As noted, the widespread use of corporal and capital punishment is evident during periods when there is an ample supply of labor. Conversely, when labor threatens to exceed supply, the state becomes more cautious to dispense human lives since penal exploitation of labor is realized to be significant in the survival of the capitalist mode of production.

Aside from being an instrument of class domination, the law also operates as an ideological apparatus in reproducing cultural categories on which capitalist rule depends. According to Douglas Hay (1975), criminal law details the ways in which ruling class hegemony can be sustained by strategic use of discretion in criminal justice, careful management of symbols and ceremony, and the ideological appeal of a system that generally abides by its own legal ideals. The law reinforces the claims of the ruling elite exercised through punishment. It reproduces the forms and figures of class division as evident from the overrepresentation of the underclass in the criminal justice system. Foucault (1977), although not Marxist in interpretation, echoes that policies such as capital punishment exist as a symbolic display of state power influenced by governing authorities and the dominant group. He suggests that "the governing ideology does not necessarily operate by violence or repression but rather through the law" (Foucault, 1977, pp. 24-28, 257-292). The law legitimizes the claims of the ruling class and

sanctions the legitimacy of their authority through the honorific will of the underclass.

The theoretical trajectory established by variants of Marxist analysis thus contributes to our understanding of the relationship between state and the reinstatement of capital punishment in the Philippines. It is in this formulation that capital punishment represents not only a reaction to punish criminals but was a result emanating from macrohistorical and macrostructural conjectures.

Marcos Aftermath: Transition to Democracy

The years after Marcos was removed by the 1986 People Power Revolution brought major transformations that were significant in producing varying approaches by the government in the application of capital punishment. First, the succeeding governments had to ensure that the political power would be brought back to the local government. This meant that the control of ruling elites in local and national administration would be replaced by giving credence to the highly active participation of a civil society.[4] The passing of the new constitution in 1987 was among the first symbolic victories for many advocates of human rights, since the new Bill of Rights addressed the basic issues significant in reestablishing democracy. Second, neo-liberal economic policies had been adapted to tear down "guarded" industries which had been monopolized by many of Marcos' cronies in order to create market conditions for economic competition and enhancement of traditional export earnings. To ensure public and business confidence, the government enacted several laws that would pave the way for the Medium Term Development Plan, as well as for the country's dream of industrialization by the end of the century. [5] Third, an amalgamation of political interests from peasant movements and the middle and upper classes of Philippine society had been strengthened by their ties to the same experiences under Marcos' machineries of subjugation. The former had always been viewed as a threat to the status quo while the latter, although having the means to resist, were resigned to living under Marcos, so long as their businesses were not affected.

Political Transitions

The transition to democracy meant political reconditioning. The new government had to deal with huge political setbacks including management of old Marcos cronies who were still holding important economic and political seats (Lopez, 1998), military loyalty, and a $ 27 billion (US dollar) deficit (Iyer, et. al, 1987). Because of this, Aquino appointed "liberal" representatives to her cabinet to oversee that the process of democratization would align to the visions of the new government.[6] Many of these liberal cabinet members were imprisoned by Marcos and had developed a deep sense of propriety to defend the present government from any threat to its security (Mangahas, 1999).

But one of the biggest barriers for the Aquino administration was the military. When Aquino sought peace negotiations for national reconciliation with the communist and Muslim insurgents, the loyalty of ultra conservative armed forces eroded. Dismayed by the "soft approach" of the new administration in dealing with insurgency, the Reformed Army Movement (RAM), the right wing military forces, led six unsuccessful military coups between the years of 1987-1989. Aquino was left with little option but to compromise her position by allowing the military to freely launch counterinsurgency measures, without military threats to the existence of the civilian government. The all-out campaign in the early 1990s against the communist rebels took off after the failure of almost one year of the peace negotiations with the National Democratic Front (NDF), the political body of the underground Left. The military campaign was also expanded in capturing and subjugating powerful Islamic militant groups, the Moro

National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The effect of military influence broadened the moral panic over "liberalism" in the new government and was exacerbated by associating the term with communism. It caused the purging of several of the cabinet ministers, perceived as being "liberal" who were vocal about human rights violations and were strong campaigners against the death penalty (Hutchcroft, 1996). Pressure from the military and conservative groups, for Aquino to eliminate these ministers from their respective government offices, had reduced the power of the government to deliver its pledges to protect human rights. Furthermore it empowered the militia to build their own defense against the communist rebels and their suspected allies.

When Fidel Ramos entered the presidency in 1992, the conditions to reinstate capital punishment had already gained general acceptance from the public. Ramos and his military allies had earlier spearheaded the passing of a bill to reinstate capital punishment. Being a decorated general himself, containment of insurgency and public order was Ramos' primary concern, and paved the way for his economic strategy to reopen the Philippine economy to international trade.[7] He vehemently insisted in his first State of the Nation address that the new Congress reinstate the death penalty as part of his grand master plan for development (Fookien Times Yearbook, 1993, p. 27). The yearning for speedy industrialization and the growing competition for foreign investment propelled Ramos to impose tougher criminal measures that would bolster public and business confidence, and entice local entrepreneurs and transnational corporate (TNC) investments. He specifically proposed the expansion of the death penalty bill to include economic crimes such as smuggling, illegal export of foreign currency, and bribery.

On December 3, 1993, RA 7659 was passed unanimously under Ramos' direction for the restoration of the death penalty for certain heinous crimes (Labog, 1993). The quick passing of this measure was partly a political move since a majority of those elected in the Congress were from Ramos' political party (i.e. Lakas NUCD-National Union of Christian Democrats). But the move to reinstate capital punishment was not passed without the support and lobbying of emerging political agents in the House of Congress.

Reemergence of Political Agents

During the economic prosperity of the mid 1990s, there had been an expansion of the "middle class" (Pinches, 2000). Historically, the middle class had been influential in bringing into the mainstream acceptance for the various issues that had been under the heavy shadow of the Philippine class structure. Hounded by threats during the dictatorship, the middle and upper class learned that political transformation could only be ushered in by a new government and through their active participation in movements for social justice. This unique convergence had unleashed the opportunity for the country to improve the stability of democracy, and created the necessary conditions to embrace more "liberal" thoughts to address the many ills of the country.

Many of these so-called society "watchdogs" and active political agents came from the middle class.[8] These groups were split between the new liberals and conservatives. The liberals were mainly comprised of non- government organizations, academics and intellectuals, ethnic minorities, and marginalized populations. The conservatives, on the other hand, belonged to the business classes, professionals, and the military, that derived their power from their institutional positions. Most of the middle class were

well connected, well to do, and had easy access to media. They were the apparent forces wrestling to influence the majority of the population to support or dismiss the reinstatement of capital punishment. The shift in the economic base, with the reemergence of middle class, also shifted the power organizing and influencing the law making process. Often well educated, the middle class was politically sensitive to the many issues surrounding the government. They became the new political agents that had rigorously engaged within the debates about the death penalty.

A number of these political agents were of Chinese descent and held prestigious economic and political seats in the country. However, their economic status made them ideal prey for kidnap-for-ransom gangs that had beleaguered the capital city of Manila. In the beginning of 1993, reports of kidnappings and murder of individuals with Chinese Filipino background caught media attention and was carefully followed-up. The tragedies of kidnappings that befell the Chinese Filipino community incited a strong call for reformation in the criminal justice system. Frustrated over the government's inadequacies in providing protection for their economic enterprises and personal lives, Chinese civic organizations and other middle class-based anti-criminal groups strongly supported the Ramos campaign to restore capital punishment. The coalition of rich Chinese business owners and the Citizen's Action Against Crime (CAAC) were the two main lobbying bodies pressuring the government into taking serious action regarding the state of crime in the country. They staged a series of widely attended demonstrations and campaigned for public awareness of the state of crime in the Philippines (Alampay, 1993; Sarmiento, 1993; Flores & Agnote, 1993).

The vigilance of these lobbying groups also exposed many problems within the judicial system, and reports of judicial corruption became rampant in the media, but to no avail (Pacis, 1993, January 23, p. 4).[9] During 1993, a series of expose articles brought strong criticism highlighting numerous complaints of bribery and obstruction of justice by judges. This in effect instigated several resignations from the Lower and the Supreme Court (de Guzman 1993; Burgos, 1993). There were perceptions that the court worked in favor of the wealthy and the influential, while the poor and ill-educated were vulnerable to the vagaries of a system that they could not afford and did not understand.

The failure of the court to uphold a clean bill of corruption concerned many about how it could insulate itself from business and political interest. After the passing of the death penalty law, the judiciary system, despite its efforts to uphold justice based on reason, was under extreme pressure from the anti-crime groups to apply the law to any crime deemed punishable by death. As Gluckman observed:

> In the Philippines the lower courts impose the death penalty. Critics say this procedure spawned a 'death rush' among justices eager to appease the public appetite for vengeance. Indeed, many prisoners went to jail in T-shirt emblazoned with the motto, "Guillotine Club." These were gifts from judges who ascended to the exclusive association by issuing a death decree (1994, p. 4).

The intense public support for the death penalty was instigated, in part, by the media portrayal of the state of crime in the country.

The Media

The attention given by the media to crime was reported side by side with the discussions on reinstating capital punishment. To compare how media influenced public policy on punishment, Table II and III

provide a snapshot of media coverage on rape, murder, graft and corruptions, juxtaposed with coverage on capital punishment.

Table II: Media and periodical coverage on capital punishment by year (1988- 2001)

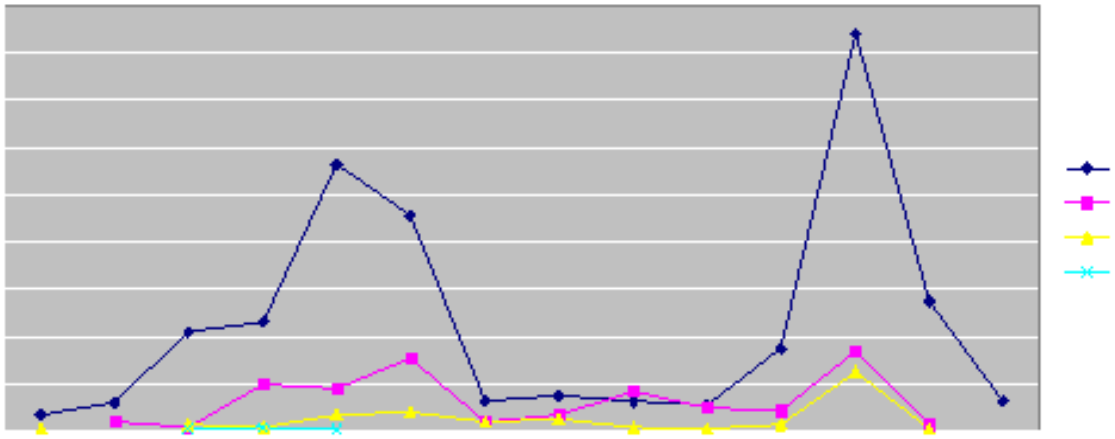
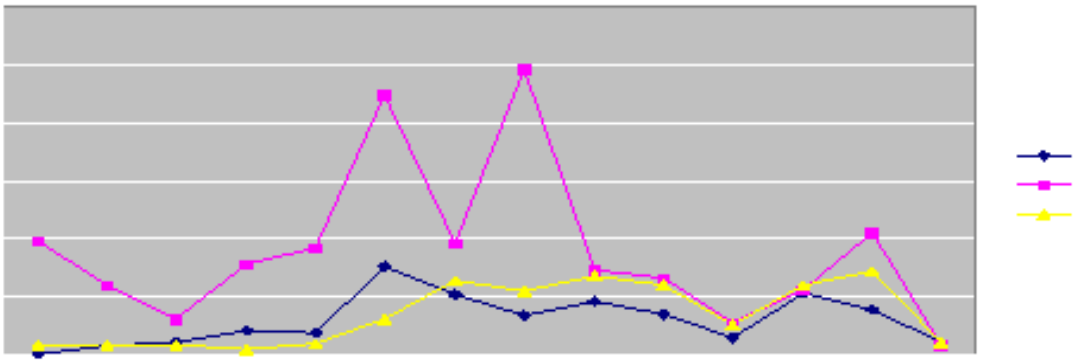


Table III: Number of media coverage on rape, murder, and graft and corruption by year (1988-2001)



The Saliency of Crime

Since the new constitution assured legal security for the media to freely express their news and opinions, criminal reports became a staple for the sensationalist approach to news reporting. As Table III shows, the year 1993 was the apex of media coverage on rape and murder. The widespread reporting of the rape, murder, and kidnappings of children of rich Filipinos and Chinese-Filipinos meant that many questioned the ability of the Philippine National Police (PNP) to restore order and public safety (PDI, January 1, 1993, p. 1; February 17, 1993, p. 1). The vigilance of media reporters to follow crime reports exposed many illegal activities of local bureaucrats and police officers (PDI, 1993, January 13, p. 1).[10]

Months before the Congress voted for the reinstatement of capital punishment, editorial and opinion writers joined the Ramos administration in pressing lawmakers to make corruption and rape crimes as

principal offenses warranting execution.

The Echagaray Case

In 1999, the first execution took place after the death penalty was reinstated in 1993. Leo Echagaray, a 35-year-old house painter, was executed for raping his 10 year-old step daughter (PDI, 1999, January 5, pp. 1, 12). The event surrounding Echagaray's execution highlighted a long- standing bifurcation of Philippine society over the practice of the death penalty. Because his execution was the first to take place in more than 1,000 death sentences, it was a symbolic act on the part of the government to prove to the public that they have the political will to abide with the law. The media was quick to pick the issue and placed wide attention both in televised public discussions and newspaper editorials, following the deliberation in court regarding Echagaray's fate (See Table II).

Despite heavy resistance to rescind Echagaray's death penalty from liberal groups and the Catholic Church, the following of death penalty supporters was so immense that one editorial quoted that the country was in a "hanging mood" (Gastardo-Conaco, 1999, January 17, p. 7). Public opinion about the matter weighed deeply against Echagaray. Television polls reported a 3 to 1 ratio of the sampled population in favor of his death (Cruz, 1999, January 6, p. 1), while 8 out of 10 Filipinos supported death for convicts of heinous crimes with rape as the most deserving of death, followed by kidnapping, murder, and drug trafficking (Pazzibugan, 1999, January 16, p. 14).

While there has been more attention given to pro-capital punishment supporters in the media, the anti-death penalty campaigns remained almost invisible to the mainstream media. The Catholic Church, human rights groups, women's groups, and many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) waged their cause within the boundaries of their influence, in their own parishes, the street, and the legislative assembly, through their relatively small demonstrations, fliers, and worldwide web postings. In fact, the Catholic Church and non-profit organizations chose a grass-roots approach for their campaign by mobilizing the urban poor, peasant groups, and industrial workers. However, the majority of the poor of the country lacked the necessary knowledge about the issue. They were completely dependent on the media as source of information and opinions. For the most part, they lacked the political will and the teeth to organize themselves for crises or issues that affected their interests. As observed, they were easily swayed by the pro-capital punishment campaigns whose presence in the media was largely portrayed as experts with authority. The initiatives created by members of NGOs had enlightened a small number of urban poor activists, whose sense of Echagaray's execution was a representation of the inequality existing in Philippine society.

Among the anti-death penalty groups, the Catholic Church received the most criticism from the other camp. This criticism was in part because the Church was the most aggressive and the most manipulative in swaying their members to support the rescinding of Echagaray's execution. But the Church's recent feud with the state over "family planning" had placed its influence in a precarious position for persuading its members and bringing the public to its side. More so, the media had magnified the long time question about the separation of the Church and the State in dealing with issues that concerned the public good (Lim Ubac, 1998: 5). In most cases, the Church had been satirized as too lenient on crime and for disregarding the suffering of the victims.

Victim's narration

The narration of Echagaray's victim's story on television and in the newspapers, set the spark to a series of demonstrations that besieged the capital (Pazzibugan & Yamsuan, 1999, January 11, p. 2). In the past, rape cases had been underreported in the media. But in the five years before Echagaray's execution there had been an increase in reports on incestual rape or rape with murder (Zarco & Candaliza, 1995). Part of the reason for the increase was the emergence of women's rights movement in the past thirty years. As a result of this movement, more and more female lawmakers were elected to public office. In addition, more women's services had sprung up nationwide in accommodating women who fell victims to domestic violence and rape. However, most women's groups did not favor execution, but rather supported the rehabilitation of the perpetrators (SIBOL, 2001). Nevertheless, what made the Echagaray case unacceptable to the public was that he had violated his own stepdaughter.

Culturally, rape in the Philippines means a lifetime of shame for the victim. Most women would rather separate themselves from their reference group than live with the stigma of being a rape victim. Violation of one's "womanhood" is considered a violation of social expectations. In these circumstances, the role of capital punishment as vengeance comes to the foreground. To pursue execution meant a "closure" to all the tragedies of the victims. In the Philippines, financial compensation from the perpetuators or from the government is non-existent, so that many feel the only way to compensate for all their loss and feelings of injustice, is to execute the perpetrator.

Sympathizing with the grief of Echagaray's victim, a number of politicians and movie actors joined the growing movement to pursue the execution (Lim Ubac & Burgonio, 1999, January 12, p. A1). The sentiment against Echagaray also reverberated from major capital cities in the provinces and far-flung towns. The public cry for executions was not only felt as some schema for vengeance, but a demand to prove that the laws were upheld. Dante Jimenez of the Volunteers against Crime and Corruption (VACC) summed it up:

> The protection of human rights is a two way thing. Echagaray had already exhausted all means to absolve himself. On the other side of the law, due process had been served to him. But on the part of the victim, justice is still awaiting to be served. The public is yet to witness a real execution. We cannot say that the death penalty is not a deterrent to crimes (Lubac, 1999, January 1, p. 6).

Media Politics

Conservative points of view dominated the mainstream media on Echagaray's execution, and liberal expressions of opinion were usually met with resistance from the public as being too soft on criminals. The upsurge of conservative news and opinions can be attributed to the financial ownership and structure of the media, at least in the newspapers.

After the People Power Revolution in 1986, ownership of the more than 20 newspaper agencies was by private groups (Dornilla, 1990, p. 94). Though stock ownership was diffused, it was most unlikely for newspaper agencies to take a leftist position, because given the existing political climate, publishing too liberal a position could be financially devastating. Motivated by the need to catch up from their financial losses, newspaper agencies were highly competitive in bidding for advertising from relatively few companies, businesses, and the state, making them susceptible to the maneuvering of the market situation by investors, the government and even the military. This overshadowed the role of the media to deal with the reality of the social conditions affecting crime and punishment in the country.

The most striking aspect of media politics, however, was that owners and publishers of these newspaper agencies were with Aquino during her campaign against Marcos. Some of them had experienced imprisonment, torture, seizure of properties, and exile for criticizing the Marcos government. Although owned by big family businesses with strong ties to the local political oligarchy, these agencies had no guarantee of their safety under martial rule. In fact, many of them had been bullied by Marcos' cronies and were manipulated to conform with Marcos' alleged corrupt activities.[11] Their common experiences under the martial law led many of these owners to support and protect the new government. Media ownership developed a strong commitment to uphold the endeavors of the new government, despite the fact that policies and practices against human rights violations and abuses began to arise elsewhere in the government. In hindsight, the resurgence of the media's privileges to exercise and practice their business with the new government shielding them, resulted in an exclusionary practice of the media refusing to report news and opinions that were perceived to be too radical.

As a result, discussion of crimes in the Philippines focused on sensational cases and on how to punish criminal activities rather than adequately articulating the conditions that led to such actions. In essence, the public was more informed about the immensity of the criminal problem that plagued the country, yet the media did not convey the point of view of the poor, where most of these crimes occurred.

State and Social forces

Until now, the historical and political experience, the social timing, and the active participation of political agents have not been combined to provide an explanatory sociological picture in which capital punishment can be understood. A comparison with the United States is potentially fruitful and instructive to understand the presence of capital punishment in the Philippines since both countries share the same democratic legacy.

The United States is one of the few remaining developed countries in the world that still practices the death penalty.[12] Capital punishment research in the United States has largely focused on its deterrent effects for would-be criminals (Bailey & Peterson, 1997; Bohm, 1999; Hood, 1996, pp. 180-212), race and other determinants of death sentences (Baldus & Woodworth 1998; Keil & Vito, 1995, Radelet & Pierce 1991, Radelet & Zsembik 1993), its economic implications and consequences (Bohn, 1998; Dieter, 1997), the fairness of the practice (Bowers et al, 1998; Givelber, 1997; Gross, 1996; Huff et al, 1996; Leo & Ofshe, 1998), and public opinion polls with respect to retribution (Borg & Radelet, 1999; Cabana, 1996; Denno, 1997; van de Haag, 1997). The example of capital punishment in the United States is a by-product of various political and social indices. The state structure and different political agendas on the application of capital punishment are not solely confined to present political structures, but also by historical, religious and economic rationales. As Banner (2002) puts it, the contention over capital punishment in the United States is "an emotionally charged political issue administered within a legal framework so unworkable that it satisfied no one" (2002, p. 310).

Political Culture

Like the United States, support for capital punishment in the Philippines is diverse. The divergence of the Philippines' stance on the morality of capital punishment is largely a manifestation of the contention between conservative and liberal political strategies. As Garland pointed out, "In such a context, and

with the need to appeal to a range of different audiences, at one and the same time it is no surprise to find that penalty displays a range of rhetorical identifications and a mosaic of symbolic forms" (p. 275).

In the United States, conservatives believe that criminals commit crimes with rational intent and therefore deserve to be punished (Burnham 1970, Lacey 1990, Thorne 1990). This claim supports the logic of deterrence that capital punishment will remedy lawless behavior (Thorne 1990). Liberals, on the other hand, are more skeptical of harsher punishment and prefer social reform as the most effective and just remedy for lawlessness (Garland 2001, Thorne 1990). Despite zealous advocacy of human rights at the national level to abolish capital punishment, American politics are often susceptible to popular influences. One important feature of this is the exploitation of populist sentiment by political candidates through the use of controversial issues in political campaigns in order to entice votes from single-issue voters (Bohm, 1991). Elected officials promote "tough on crime" initiatives because large segments of the public view courts and the legislature as "soft on crime." Furthermore, politicians use political partisanship to enhance their parochial interests. Republicans, for example, can win elections by appealing to the middle class and the working class voters who do not benefit from Republican economic policies (Blank and Blinder 1986; Hibbs 1987), if they would emphasize for issues such as law and order (Beckett 1997, Edsal and Edsal 1991). The Democrat's "soft on crime" approach had earned many Republican votes by appealing to less affluent voters who are more likely to be victims of crime, or living in areas in which violent crimes are likely to occur. The populist political structure of the US has allowed the support of capital punishment to be converted into public policies. These policies are then transferred to the criminal justice system where the influences may not be only legislative, but also prosecutorial in charging decisions, and judicial in the conducting of criminal trials and rendering of verdicts and sentences. The different beliefs and cultural values in the United States had furthered the political and ideological clash when certain states demands for self- determination from the federal government in handling criminals (Zimring, 2003; Zimring and Hawkins, 1996).

A motivating factor for US support of punitive punishments is the nature of American "federalism," which empowers individual states to have their own criminal policies. After the Furman v. Georgia case (408 US 238), many state legislatures have resented the interference of the Federal government and the Supreme Court in barring capital punishment as "unconstitutional" (Zimring and Hawkins, 1986). Thirty-eight states at present have retained capital punishment. Fourteen of these states, including the state of California, Texas, Florida, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina accounted for 3,593 executions to date (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001). The states that use capital punishment are largely in the South. As Banner (2002) pointed out, the long history of racial tension and inequality in the South resulting from the institution of slavery had embedded punitive traditions that promoted sanction to discourage would-be criminals.

In the Philippines, studies of ideological disparity are almost non- existent but conservatism is apparently the dominant thrust in many of its public policies regarding crime. Philippine conservatism cannot be conceived independently, as it was clustered with the events during the redemocraticatization process in the mid 1980s. Among these events are the efforts for economic recovery and political stability. In an attempt to respond to the economic downturn, the Aquino and Ramos administrations had to embrace a more globalist approach and enacted more punitive sanctions for criminals to ensure business confidence, national security, and public safety.

The creation of conservative politics in the government was strengthened by the role that the media played in legitimizing the claims of the government. Even with resistance from the Catholic Church and

other NGOs, the effort to dissuade the public from harsh and inhumane treatment of criminals has proven futile. The conflict between the State, Catholic Church, and non-government organizations' grass-roots approach of campaigning for less punitive sanctions, were not successful in influencing public opinion or public policy.

Social Timing

Why a different configuration of criminal problems in United States and the Philippines should have yielded similar rates of support on the issue is still somewhat unclear. The social timing of how these two countries embraced capital punishment has two facets. The first relates to the macrohistorical context of each country regarding their approaches to crime. The United States move towards capital punishment was driven by almost a half century of political commitment to impose "get tough" crime policies. Recent literature on the subject in the United States points to the presence of capital punishment as a symbol of the American campaign against the perceived increase of crime (Banner, 2002). The US policies on the "war against crime" have resulted in tougher and more punitive punishments despite evidence showing that violent crimes in America have been dropping since the 1990s (Blumstein and Wallman, 2000). Compared with other Western democracies, America's crime situation is no different. Nevertheless, policy differences regarding law and penalty were responsible for the dramatic increase in the prison population from 196,000 in 1972 to 1, 159,000 in 1997 (Tonry & Frase, 2001, p. 7; Mauer, 1999 p. 19). The Philippines, on the other hand, was marred primarily by the events surrounding the political transformations after the 1986 People Power Revolution. The Philippine government needed to revive the failing economy and to sustain the fragile political order of post-Marcos era. In principle, it forwarded the economic agenda at the expense of human rights.

The second facet relates to the construction of crime expressed in public opinion polls and media representation. Opinion polls also influence public perceptions sympathetic to the death penalty (Bohm, 1991; Radelet & Borg, 2000; Sarat, 2001). American electoral politics capitalizes on using these polls as strategies to pronounce the saliency of crime (Bohm, 1991; Garland 2001, p. 152-153). A number of experts have also articulated popular culture as a way of conveying conservative cultural politics (Bessler, 1997; Cabana, 1996). According to Sarat, by watching movies about capital punishment, audiences are offered a juridical role in looking at the particularities of a single case, but are distracted from a more "structuralist" account of the crime (Sarat, 2001, pp. 210- 245). Subtle representations of the media create an ideological sympathy for the victim, however Zimring (2003) notes that the "attempt to create an image of a modern method of putting people to death, and the many different ways that trials and executions have been portrayed as helping victims, are remarkable testimony to the importance of imagery in the political career of a penal policy."

The media at the onset of the political transformation in the Philippines coalesced itself with the government in combating opposition that opposed or challenged the stability of the new government. Like the United States, the Philippines' criminal problem became the government's top political agenda. The Philippine media, unlike the United States, has to exploit news that aligns itself with the political conservatism amidst the growing threats to the newly established democracy. With the influence of media, even the electoral politics, the justice system, and the institution of public safety used "wedge" issues (e.g. public order or crime) as a political strategy to earn the support of the public for the cause. The death penalty was seen as a necessary ingredient to achieve social order, and discourage opponents of the newly established government, and later to would be criminals that were deemed to have committed culturally taboo crimes (e.g. rape, incest). While it was obvious that the rationale for

reinstating capital punishment was deterrence, the public also accepted its as a form of cultural retribution. In the Philippines, the populist influence and control of the political agenda are largely driven by the mistrust of the high court, something that alarmed political agents and caused the media to place more accountability to judges on cases that were deemed to be socially insensitive. Hence, attempts made by the judiciary and anti-death groups to waive execution were met with vehement public pressure through demonstrations and threats to their personal lives.

Political Agents

Unlike the United States, the Philippine political forces were just reemerging from their cocoon after a 20-year hiatus during the Marcos era. The power of political agents in the Philippines varies, yet the influence of lobbying for laws depends considerably on the relative power of the middle and upper class. The majority of those who support capital punishment hold significant political, social and economic capital. The rallies and demonstrations held by these groups were legitimized as voices speaking on behalf of all victims. With the sanction of the state, these political agents had raised the level of public awareness of the need for such sanctions, and later influenced the perceptions of the underclass of the Philippine society. Under these circumstances, the Philippine anti- death penalty agents were forced to concede when strong state-led directives linked with the public's appetite to enforce execution.[13] Not to mention, the information provided by the media was easily transformed into a dominant ideology, since it had adequate mechanisms to disseminate information that eventually caused strong action from vigilant political actors. However, the media's relationship with politics and how it mirrors conservative values exacerbated the moral panic on crime. Equally anomalous was the extent to which media owners aligned themselves with the state's agenda, and were cautious to not interfere with the larger focus of the government.

Conclusion

This case study of the Philippines is an example of how modern punishment is created. Theoretically, the presence of capital punishment can be understood by the instrumental nature of the political state in protecting the capitalist class. Nevertheless, the Philippine experience shows a disaggregated view of the state in explaining the wavering support that evolved under various political administrations after Marcos. Such focus reveals that the post-Marcos government was not a state that was molded primarily by governing elites. Rather, the historic strength in bringing capital punishment back to law was based in large measure on the way the state preemptively organized societal interests, and the display of power by active agents who had the capacity and resources to influence the general public.

The capacity of political groups to influence the state is contingent on specific empirical conditions. The reorganization of the government towards democracy, the prospect of economic growth, the public clamor for more security and order, and the reintroduction of a more liberal world view in conducting politics, had cumulatively shaped the development of civil society. Although in the Philippines attempts were made to blur class lines on issues such as capital punishment, the level of political action and influence simply depends on the relative control of those who have property. Since property is a political resource, often the propertied get their way in politics. The rise of the middle class and its alliances with the state and other select social groups creates more power favoring one side of the issue over the other.

The events that reinstated capital punishment, and executed Leo Echagaray, show that the state is not purely autonomous in conducting the interest of capital class. Capital punishment was reinstated

because of the strong campaigns from the conservative sectors of the society with their alliance to individuals with political power and media that had more power to manipulate public perception of the issue. The overzealous coverage of the media, for example, on highly profiled crimes such as rape and murder exposed sentiments that were sympathetic more toward the victims, rather than looking at the larger issue at hand. Conservative groups placed pressure on government to adhere to the populist claims on enacting tougher mandates. After the terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, the Arroyo-Macapagal administration, for example, lifted the moratorium on capital punishment that was earlier placed by the Estrada administration because of the large concern over terrorism (Mydans, 2001). Similar cases happened with the US Furmann v. Georgia case that evidently had been overturned by other court rulings. The historical conditions that set the stage for democracy and development were the same conditions that reinstated capital punishment.

The reinstatement of the death penalty in the Philippines demonstrates the value of explanatory models consisting of the dynamic interplay of agent, culture, and structure. To a significant degree, looking at these formidable variables may aid us in our understanding of other conditions that affect the reinstatement of capital punishment in Southeast Asia. Although it is difficult to establish a complete explanatory model on Southeast Asian capital punishment, this is a good starting point for future systematic comparative study of other countries in the region. Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, for example, share the same democratic claims with the Philippines. Future assessment of these countries may require a more thorough inquiry of other dimensions of capital punishment.

Endnotes

1 The 1990s was a period of major regime and economic changes in several SEA states, most notably was the 1997 Asian economic crisis. These apparent transformations have varying implications to the support of the ten major human rights treaties, including the Second Protocol, enacted by the United Nations. For further discussion on these treaties see Eldridge (2001). Although part of the ASEAN group, Cambodia has declared itself abolitionist for all crimes although not a signatory to 2nd ICCPR Protocol. Brunei has not executed anyone since 1957. Laos, although a retentionist, has no reported record of execution.

Table 1: Capital punishment trends in Southeast Asia

Countries	1996		1997		1998		1999		2000[i]		2001	
												
Indonesia	--	--	33	--	30	--	8	--	10	2	--	--
Malaysia	--	49	7	2	6	--	1	--	13	2	4	1
Myanmar	--	--	--	2	6	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Philippine	--	--	170	--	400	--	350	6	--	1	--	--
Singapore	--	104	8	14	5	28	5	21	--	21	--	2
Thailand	--	--	37	--	32	--	100	17	130	45	72	10
Vietnam	--	--	56	9	53	18	200	8	112	12	55	10
Total	--	435	311	27	494	78	664	52	265	83	131	23

Sentenced  Executed 

Source: Amnesty International 2002, 2001, 2000, 1999, 1998, and 1997

[2] The 13 crimes are (1) rape; (2) parricide, murder; (3) infanticide; (4) kidnapping and serious illegal detention; (5) robbery with violence against or intimidation of persons; (6) car theft with homicide; (7) qualified bribery, wherein a public officer refrains from arresting or prosecuting one who committed a heinous crime, in consideration of any offer, promise, gift or present; (8) destructive arsons; (9) treason; (10) piracy or mutiny in the high seas or in Philippine waters; (11) plunder, wherein the amount acquired illegally is at least P50, 000 million; (12) offenses related to prohibited drugs, namely: importation or manufacture; cultivation of sources, sale, administration, delivery, distribution and transportation; possession or use in certain quantities; and (13) maintenance of a den, dive or resort for prohibited drug users. Plea bargaining, or negotiating for a lighter penalty, for the drug related crime is not allowed under the measures.

[3] According to Cohen and Kennedy (2000), meta-narratives are simply "grand" theories claiming possess demonstrably valid explanations for all societal evolution and change. Rather, they also offer epic stories about the truth of human experience (p. 378).

[4] The role of many non-government organizations (NGOs) suddenly became significant, coming to the forefront of government initiatives to participate in the development of many reform-oriented policies. The 1987 constitution specifically paid attention to the recognition of NGOs as legitimate political bodies that were encouraged by the Aquino government, as a part of the "people power" governance.

[5] Among the major laws enacted by Ramos's administration are RA 7844 (The Export Development Act), RA 8179 (Further liberalizing Foreign Investments), RA 7721 (Liberalizing banking in the Philippines), RA 7651 (Revitalizing and strengthening the Bureau of Customs), RA 7916 (Creating the Philippine Economic Zone Authority), RA 7640 (Constituting the Legislative-Executive Development Council, Extending the Life of the Asset Privatization Trust),SBN 345 (Promoting the Development of Interisland Shipping) and SBN 358 (Development of Micro and Cottage Industries). The slow and yet stable economic growth exhibited in the mid 1990s (growth in exports on manufactured goods and merchandise, steady national investment, reduction of foreign debt servicing, and high rate of employment) were ascribed to the strong state economic and political policies (Fookien Times 1995) until the Asian economic crisis hit the region in 1997.

[6] I define liberals as individuals who believe in running the government by consent, personal, and especially economic freedom. They believe in the value of secularism and democracy.

[7] The higher growth evident since 1994 had facilitated impressive degrees of transformation in many industrial sectors, most obviously in airlines and shipping. Thanks to measures liberalizing foreign exchange and foreign investment, many of the new competitive pressures have come from a major influx of international investment. The major push for change, however, has generally come not from the business sector anxious to alter often unproductive modes of operation, but rather from a committed core of reformers within the Ramos administration. Exercising effective and persistent leadership at a propitious crossroads in the country's history, they have indeed begun to effect change.

[8] Although there is no set indicator to categorize the middle class as a single monolithic group, the media refers to them as socially and culturally mobile and having strong buying power.

[9] For example, in 1993, a Supreme Court Judge resigned amidst controversy of a court's decision that preserved the monopoly of the Philippine Long Distance Company (PLDT) on overseas calls (Tirol-Cadiz, January 28, 1993; Coronel, May 31, 1993). PLDT had protected its turf from its rival by using influence as well as the Congress, in the executive branch, and in the court system.

[10] Among these crimes is a double murder/rape case involving a local politician that exposed the country to the grim reality of political warlordism in the peripheral provinces (PDI, 1993, August 14, p. 1). This incident had invited government investigations to other mayhem committed by bureaucrats in other regions (PDI July 8, 1993, October 28, 1993). Reports of corruption also remained endemic in many areas of the government. As one editorial noted: "Graft and corruption is no less than a cancer and should be treated like cancer" (PDI, 1993, July 17, p. 4).

[11] After martial law was declared, many editors and journalists were among the first to be arrested and incarcerated in military prison camps. Only three newspapers were allowed by the government to reopen. During the 1980s, there had been a resurgence of a handful of tabloid newspapers to counter pro government media despite constant intimidation from the government. Among these publications and the people behind them were: the father and son team of Jose Burgos who were behind the courageous tabloid WE Forum and its broadsheet affiliate, Pahayagang Malaya; Felix Bautista and Melinda Q. de Jesus edited Veritas; Raul and Leticia Locsin published Business Day (now Business World); Eugenia D. Apostol and Leticia J. Magsanoc published and edited Inquirer and Mr. and Ms. Magazine. Other notable alternative newspapers emerged at state and private university campuses (Tuazon, 2002).

[12] Many Western democracies abandoned the death penalty for ordinary crimes either de jure or de facto. Many countries had already abandoned it for all crimes, including terrorism, treason, and military offenses (Amnesty International 2001). At least in 1998, execution was known to have been carried out in the following countries: Afghanistan, Bahamas, Belarus, China, Congo (Democratic Republic), Cuba, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Palestinian Authority, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Taiwan, Thailand, United Arab Emirates (UAE), United States of America, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Yemen, Zimbabwe (Amnesty International 1999).

[13] Estrada's manipulation of the Supreme Court during the Echagaray case proved that state agents had a larger role in maneuvering social justice. Estrada specifically appointed judges that would outweigh members of the court, who were against Echagaray's execution during the appeal process to reopen Echagaray's case (Labog-Javellana, 1999, January 6, p. 1).

Chart 1: Philippine Capital Punishment Timeline

Pre-History

Pre-Spanish history records the existence of the Code of Kalantiyaw, a common law followed by

indigenous groups in appropriating punishment, including capital punishment over deviances in society (see Zaide's discussion on pre-Spanish era, 1964, 1979).

Spanish Period - 1521-mid 19th century

Early colonization process of Spain to the Philippines had imported many of European medieval practices of criminal execution, which oftentimes were legally sanctioned and sometimes practiced by Church authorities. Capital punishment was used to struck fear in controlling the new colony.

1840-1875

During this period 1,703 death sentences, 46 executions were recorded to have taken place.

Late 19th century

The enlightenment movement became entrenched in many European countries and spread to their colonies. As a result capital punishment in the Philippines were no longer for everyone but rather reserved for common offenders, which were usually poor indios, male and illiterate (Bankoff 1996:182).

American Occupation (1898-1934)

The Americans adopted the Codigo Penal of 1848 as the main body of law at the start of their occupation and later adopted the Revised Penal Code and came into force seven capital offences including treason, piracy, parricide, kidnapping, rape and robbery with homicide.

Japanese Occupation - (1941-1945)

Like its earlier colonizer, extrajudicial executions were pervasive as part of pacification process of the country.

Post World War II

Anti-subversion law was enacted as part of campaign to subvert peasant rebellion, particularly the Hukbong Bayan Laban sa mga Hapon (Hukbalahap) and Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), which started as resistance movement against Japanese forces. The law carried death penalty but no execution was made for leaders that were caught.

1946-1965

Thirty-five people were executed for "savage crimes" marked, in the words of Supreme Court judges who reviewed the cases, by "senseless depravity" or "extreme criminal perversity."

The Marcos Years (1965-1986)

Congress added new capital offenses involving hijacking, dangerous drugs and carnappings as a response to burgeoning political and social unrest in the country, and pinpointing the formation of the CPP and its armed wing the New People's Army (NPA) as its main cause. Nineteen executions took place before the application of martial law (1965-1972). Twelve executions were carried out on 1967 alone. During the martial law, , 24 offenses were punishable by death. Out of twelve executions during the martial law, 11 were convicted under the civilian court, and one by a military tribunal. The last execution took place in 1976. The National Assembly was formed in 1979 and several voices in the house were against the application of death penalty in the Philippines. Marcos, amidst growing pressure and criticism from its neighboring ASEAN countries and other Western allies, coupled with collapse of the economy in the mid 80s, halted the execution of more than 500 inmates in death row.

President Corazon Aquino (1986-1992)

Death penalty was abolished under the promulgation of the new 1987 Constitution and reduced those who are previously sentenced to death to reclusion perpetua or life imprisonment. Plagued by series of right wing military coup and upsets by the insurgents in the countryside, top military officials call for the reinstatement of death penalty for serious crimes. Officials identified that the lack of legislative support in their anti- insurgency campaign was lowering the morale of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). A bill was passed under the leadership of Gen. Fidel

Ramos. Widely publicized criminal activity in the media and government's effort to anti insurgency campaign gained capital punishment ascendancy in the public polls.

President Fidel Ramos (1993-1998)

Upon his step to office, Fidel Ramos announced that capital punishment will be among his top legislative priority and had urged Congress to expedite the bill he proposed while acting as the chief of the AFP. As a result, Republic Act 7659 was signed by joint measure of the Congress and President Ramos to restore death penalty in December 1993-taking effect on January 1, 1994 despite opponents of the bills had been vociferous of the unconstitutionality of the measure.

President Joseph "Erap" Estrada (1998-2001)

It was under President Joseph Estrada that the first execution took place under public pressure. Several executions followed. However, amidst growing threat of impeachment on corruption charges and attempts to reconcile with its long feud with the Catholic Church, Estrada declared a moratorium on all death sentences. He was later ousted from office through People Power III.

2001

Macapagal-Arroyo (2001-present) Continued military clash with Muslim insurgents, and post September 11 effects in the Philippines had pushed Arroyo to lift the moratorium earlier declared by Estrada.

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Persistent Ambiguities:

Vietnamese Ethnology in the Doi Moi Period (1986 -2001)

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From the time ethnology was established as a field in Vietnam, one of its key tasks has been to foster and maintain national unity, while at the same time preserving and developing 'ethnic distinctiveness' and diversity. During the first thirty years of ethnology's development, the focus of ethnographic endeavours was to incorporate the different ethnic groups into the national whole, so as to develop and promote an ethnicity, history and culture which emphasized the 'national' and 'unified' nature of Vietnam's diverse ethnic components. Ethnographic research has traditionally tended to focus on three areas: ethnic classification, minority history and culture. This began to change in the *doi moi* era, as more attention has been given to socio-economic development issues.

Doi moi, which means renewal or renovation, refers to the economic reforms officially launched in 1986, during the Sixth National Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party. From liberalising and opening the economic sector, and to a lesser extent with the gradual decentralization of the political system, *doi moi* has affected almost all spheres of the national polity and society. Members of the media and communications, along with the academic

community, have been encouraged to embrace the 'spirit of openness' and to 'seek the truth' in their work. With regards to academia, *doi moi* has provided them some scope for flexibility and re-evaluation -- no doubt within accepted limits -- in their respective fields. Such changes were construed as necessary developments to move from a state-run command economy to a "Socialist-oriented market economy." In some respects, *doi moi* has led to changes in the way minorities are perceived and portrayed. Yet, there remain striking similarities and fundamental continuities from the earlier period.

The following discussion will examine the elements of continuity and change in ethnology during the *doi moi* period. Critical aspects of contemporary ethnology continue to be shaped by the previous discourse, with regard to specific themes, theories and ideology. Yet, there are also some noticeable changes which constitute a significant departure from the previous discourse, such as more positive and reflective approaches to minority culture. In the current discourse, certain aspects of minority culture appear to have undergone significant reconfiguration and re-evaluation. The section on the new museum of ethnology in Hanoi elucidates this aspect of *doi moi*. However, the goals and focus of Vietnamese ethnology continue to be intertwined with national politics and ideology, and certain key aspects of the state's national minority policies remain unchanged.

I. Continuity

The main topics of the earlier years, such as ethnic classification, minority history and culture, continue to dominate much of the official/public discourse on ethnic minorities.

Ethnic Classification

Contemporary scholarship on concepts like *ethnie*, nation and nationality continue to be based on Stalin's "National Criteria," i.e. language, culture and ethnic consciousness, and this continues to be the case.[1] The works of Soviet thinkers (Marx, Lenin and Stalin) and those of the pioneering Vietnamese ethnologists (the "old guard" of the discipline) continue to be the standard reference texts. In fact, in a recently published ethnology "textbook" on theories and research on ethnic classification, all the articles are basically reprints of the earlier writings.[2]

As a result, among the continuities in Vietnamese ethnology are the ambiguities and contradictions surrounding the "national criteria." The roots of this contradiction can be traced to Stalin's text itself. When applied to the colonies, Stalin's definition did not qualify most of them to be (or become) nations. In fact, Stalin hardly raised the issue of colonial nations in his famous tract. It has been pointed out that while Stalin's national criteria was adequate for the multi-national states of Eastern Europe, and to a lesser extent the nation states of Western Europe, it was "wholly inadequate for the world of colonies and semi-colonies of Asia, Africa and Latin America."[3] Applied to the Vietnamese context, the limitations of Stalin's criteria become immediately apparent. The sheer diversity of its ethno-linguistic make-up and landscape, not to mention the highly complex social, political and economic dynamics of the highlands, defied the logic of any "grid-filling" exercise and rendered Stalin's provisions highly problematic and

mostly inapplicable. [4] If applied rigorously, these criteria would show that Vietnam was made up of several separate ethnic nations, debunking the "historical myth" of its national unity and indivisibility.

With regard to the concept of *dan toc*, the specific meaning and definition, as well as the distinction between "constituent components" of *dan toc* remain undefined and unclarified. The term, which is essentially a transliteration of the Chinese term, *minzu*, which is of Japanese origin, can refer to nation, nationality (in the Stalinist sense) and *ethnie* at the same time.[5] In part, its ambiguity can be traced to the lack of clarity and precision of Stalin's national guidelines, and their inapplicability to Vietnam's specific conditions. That Vietnam is a nation is an indisputable and sacrosanct fact, in official discourse at least. What is less certain (and more problematic) is the precise definition and scope of *dan toc* with regards to the minority peoples, for instance the term *dan toc Tay* could refer to the *Tay* ethnic minority at one level, and/or a hypothetical *Tay* nation and nationality on the other. Although this ambiguity was never clarified by party leaders and academics alike, it seems that in its narrower definition, and specifically with regard to minority groups or communities, the term *dan toc* refers to an '*ethnie*' or ethnic group, not nation or nationality per se (at least not 'nationality' as commonly understood, i.e. in the sense of being part of a separate and sovereign independent nation-state).

In a recent publication, however, a well-known Vietnamese ethnologist attempts to clarify the inherent ambiguities and delineate the broad boundaries of certain key terms and concepts. While reiterating the established and accepted definition of the term *dan toc* -- i.e. the double meaning of *ethnie* on the one hand and nation on the other[6] -- Professor Dang Nghiem Van advocates the use of more precise terms to distinguish between *ethnie* (*toc nguoi*) and nation or national community (*dan toc* or *quoc gia dan toc*).[7] In his view, Lenin's definition of a nation as a community that comes into being only after having passed through the capitalist stage of development was problematic as it led to confusion when determining whether an *ethnie* was a tribe, clan or nation, since different communities possessed different levels of socio-economic evolution. Van points out that the term "nation" should preferably be "reserved for national communities with the general meaning of a nation, regardless of social regimes from slavery, feudalism and capitalism or socialism."[8]

At present, he writes, there are "no tribes (bo lac) in the strict sense of the word, nor are there nationalities (bo toc) with compact, mutually exclusive territories" in Vietnam.[9] His immediate explanation for the non-existence of tribes and clans in Vietnam (that these terms were too "primitive" in connotation, applying only to "human beings living thousands of years ago in the period of primitive communism," and was irrelevant to the current stage of development), however, is unclear and somewhat confusing.[10] Not without a sense of irony, he goes on to say:

> These pitiful ethnicities still existing with a thin population in different countries have to endure the fate, of dependency on central or local organisation with a leader, in many cases, their relations rest on the ethnic consciousness - with any separate socio-political organisation being forbidden. The destiny of ethnic

> minorities in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia pertaining to ancient groups called Kha and Xa, provides an example.[11]

In other words, although some ethnic minorities may have originated from another nation (for example the Hmong, Khmer, Thai) prior to their arrival or existence in Vietnam, they are now part of one common nation and do not form separate nations with separate political organisations. The only common ties they share with their country of origin (or members of that community) are those of ethnic consciousness.

The constant reiterations, as well as the attempt to clarify the scope and content of *dan toc* (as Professor Van sought to do in the above discussion), can perhaps be better understood in the context of the ethnic unrest that has persisted in the highlands (particularly in the Central regions) in the *doi moi* period. The causes for the above predicament are complex, but it is likely that the " 'sstrong and profound'" tribal consciousness of certain ethnic groups has been perceived as the driving force behind their continuing call for greater autonomy and religious freedom, unifying them in their goals and strengthening their sense of distinctiveness from the "'greater Vietnamese family,'", thus constituting a continuing source of friction and antagonism with the state. The academic effort to clarify and verify the concept of the Vietnamese nation and nationality, while at the same time denying and dispelling the notion of the existence of other socio-political communities, can be seen as a measure to deal with the problematic nature of Soviet provisions on this matter in the face of Vietnam's unresolved "'ethnic problem.'". Yet, despite efforts to clarify and define the term *dan toc*, its persistent ambiguities continue to dominate contemporary ethnological discourse. The more specific term quoc gia *dan toc* used by Van for instance, has not been appropriated and used by other scholars in their discussions, and hardly figures in any of the other writings I have come across.

One of the main tasks, and perhaps one of the notable achievements, of the ethnic classification process during the earlier phase of ethnology was not just that it placed members in their ' "rightful'" ethnic group(ing), but that it succeeded in giving each group a "'correct'" name, one at least recognised as such by its givers, chiefly ethnologists and the state. From the late 1960s to the early 1970s, the main task of ethnology was to verify (*xac minh*) ethnicity and thus verify how many ethnic groups there were in Vietnam, a process known as "determining ethnic classification" (*xac dinh thanh phan dan toc*). These classification exercises were intended to provide the state with a more detailed and accurate map and census of the ethno-linguistic and geo-political landscape of Vietnam. These efforts culminated in Decision 121 of 1979, with an official list of 54 ethnic groups. The classification exercise also sought to "determine the relations between different ethnic groups," so as to develop and strengthen national unity.[12]

Following the major classification survey of 1979, another similar "scientific investigation" was carried out in 1989. This basically reaffirmed that there were (still) 54 ethnic groups in all of Vietnam. The only change was the reclassification of a number of groups into different ethno-linguistic categories. This primarily concerned groups formerly classified as belonging to the extensive and all-encompassing Austroasiatic language family. A number of groups from this category were reclassified as a separate language family in the 1989 list, such as the Hmong-Dao

(regrouped as the Hmong-Dao language family), the Tay-Thai, and certain groups formerly classified as "the others" (for example the La Ha, La Chi, Pu Peo and Co Lao), which were reclassified under the Thai-Kadai language family. In the list of 1989, the 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam belong to five language families, comprising eight language groups, whereas previously they had been grouped in three very large language families. No explanation seems to have been given for the reclassification of these groups in 1989, but they are certainly closer and more in tune with the general system adopted by linguists outside Vietnam, and are perhaps reflective of the greater exposure to foreign scholarship.

A number of authors have also noted the likely statistical or numerical inaccuracy of the 1989 investigation. This, as one writer explains, was inevitable given the increased level of migration, physical movement and cultural exchange (and change) among the different ethnic groups over the past few decades.[13] Ethnic borders and boundaries have become more porous, fluid and complex, particularly in minority-inhabited regions. Most writers agree that there should, or ought to be "an up-to- date, more scientifically grounded and documented list of ethnic groups in Vietnam."[14] Based on the research findings of a recent investigation in several minority regions, it is likely that the figure is much higher than the present 54. The researchers noted that a significant number of minority groups wanted to be reclassified as a separate or different ethnic group.[15]

Despite the awareness of the inaccuracies of the existing List of Ethnic Groups in Vietnam, it seems unlikely that a more updated and accurate survey will take place any time soon. This reluctance is probably due to a number of factors, for example the huge administrative costs and work involved, or the need for more in-depth research and understanding of minorities before undertaking such a major task. The heart of this reluctance though, would seem to be the unresolved differences among ethnologists regarding respect for the wishes of ethnic groups and their prerogative to choose their own ethnonym. A number felt that should the wishes of all ethnic groups for separation be fulfilled, it would not only fragment the country's "ethnic map" and slow its socio-economic development, but also hinder the "convergence of the different ethnic groups," an outcome contrary to the law of historical development.[16] Yet, there were also those who felt that integration should not be rushed or forced upon groups concerned, "even if science had reified the accuracy of this process."[17] If this was the case, and should the wishes of ethnic groups be disregarded, as one well-known scholar warns, this would lead to unpleasant consequences for the whole country.[18] Either way, the issue of classification or reclassification remains a complex and delicate issue. Such efforts could open a "Pandora's box" of minority issues such as land rights and political self-determination, which could in turn encourage separatism.

History

The instrumental role of ethnic minorities in National History (with a capital H to denote it as a state project and distinguish it from other modes of portraying the past) has been a prominent theme in Vietnamese ethnographic writings. Yet, as one ploughs through these materials, two things stand out: first, there is actually very little dealing specifically with minority history.

Second, the materials are limited in scope; they tell us more about Vietnam's National History than about the history of the minorities themselves. Only aspects that were positively instructive and inspirational were deemed worthy of representation or to have a place in National History, while those that were controversial or ambiguous were either glossed over, simplistically and unsatisfactorily explained, or else omitted altogether.

The history of the minority groups is epitomised in two essential themes: their origins and their tradition of resistance (to protect the Fatherland, i.e. Vietnam). Writings on minority origins serve to illuminate the origins of ethnic Vietnamese people or the nation as a whole, rather than reveal anything much about minorities themselves. Such a history became encapsulated in their long tradition of resistance and defence of "their" homeland against "foreign" enemies.

The former discourse on the origins of minority groups continues to dominate contemporary discussions on this aspect of minority history. As with the earlier writings, the emphasis is not just on the common origins of most ethnic groups in Vietnam, but also the primordial nature of these ties. In a recent publication on the origins of ethnic groups in northern Vietnam, the author, Nguyen Chi Huyen, basically reiterates the common origins of most ethnic groups in the region. At the same time, there is a broader emphasis on the primordial roots and relations between Vietnam and its Southeast Asian neighbours. Huyen argues that:

> The 'Hundred Viet' or Bach Viet [the ancestors of the major or majority of the ethnic groups in Vietnam and mainland Southeast Asia] were super tribes (*sieu toc*) in an ethno-historical region, or during a period in Southeast Asia when ethnic groups had yet to be clearly differentiated according to language groups: Austronesian, Tay-Thai and Austroasiatic, that present day science recognises as the indigenous history of Southeast Asia.[19]

This emphasis on ancient Southeast Asian roots and ties in Vietnamese ethnology is also complemented by parallel research efforts in other related disciplines like archaeology, cultural studies, linguistics, geography and biology (including genetics). In a standard archaeology textbook (for university students) on the origins and development of the Dong Son culture, the author points out the basic and unmistakable similarities in the architectural style, symbols and language of the peoples in the region (such as that of the ancient Vietnamese, and present day Toraja and Dayak peoples of Indonesia) which belonged to or bore a striking resemblance to that of the Dong Son culture.[20] The implication here is that (an) ancient Vietnamese culture and civilisation had a significant role in shaping the content and form of Southeast Asian culture. It is also interesting and important to note that the emphasis on the Southeast Asian roots and commonalities of the Dong Son culture is specific to Vietnamese archaeological scholarship; the conclusions of most scholarship outside Vietnam on this subject are quite different. Well- known scholars in this field like Goloubew and Higham, for instance, have paid more attention to the indelible and undeniable Chinese influence (i.e. that from Southern China during the pre-Han and Han eras) on the Dong Son cultural legacy.

With regard to the unresolved debate among scholars about whether the origins of this culture

were indigenous or foreign, Higham highlights the tendency to politicise or nationalise the origins of the Dong Son. He criticises this deterministic, "black or white" approach to the issue -- i.e. that it either "belongs" to the Vietnamese or the Chinese -- and makes a rather convincing and cogent argument for the need to appreciate and understand that Dong Son was a product of the dynamic, complex and symbiotic interaction and exchange of ideas and goods that took place as a result of or in response to Chinese expansion.[21]

According to the current discourse on minority origins, not only do most ethnic groups share common origins, but such primordial ties and commonalities are also (necessarily) Southeast Asian in content and extent. This may be seen as a continuing effort on the part of Vietnamese ethnologists, and academics in general to "decolonise" Vietnam from the shadows of Chinese cultural domination, by emphasising its pre-colonial, indigenous Southeast Asian roots and heritage. The current "Southeast Asian focus" must also be understood in context of Vietnam's becoming a member of ASEAN in the 1990s. Contemporary ethnological and academic endeavours in Vietnam can be seen as an effort to promote better understanding about Southeast Asia in Vietnam on the one hand, and among other Southeast Asian countries on the other hand, as well as to foster closer inter-regional ties and cooperation among the member nations.

Under *doi moi*, the theme of the minority peoples' long tradition of resistance and defence of the country is reiterated and replicated over a much wider variety of media and forms; such as in the newspapers, television programmes, films, museums, official/political speeches, and so on. It seems this tradition of resistance -- with its emphasis on the patriotism, heroism and indomitable will of the minorities in defending and building the nation -- is all the more necessary during the current stage of socio-economic development and change. Now, rather than facing foreign invaders, the main challenge for all Vietnamese peoples is to muster their patriotic and heroic tradition for the socio-economic development and advancement of the country. The new "battle front" is in the area of "building and developing the national economy;" continuing to implement the "Fixed Cultivation and Fixed Settlement" program in the highlands; "building new social relations;" "developing culture, education and training, and healthcare and family planning."[22]

In the current discourse, minorities remain an anonymous, faceless and somewhat "unreal" historical force to be reckoned with. In various ethnographic publications, as well as in museum displays, minority history of resistance is quite simply reduced to a matter of statistics: numbers, names, weapons and geographical areas. Two recent publications on minority history delve into rather lengthy detail on their deeds and sacrifices, listing page after page of "type-set" information about the minority "national heroes," including their name, place of origin, and their specific contributions to the national struggle.[23] Most of them were made or became heroes in the context of the war, including soldiers who made valuable contributions to the war effort and/or died in battle, as well as their mothers, also considered heroic. Again, this discourse on minority heroes does not differ significantly (if at all) from the wider, "popular" historical discourse on national heroes, thus emphasising the "fact" that all minority heroes were first and foremost National/Vietnamese heroes.

At the History Museum in Hanoi in a section dedicated to Vietnam's National Heroes, the names of the minority heroes in the "Anti-French Movement of the Highland Ethnic Groups (1864-1929)," as well as the details about their ethnic origins are prominently displayed alongside those of the Great National Heroes of Vietnam, who are invariably ethnic Kinh. It is interesting to note that while the Great National Heroes had easily recognisable names and individual portraits to accompany their names, by contrast, none of the names of the minority heroes are as well-known; nor do they have portraits displayed alongside their names.[24] If minorities are featured in pictures or illustrations, they are usually depicted as supporting or contributing to the war front. Even in these depictions, minorities still appear characterless and nameless, as none of them are recognisable heroes; the only distinguishing marker of their identity is their ethnic attire.

At the Fine Arts Museum in Hanoi, for instance, an untitled lacquer painting depicts a scene reminiscent of the "Vietminh/Revolutionary days in the highlands" artistic genre. A young soldier, whose ethnic origins are unknown, since he is dressed in 'plain clothes,' is surrounded by a small crowd of what appears to be Hmong villagers, as suggested by their traditional attire and the agricultural implements that some of them are carrying. The focus is not so much on *who* they are individually, but *what* they represent. The young man represents the presence of the Viet Minh in these regions, whilst the Hmong people highlight minority support for the Viet Minh cause, or more precisely, the multi-ethnic dimensions and nature of the resistance movement. The overall scene, of which the focus is the exchange of a firm handshake between this cadre and a Hmong man, who also places his hands on the young man's shoulders, suggests a sense of trust, warm relations and solidarity between the minorities and the Viet Minh. On the whole, however, it seems as though the (only) purpose of the minority presence is to add some colour and variation to these portrayals, and highlight the mass appeal and popular support for Vietnamese Communists. Certainly, such portrayals emphasised the idea of Vietnam as a "multi-ethnic nation."

The tradition of resistance of the minorities, or of minority history in general, is frequently represented in and epitomised by weapons and geographic areas. At the Revolutionary Museum in Hanoi, for instance, the significance and contributions of the minorities to the national revolutionary struggles are represented by the weapons they used in the heroic battles against the foreign aggressors (apparently that is), such as crossbows, javelins, gun barrels, tridents etc.[25] A bronze sculpture display at the Fine Arts Museum depicts two minority men in combat-ready poses and with lethal-looking weapons. One is armed with a crossbow and arrow, whilst the other is shown setting up a spiked trap. Their ethnic origins are unknown, although their garb does distinguish them as being distinctly minority: both wear loin-cloths, and a narrow length of cloth drapes from their shoulders covering their upper bodies. Both figures are also wearing bandanas on their heads. This attire also has the effect of enhancing the martial feel of the display, giving the scene a kind of raw and potent energy. Beyond the explicit meaning of such displays, which emphasise the patriotism and tradition of resistance of the minorities, they imply that the only context in which the martial potency of the minorities can be portrayed and commended is that of the united national struggles against *outside* aggressors, not in combat

against the Kinh.

The historical value and importance of the minorities are also essentialised and commemorated in geographic spaces or areas. Historically important and strategic regions in the northern highlands like Viet Bac, *Tay* Bac, Dien Bien Phu, Son La, Pac Bo and Thai Nguyen continue to be commemorated and celebrated as the cradle(s) of resistance or revolution (*cai noi cach mang*). [26] At the Ho Chi Minh Museum in Hanoi, the importance of these regions to the national struggle and in National History is prominently and vividly displayed in a section commemorating the National Revolution in the Pac Bo area of Cao Bang Province (northeastern Vietnam), where the resistance movement was based in its early stages. This display is modelled to resemble what looks like the interior of the human brain, and props that are synonymous with the 'Pac Bo days' occupy or fill up this 'brain:' such as the famous 'rock' table and chair where Ho apparently spent much time reflecting on the state and fate of his country and where he also devised brilliant strategies to win the war, as well as certain aesthetic and idyllic scenes of the region and its geographical features. Yet, it is also important to point out the lack of an explicit reference to any distinctive or separate contribution of minorities to the national revolution, or any part of National History for that matter. The section depicting the revolutionary period in Pac Bo highlights and commemorates the importance of that geographical space to the success of the movement, rather than the importance of the people who inhabited that space; most of the displays center on Ho and personalities or events related to him and the national struggle. The conspicuous absence of minorities in this museum is surprising, if not ironic, given the prominence and priority Ho accorded to minorities in the areas of national defence and development, and with regards to equality and equal rights -- in various political speeches and the Constitution, as well as in national policy.

As with the earlier discourse, persistent ambiguities continue to characterise *doi moi* writings on history. History is still dominated and shaped by a Marxist-Leninist framework, with emphasis on class conflict and imperialist manoeuvrings. Questionable or dark spots in this History are conveniently glossed over or entirely omitted in the post-colonial rendition of minority history. "Complicated" ethnic relations between the Kinh and other groups are explained as being the result of what "history has left behind" (*do lich su de lai*), or enemy provocation (*do dich gay ra*). [27] Examples include the "anti-August Revolution" uprising staged by the Hmong in Ha Giang province between 1945-1946, and the persistence of inter-ethnic conflict in the Central Highlands, which continues to be written off as the work of reactionary and imperialist forces both within and without the country (such as the FULRO movement), seeking to sow discord and break national unity.[28]

The implications of Vietnam's southward expansion (*nam tien*) receive short shrift, as demonstrated by the remarks from a well-known scholar:

> Everyone knows that the Kinh ethnic group, in the process of historical development [and] in the task of southward expansion that spanned a few hundred years, at times had clashes with the Cham and Kho me [Khmer] ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the clashes mentioned above are also a historical reality. Presently,

> under the leadership of our Party, [which is] based on Marxist-Leninist foundations, and Ho Chi Minh's ideology, [we now have] an accurate national policy to guide us, we are more concerned about the Cham and Kho me ethnic groups, help each other, create development conditions, just like for the rest of the minority siblings in our country.[29]

Although there has been more academic interest in recent years, most of the materials continue to gloss over the political and territorial impact of *nam tien*, focusing instead on the euphemistic "cultural exchange" (*giao luu van hoa*) that resulted from this process.[30] For the most part, Cham history has been essentialised and epitomised by its cultural splendour and legacy. The following description about the history of pre-Vietnamese entities is typical of this cultural focus, and is a rather interesting, if not refreshing perspective, as it defines the Cham and Khmer in relation to the latecomers to the local scene, i.e. the Kinh.

> Southern Vietnam was a new area for the Vietnamese, however, this was not a "culture bare" land [*dat trang van hoa*, or land without pre-existing culture], but before the Vietnamese arrived there, there was already a "pre-Viet" culture that had also developed quite splendidly.[31]

This persistent ambiguity and 'cultural reductivism' or essentialisation is succinctly and poignantly expressed in the display on the Cham civilisation at the History Museum in Hanoi. In this display, which covers quite a wide and conspicuous floor area on the second level of the museum, items of recognisable and distinctly "Cham" (i.e. Hindu-Indianised) style occupy and dominate this space. It is obvious to the visitor that the Cham once had a great kingdom and civilisation, and have inherited a splendid artistic and cultural tradition. Yet, the fundamental and nagging question still remains: what happened to this once great civilisation and culture? What brought about its demise? Certainly neither the museum displays, nor contemporary historical writings are illuminating in this respect.

In essence, *doi moi* writings on minority history continue to gloss over a number of important issues. Vietnam's minorities still remain a faceless and inadequately understood historical entity in public knowledge and popular culture. Along with ethnicity and history, culture is also critical to the development and assertion of a common national identity among Vietnam's diverse ethnic groups. The discourse on minority culture continues to focus on certain key areas that would facilitate the socialist transformation and development of Vietnamese society as a whole.

Culture

> Culture is *doi moi*... *doi moi* as we often call it is a revolutionary process, of which we are only at the beginning stage. *doi moi* must be based on and rooted in the cultural aspects: the cultural traditions of the ethnic groups, cultural essence of the contemporary period...[32]

The above abstract from the late Pham Van Dong's commentary on culture and *doi moi* highlight

certain key aspects about culture in the current period. Firstly, it elucidates the importance and instrumentality of culture. Next, it is also telling of the (greater) preoccupation with preserving the distinctiveness, i.e. the cultural traditions of the ethnic groups. Lastly, it points to the continuities from the earlier discourses on culture: the ambiguous and abstract nature of key terms and concepts, as well as the continuing emphasis on change and transformation. In general, as is true of this quotation, the contemporary discourse on minority culture does not significantly differ from that of national culture on the whole.

Certain key features of the discussions from earlier years continue to dominate and shape the current cultural discourse. Culture still appears to be conceived and conceptualised in a rather deterministic manner as an entity or aspect of national life that can be "scientifically managed and corrected," to eradicate the backward, ugly or wrong aspects and promote the beautiful and correct aspects.[33] Some authors still maintain an iconoclastic tone, calling for the continual need to be vigilant against and eradicate "backward" and superstitious practices, such as polygamy, under-aged marriages, excessive wedding ceremonies, etc.[34]

As with the preceding discourse, the need to continue to develop and promote a "new culture" in Vietnam continues to dominate discussion of culture under *doi moi*. Yet, specifically what makes for and distinguishes this "new culture" from that of the former "new socialist movement" is not discussed in much detail. To a significant extent, the inherent ambiguities and imprecision of the earlier discourse persist in the contemporary period. For instance, just what is involved in the process of "developing and preserving" culture, or what constitutes "ethnic distinctiveness" or national culture to begin with (the term *van hoa dan toc* could refer to either or both of these entities at the same time) has yet to be specified and clarified.

With regard to minority language, the focus, goals and problems of the current language policy remain the same as those of the preceding phases. More than thirty years after Decision 153, the goals of the language policy remain basically unfulfilled. Minority scripts have never seemed to gain popularity among the minorities themselves, and the majority of ethnic groups still do not possess their own writing system.[35] The reasons for this lack of success are numerous, complex and unclear. One author suggests that it could be due to the lack of administrative commitment and resources (for example teaching staff and materials) and the tough socio-economic conditions that many minority groups continue to face (such as poverty and the lack of physical infrastructure).[36] Yet, another likely explanation for this situation is that Decision 153 also states that:

> It is necessary for all groups in the Vietnamese territory to study speaking and writing Vietnamese which is the common language of the whole country. The state must make efforts to help minority people to rapidly learn to speak and write in Vietnamese.[37]

Ultimately, the end goal and main priority of the minority language endeavours in the current period is still to develop and promote the use of Vietnamese, over that of minority languages. In the area of language policy, as with minority education in general, *doi moi* has yet to have any

significant impact.

II. New Trends In *Doi Moi* Ethnology

While some authors still maintain the dichotomous categories and the iconoclastic jargon and tone of the preceding discourse, on the whole, such tendencies are less common in current writings. Most authors tend to take a more moderate, objective and positivistic approach towards cultural topics. In fact, some discussions reveal greater reflectiveness, sensitivity and even cultural relativism toward minority culture.

In the current discourse, the distinction between formerly antithetical dichotomic categories is not as definitive and clear-cut as it once was. In fact, what is "positive" (*tich cuc* or "negative" (*tieu cuc*) in culture is no longer so clear. There seems to be an awareness that what had hitherto been considered "bad" may not be so "bad" after all, and could in fact be beneficial and necessary to the development of a modern society. One author makes a rather convincing argument for the need to judge each culture on its own terms for what it is, not from another culture's or group's terms and standards:

> Until now, there is still the mistaken perception that ethnic minority culture is primitive culture. For a long period, with an approach that follows a narrow path, not a few people often take the development index of society to measure the development standard of culture. [However], if culture is the essence of every ethnic group, then we cannot take the 'high-low standard' [approach] as criteria. The Vietnamese and some [other] ethnic groups who follow the patriarchal system will use the term "to marry one's husband" (*lay chong*)... the situation is the same with some ethnic groups who follow the matriarchal system... and use the term "to marry one's wife" (*lay vo*). We cannot compare [and come to the conclusion] that this way is more backward than the other way or vice versa.[38]

Perhaps the most significant departure from the earlier discourse is the more positive and favourable reconfiguration and revaluation of aspects of ethnic and/or national culture. This is particularly so with regards to beliefs, customs and practices formerly written off as "superstitions." In the current period, some of these hitherto undesirable practices are being recast in a more positive light, and "upgraded" to more acceptable "popular" beliefs or culture (*tin nguong / van hoa dan gian*), or "religion" (*ton giao*).

In one article, Phan Huu Dat attempts to clarify the outstanding and persistent "misconception" about the role and function of religion in Communist regimes, while at the same time verifying and affirming the importance of popular (or folk) culture in the national community and life. Re-evaluating Marx's famous line: "Religion is the opiate of the masses" as a starting point in his discussion, Professor Dat reaffirms the Party and state's respect for the people's fundamental right to religious freedom in Vietnam, and points out that Marx's stance on religion has been read out of context and inadequately understood by many. He argues that Marx was not so much

against religion *per se* as he was opposed to the political use (or abuse) of religion as a "tool to preserve the dominance or rule" of a certain class of groups of people. He reiterates the point that since the Party recognises and considers religious beliefs a "spiritual need" of certain sectors of society, religion should be allowed to develop and expand, not controlled or restricted.[39] However, Dat also notes that not all beliefs and practices were necessarily "good" for the people or the national community in general. In particular, practices such as head- hunting, worship of ghosts and witchcraft are not "wholesome," and should not be encouraged but prohibited as being detrimental to national unity, stability and development. On the other hand, customs like ancestor worship, rain prayers, buffalo sacrifices and other festivals -- once construed as being backward, primitive or superstitious -- are educational traditions and an important part of popular beliefs and culture, which could strengthen the community consciousness of the people. Fundamentally, he concludes, beliefs are an important aspect of culture, and are therefore intrinsic to national culture on the whole, and should be respected and developed as such.[40]

This article is interesting not only because it is indicative of the *doi moi* tendency to "rehabilitate" some formerly undesirable aspects of culture, but also because it highlights the flexible and fluid, not to mention arbitrary, nature of the labelling and categorising process. The boundary between "superstition" and "popular belief" or "culture" appears to be quite a thin and porous one; buffalo sacrifices and rain prayers could just as easily been construed as being the worship of ghosts or witchcraft. In the *doi moi* period, it is still the Party and the state that decide which cultural practices end up in what category.

Although no specific explanation has been given for such reassessments, it is plausible to suggest that it represents an effort on the part of ethnologists and the state to give credence to their claim to respect and preserve the cultural distinctiveness of ethnic groups. Perhaps it is prudent, if not necessary to appease certain ethnic groups in these areas, which are more harmless and less controversial compared to other issues which may be politically sensitive and explosive.

Yet, it should also be noted that not all cultural "distinctiveness" can and will be preserved and developed. It will still be national goals and priorities (such as those of the current socio-economic development) that determine what kinds of culture will be preserved and developed. Anything that impedes the current development process is deemed "unsuitable" hence "undesirable."[41] "Suitable" traditions to be preserved and developed include patriotism, productive labour, safe and clean eating habits, housing and dress styles --- which ironically (though not surprisingly or unexpectedly) are strongly reminiscent of the "New Socialist Man and Culture" of the preceding era, though without the iconoclastic overtones. [42] A number of recent publications also discuss the general issue of ethnic distinctiveness or minority culture in economic terms, i.e. the economic potential and value of preserving and developing minority culture and distinctiveness. Developing and promoting "cultural tourism" (*du lich van hoa*) in the minority regions, along with (specific) ethnic cultural traditions (like weaving, embroidery, basketry and wine- making etc.), are construed as being not only economically viable and valuable, but also as a good opportunity and means to promote "cultural education" and exchange among ethnic groups and with foreign countries.[43]

Applications of *Doi Moi* - The "New" Museum of Ethnology

Officially opened in 1997, the Vietnamese Museum of Ethnology (VME), lauded as "the most attractive ethnology museum in Asia,"[44] succinctly embodies the coming together of the "old" and the "new" aspects of ethnographic discourse on minority culture. The cultural representations at the museum can be seen as a magnified, physical and three-dimensional version of the "old." conventional ethnographic knowledge. Here, Vietnam's 54 ethnic groups can be viewed in five sections, divided according to the five language family groupings. Within these sections, there are subsections of the "main" ethnic groups of each language family, such as the Kinh, Muong, *Tay*, Thai, Hmong, San Diu, Dao, Ngai, Cham, Hoa and the Mon-Khmer peoples of the North, Truong Son-*Tay* Nguyen regions etc. The culture of each group is displayed within a structure that resembles the traditional house of that group. Each house is intended to be a "mini-museum" of that group's culture.[45] In this sense then, the museum's classification and representation of minorities essentially constitute an extension or projection of conventional ethnographic practice and knowledge: the ethnic groups are 'boxed' into different sections of the museum according to their ethno-linguistic characteristics, within which their culture is once again 'boxed' in ethnic houses and glass cases. Furthermore, the physical structure of the museum and the nature of its displays serve to reinforce the quintessential themes of Vietnamese ethnology, i.e. ethnic diversity, antiquity and unity. The sign at the start of the exhibits reads, "Vietnam -- Historical and Cultural Passages" (*Viet Nam - Nhung Chang Duong Lich Su Van Hoa*). The external structure of the museum, built in the shape of the Dong Son drum, was designed by a *Tay* architect while the architect of the interior was French.

What is "new" about the museum representations, on the other hand, is that its displays are intended to take on additional goals and functions. Firstly, it seems that the museum planners seek to present the culture of the ethnic groups as objectively as possible, i.e. to portray various aspects of their culture "as it is" or from the standpoint of its owners. The short monographs that accompany each display provide concise and standard ethnographic details: such as the group's name, the region they came from, the name of the artefact/custom/event that is portrayed, its function/significance for the people etc. In this sense, the Kinh are presented as just one of the 54 ethnic groups on display at the museum.

Secondly, there is also a concerted effort to make the culture of ethnic groups more real and a "lived" experience for the visitors. The focus of the exhibits is not so much on the cultural artefacts *per se* as on its users and producers, who are considered the "agents of culture." Nguyen Van Huy, the director of the museum, a well-known ethnologist and also the son of the late Professor Nguyen Van Huyen, who was one of the "founding fathers" of the discipline, elucidates this point:

> One of the renovated perspectives in [the] exhibition of VME is its special attention to the agents of culture. In an old type museum too much attention was paid to objects and too little on their creators. In the new ethnographic museum the exhibition itself is originally designed through the lenses of culture bearers/agents. A culture agent participates in the process by recording his or her narratives, his or

her comments of the artefacts and their making, and on various social and cultural event.[46]

In other words, these representations seek to give a "voice" to the people being portrayed. Beyond their educational and entertainment value, these displays also have the "higher goal" of instilling acceptance and respect of the diversity of cultures and its values in Vietnam. Ideally, the museum not only strives to be a place where culture is presented and preserved, but a meeting place of cultures, and can generate dialogue and understanding between the cultural bearers and visitors such that the minorities "can move towards development without losing themselves."[47]

The distinguishing feature of the museum displays is its "interactive" approach to culture. In each of the ethnic-cultural houses for instance, life-size models of minority peoples, dressed in their traditional attire, are depicted engaging in a variety of cultural activities, such as spinning thread, weaving, making baskets, playing musical instruments, ancestral worship, farming, fishing etc. Audio-visual tapes are also another medium used to present and instruct on ethnic culture. In some of these "houses," there are short video-clips showing actual footage of certain ceremonies, rituals and festive celebrations of that group. In the *Tay* house, for example, the visitor not only gets to see the *The Lau Then* (Praying to Heaven for Luck) ceremony of the Tay in its three-dimensional form (through the mannequins and ceremonial props on display), but also witness the "live" event performed by its real practitioners on video. Apart from this, the buffalo sacrifice (or slaying) ceremony of the Ba Na and the *non* (palm leaf conical hat) production of the Kinh are permanent video exhibits at the museum.

In recent years, the museum has also incorporated "folk art performances" or "on-the-spot-making of traditional handicraft articles" as part of its cultural exhibits. [48] One recent event was on the Hmong cloth culture, which include aspects of weaving, batik making, embroidery, indigo dyeing and hemp production. In this event, eight "live models," most of them elderly Hmong women, were invited to come to the museum to demonstrate their craft. Not only were the visitors able to see the cloth production process from start to end, they were also encouraged to interact with the producers, and ask them questions about their culture.[49]

Despite its strengths (such as making minority culture more accessible and approachable, and contributing to the preservation and public interest in ethnic culture), there are also inherent limitations to the "museum method of anthropology" not just in Vietnam but elsewhere.[50] The most fundamental of these limitations is that of realism, or the lack of it. Although the exhibits aim to make culture as real and 'lived' an experience as possible, these are but "cultural snapshots," re-enactments or reproductions of the original event, not the real events themselves. The various scenes on display capture the ethnic subject in the act of cultural (re)production: these aspects of the group's culture are frozen in time and space, and propelled forward to a foreign geographical and cultural setting. No doubt the displays strive to be as authentic and as close in detail to the "real thing" as possible, ultimately, such authenticity remains a staged one. In these exhibits, the ethnic group's culture is de- contextualised from its original setting and symbolism, and is condensed so that it can be performed to so that it can be performed for

museum visitors. There are a number of implications involved in the process of staging and reproducing ethnic culture: what was a private ritual becomes a public "spectator" affair; the sacred becomes the secular; and what was unique and personal to that ethnic group becomes an indistinguishable part of Vietnam's diverse cultural landscape and "shared National Culture." The main problem with the museum method is the impossibility of depicting an ethnic group's culture in its entirety.

The other limitation lies in the problem of repetition and the massive scale of the display areas. With the sheer number and variety of artefacts, models displays and space, it is inevitable that after some point, these repetitions start to have a "dulling effect" on the visitor. As Franz Boas succinctly put it: "with the undue multiplication of groups of the same type. the impressiveness of each is decreased by the application of the same device."[51] While one might be awed by the splendid array of ethnic cultures on display when walking through the "cultural houses" of each ethnic group in Vietnam, after a while, it all begins to look the same. It is possible for the visitor to leave the museum none the wiser about what minority culture really is; apart from the fact that it is colourful, distinct, possess remarkable skills and technology, and has a long history. Although the focus of the displays is supposed to be on the cultural agents, calling for meaningful exchange between them and the visitors, it is unlikely that any interaction actually takes place between the two parties. Neither the minority mannequins nor the participants in the video clips can speak for themselves or answer questions about their culture. Interestingly, most of the participants at the workshop on Hmong cloth culture could not speak Vietnamese. The non- Hmong speaking visitors could only sit and watch the cultural demonstration. With the museum method of ethnology, as with the textual representations, there is still a sense of looking in at minority culture from the outside, albeit through the lenses of the ethnic Other. If minorities were supposed to have a voice in the representations of their culture during this period, it comes across as a silent one. The paradox of such representations is that in the museum on minorities, minorities are the silent majority.

Ultimately, the process of "cultural preservation" and the emphasis on "ethnic distinctiveness" in the *doi moi* period has been a selective one. As in the preceding period, it is not the minorities themselves who determine the content of their ethnic "distinctiveness" but the ethnic *others*, the Vietnamese nation and state, which are essentially Kinh.

Conclusion

More than fifty years after the end of colonial rule, twenty-five years after national reunification, and fifteen years since the start of *doi moi*, the minority issue remains "complicated" (*phuc tap*) and "sensitive" (*te nhi*) in popular discourse and national policy alike. Ethnology's intrinsically political nature explain the fundamental continuities in the discourse on minorities both before and during *doi moi*. Therein also lies the fundamental limitation of ethnology. In its effort to create a unified and homogenised masterpiece, it has effectively blotted out the minorities themselves, or at least muffled their voices. In the current period, minorities remain somewhat faceless, even unreal entities in official discourse and public knowledge. As with the earlier discourse, it is still the ethnic "outsiders" -- the state and the ethnologists -- who determine the

content and character of ethnic distinctiveness.

To its credit, it should be noted that Vietnamese ethnology has made some commendable achievements. It has successfully mapped and placed the various ethnic components into compact 'boxes' or categories, such that each ethnic group has a name, identity and position in the wider culture and nation. It has also made extensive and detailed studies of minority culture and lifestyle. Endeavours in these areas have helped to make sense of and put in order the 'chaotic disarray' that characterises Vietnam's ethno-linguistic landscape. In this manner, other ethnic groups have been brought into existence in official discourse and public knowledge, partly as a measure to fulfil the national ideal of "preserving and promoting ethnic distinctiveness." In the *doi moi* period, the minorities issue has received much more coverage and attention, both in academia and in official or popular discourse through a much wider range of media. Discussions of their culture and history, the economic and ecologic value of the regions they inhabit, and the persistent socio-economic hardships that they face have been linked by common themes: first, that the minorities have always been an important aspect of the nation's history and development; second, and more importantly, that the Vietnamese people and nation as a whole are united in -- or in spite of -- their diversity. On paper at least, all ethnic groups are equal members of the greater Vietnamese family, whose distinctiveness is valued and celebrated. To this extent, it has succeeded in integrating the ethnic Other with the Vietnamese whole.

In the final analysis, *doi moi* has brought both the elements of change and the opportunity for change in Vietnamese ethnology. Although many aspects from the earlier discourses persist in the current one, there are also some positive and promising developments, such as greater reflectiveness, the willingness to question and address critical issues, and greater receptiveness towards new approaches among ethnologists. The critical question at hand is what shape the discipline should take, and who it should ultimately represent, the minorities or the state.

Endnotes

[1] Le Sy Giao ed., *Dan Toc Hoc Dai Cuong* [Fundamentals of ethnology], (Ha Noi: NXB Giao Duc, 1997), p.129.

[2] Such as "Ethnology and Research Work on Ethnic Composition" (1972), and "Principles of Classifying and Affirming the Inhabitants in the North of Our Country" (1973), in Mac Duong, *Dan Toc Hoc* [Ethnology Magazine], pp.9-38; 39-50.

[3] Blaut, James M., *The National Question* (London: Zed Books, 1987), p.149.

[4] In this paper, the term 'highlands' is used to distinguish a particular geography, demography and socio-economic characteristics in relation to the rest of the country. It refers to the mountainous regions in north, north-western and in the plateau region of central Vietnam, which are primarily inhabited by ethnic minority peoples. The term is frequently juxtaposed with 'lowlands,' which refers to the plains and delta regions populated by the ethnic Vietnamese

(Kinh) and other minority peoples like the Khmer, Cham and Hoa.

[5] During the early decades of the 20th century, the Chinese extensively borrowed Japanese terms to describe new concepts - such as Marxism and the anthropological sciences. It has been estimated that fully half of all modern loanwords in Chinese are of Japanese origin, including the terms for sociology, ethnology and evolution. These terms have in turn been incorporated into the Vietnamese lexicon. Gregory E. Guldin, *The Saga of Anthropology in China - From Malinowski to Mao* (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1994), pp.23-24.

[6] Dang Nghiem Van, "Ethnic Classification in Vietnam: Principles and Processes", in *Ethnological and Religious Problems in Vietnam*, Dang Nghiem Van (Ha Noi: NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 2001), p.14.

[7] Dang Nghiem Van, "Relationship between Ethnic Communities (Ethnicities) and Socio-Political Communities (Nations) in History", Ibid., p.62. Toc nguoi is a Vietnamese neologism, whereas *dan toc* is borrowed from Chinese. It is worth pointing out that whilst *quoc gia* is a perfectly good word for 'nation', and can be used by itself, it is not a standard practice among Vietnamese scholars to do so - possibly because it is too closely associated with non-Communist regimes. I would like to thank Dr. Lockhart for pointing this out to me.

[8] Dang Nghiem Van, pp.61-62.

[9] Ibid, p.12.

[10] Ibid., p.63.

[11] Ibid.,p.82.

[12] Nguyen Van Huy, "Nhin Lai 15 Nam Nghien Cuu Su Phat Trien Cac Quan He *Dan Toc* o Nuoc Ta" [Looking back at fifteen years of research on the development of ethnic relations in our country], *Dan Toc Hoc* 4 (1983), p.38.

[13] Lo Giang Pao, *Tim Hieu Van Hoa Vung Cac Dan Toc Thieu So* [Understanding the Culture of Ethnic Minority Areas], (Ha Noi: NXB Van Hoa *Dan Toc*, 1997), pp.47-50.

[14] Dang Nghiem Van et al, *Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam*, (Hanoi: The Gioi Publishing House 2000), p.2.

[15] Phan Huu Dat, "Tro Lai Ten Goi Mot So *Dan Toc* Nuoc Ta Hien Nay" [Return to ethnonyms of some ethnic groups in our country in the present period], in *Mot So Van De Dan Toc Hoc Viet Nam* [Some issues in Vietnamese ethnology], ed. Phan Huu Dat (Ha Noi: NXB Dai Hoc Quoc Gia Ha Noi, 1999), pp.580-581.

[16] Phan Huu Dat, p.582.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Nguyen Chi Huyen ed., *Nguon Goc Lich Su Toc Nguoi Vung Bien Gioi Phia Bac Viet Nam* [Historical origins of ethnic groups in the northern border areas], (Ha Noi: NXB Van Hoa Dan Toc, 2000), p.72.

[20] *Ta Duc, Nguon Goc Va Su Phat Trien Cua Kien Truc, Bieu Tuong Va Ngon Ngu Dong Son* [Origins and development of Dong Son architecture, symbol and language], (Ha Noi: Trung Tam Tien Su Dong Nam A, 1999).

[21] Charles Higham, *The Bronze Age of Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.133-134.

[22] Be Viet Dang ed., *50 Nam Cac Dan Toc Thieu So Viet Nam, 1945-1995* [Fifty Years Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam, 1945-1995], (Ha Noi: NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1995), p.9.

[23] See for example Be Viet Dang, *50 Nam*, pp.265-285, and Nguyen Chi Huyen, *Nguon Goc Lich Su*, pp.283-286.

[24] 'Readily recognisable' and 'easily identifiable' in the sense that most of these heroes are well-known personalities in standard history textbooks, and whose names figure prominently in the physical landscape of Hanoi - i.e. all of these historical figures have major streets named after them. It is worth noting that although the famous anti-French rebel emperor Ham Nghi was betrayed by upland tribesmen, this fact is not mentioned in the exhibition.

[25] Typically, the inscription accompanying the weapon would read as follows: "Cross-bow used by Hoang Dinh Kinh (*Tay* ethnic group) to fight the French in Lang Son."

[26] Be Viet Dang, *50 Nam*, pp.23-57.

[27] Phan Huu Dat, "Qua Trinh Toc Nguoi Va Moi Quan He *Dan Toc* o Nuoc Ta" [Process of ethnic group formation and ethnic relations in our country], *Mot So Van De*, p.473.

[28] Phan Huu Dat, "May Suy Nghi Ve Viec Giai Quyet Moi Quan He Giua Cac *Dan Toc* Nuoc Ta Hien Nay" [Some opinions about solving the relations between ethnic groups in our country presently], *Phan Huu Dat*, p.642.

[29] Phan Huu Dat.

[30] Bruce Lockhart, "Colonial and Post-Colonial Constructions of 'Champa'". Presented at a workshop on "Ways of Seeing," University of New South Wales, 2000, pp.5-6.

[31] Hoang Nam, *Buoc Dau Tim Hieu Van Hoa Toc Nguoi Van Hoa Viet Nam* [First steps to understanding ethnic culture, Vietnamese culture], (Ha Noi: NXB Van Hoa *Dan Toc*, 1998), p.112.

[32] Pham Van Dong, *Van Hoa Va Doi Moi Tac Pham Va Binh Luan* [Culture and *doi moi* works and commentaries], (Ha Noi: Bo Van Hoa Thong Tin, Year?), p.38.

[33] Nguyen Duy Quy and Do Huy, *Xay Dung Nen Van Hoa Moi o Nuoc Ta Hien Nay* [To build a new cultural background in our country presently], (Ha Noi: NXB Van Hoa *Dan Toc*, 1992), pp.41-42.

[34] Be Viet Dang, *50 Nam*, p.191.

[35] Khong Dien, *Nhung Dac Diem Kinh Te-Xa Hoi Cac Dan Toc Mien Nui Phia Bac* [Socio-economic characteristics of ethnic groups in the northern highlands], (Ha Noi: NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1998), pp.205-106. It is worth noting that, by contrast, the Republic of Vietnam printed bilingual primers in all the minority languages using Vietnamese-based scripts devised with the help of American missionaries.

[36] Khong Dien, pp.206-209.

[37] Le Ba Vinh, "How to achieve combined teaching of the Meo language with Vietnamese," *Translations on North Vietnam 908*, p.382.

[38] Lo Giang Pao, *Tim Hieu Van Hoa*, p.25.

[39] Phan Huu Dat, "Tro Lai Van De Tin Nguong Dan Gian" [Return to the issue of popular beliefs], *Dan Toc Hoc* 2,86 (1995), pp.4-5.

[40] Phan Huu Dat, p.6.

[41] Be Viet Dang, *Cac Dan Toc*, p.245.

[42] Hoang Nam, *Buoc Dau Tim Hieu*, pp.170-180.

[43] Le Ngoc Thang, "Van Hoa Toc Nguoi Va Hoat Dong Du Lich" [Ethnic culture and tourism], *Dan Toc Hoc* 3,111 (2001), pp.16-20. It is worthwhile to point out that the *doi moi* interest in and attention to 'ethnic culture' is reflected in popular or consumer culture as well. "Ethnic culture" is a prominent feature in public spaces, such as museums, films and television programmes, as well as in commercial art and 'ethnic craft' shops that have been sprouting up in

Hanoi in recent years. These shops specialise in the sale of 'authentic' minority crafts such as traditional clothing, tapestry, accessories, musical instruments etc. Consumers of ethnic culture are not only foreign tourists, but increasingly (young) Vietnamese as well.

[44] Luu Hung, "Vietnamese Museum of Ethnology -- An Attractive Cultural Site," *Vietnam Review*, No. 501 (September 2000), p.48.

[45] Luu Hung (2000).

[46] Nguyen Van Huy, "How an ethnographic museum can contribute to the preservation and development of ethnic cultures?" Paper presented at the Leadership Conference on Conservancy and Development in Kunming and Lijiang, China, September 12-18. I would like to thank Professor Huy for giving me a copy of this paper.

[47] Nguyen Van Huy.

[48] Luu Hung, "Vietnam Museum of Ethnology," p.48.

[49] This event was part of the program entitled "Our Folk Culture" and was held in March, 2001 at the Vietnamese Museum of Ethnology.

[50] Ira Jacknis, "Franz Boas and Exhibits - On the Limitations of the Museum Method of Anthropology," in George Stocking Jr. ed. *Objects and Others -- Essays on Museums and Material Culture* (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p.108.

[51] Quoted in Jacknis, p.103.