

Sociology of South-East Asia Readings on Social Change and Development

Edited by Hans-Dieter Evers



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***Sociology of
South-East Asia***
***Readings on Social Change
and Development***

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DEVELOPING SOCIETIES

Sure we need to have doctors,
Teachers, builders, and all that.
Else there wouldn't have been
(Consider also the fate of)
Borobodur or Angkor Wat.

Trouble is where do we stand
Should the diagnosis be wrong,
The teacher not prepared to teach,
And the engineer-architect-builder carry on
With his monuments of sand?

Ee Tiang Hong, *Myths for a Wilderness*
(Heinemann, Singapore and K.L., 1976)

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

HANS-DIETER EVERS

SOCIOLOGICAL research on South-East Asia is still in to come to its maturity. In most South-East Asian universities, many of which were founded only after World War II, sociology departments were introduced only recently. Sociological research has, however, increased rapidly during the past decade, carried out partly by foreign scholars and partly by foreign-trained staff members of South-East Asian universities. A major part of this research was of the social survey type stimulated both by the development of appropriate techniques in the United States and by the growing demand for survey-based data from government institutions and international organizations. Though a lot of data has been amassed, relatively little progress has been made in furthering the understanding of changing South-East Asian societies. The problem lies, in my opinion, in the dependence on theories and concepts imported from abroad. With few exceptions South-East Asian and foreign sociologists have transferred theoretical propositions, developed in the context of the highly developed and industrialized United States, to South-East Asia with little attempt at adjusting to the problems of highly complex, fast changing, underdeveloped societies of South-East Asia. Taking an extremely critical point of view, the fast development of empirical social science research represents regression rather than progress; regression, because South-East Asia can look back to a long tradition of social science research based on typical South-East Asian social problems. Some scholars have, indeed, followed this tradition and have continued a debate that goes back to the beginning of this century. A continuation of this debate and the raising of new issues based on problems of social change and development of South-East Asia will provide a new impetus for the further development of sociology in South-East Asia, that is both relevant to local problems and of use to the development of sociology throughout the world.

This reader is thus designed to serve two purposes. Firstly, to provide reading material for a course on South-East Asian sociology, focused on theoretical

issues rather than descriptive material, and secondly, to establish a starting-point for research on South-East Asian societies from the South-East Asian point of view. The readings are concentrated on a few salient issues that have stimulated debate and are of continuing interest not only to one particular South-East Asian country but to the ASEAN region as a whole. Differences of opinion and debate rather than description are stressed, though none of the readings are purely theoretical. The integration of theory and empirical research is maintained throughout. Except for one of the introductory readings and some references here and there, the articles refer to the ASEAN states of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines. It is left to the student or lecturer to supplement this reader with additional material on other South-East Asian countries or more detailed studies on the country in which a course based on the present reader is given.

The readings in each section are closely interrelated. They all begin with a 'classical' statement that has sparked off debate and stimulated field research. The interrelation is easily traced in the references cited and the student will be stimulated to look at the same issue from different points of view.

It should be noted that a reader concentrated on a few selected issues must have a definite bias. This bias is a 'developmental' and 'macro-sociological' one. None of the readings can be easily assigned to sub-fields of sociology like urban, family or industrial sociology. The reader addresses itself to the basic question of sociology *par excellence*, the analysis and understanding of societies.

The first reading attempts to provide an easy introduction to the issues discussed in the reader. This overview stresses the interrelation and continuity between the sections of the reader. The second introductory reading gives an overview of South-East Asian societies in a developmental and historical perspective. The issues raised later on are put into a wider framework.

Parts II to V discuss four major concepts or theories on the structure and change of South-East Asian societies. They are arranged in the sequence in which they have emerged in scientific debates; none of these theories have remained unchallenged, but none of the major concepts 'dual societies', 'plural societies', 'loosely structured social systems', 'involution' have been discarded altogether. All four of them are still utilized in current social research on South-East Asia and elsewhere, and a familiarity with these concepts is important for understanding current studies, not only of South-East Asian societies but also of underdeveloped countries elsewhere.

The last section provides readings on some alternative approaches to the study of South-East Asian societies. The theories discussed earlier are deliberately put aside or criticized and new approaches are attempted. They are, however, in line with the other papers in so far as they are also macro-sociological and development-oriented.

It is hoped that this reader will prove to be a useful basis for courses on South-East Asian sociology both in South-East Asia and elsewhere. The concept for this reader has slowly evolved over the past ten years while teaching courses on social change in South-East Asia at Monash University, Northern Illinois University and Yale University, in the discussions on developing a new curriculum for the Department of Sociology, University of Singapore, and in discussions with staff members of the School of Comparative Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia. Though some of my former colleagues might not agree with the line taken in this reader, my thanks are due to all of them.

University of Indonesia,
Jakarta,
1979

HANS-DIETER EVERS

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PART I | Introduction

THE CHALLENGE OF DIVERSITY: BASIC CONCEPTS AND THEORIES IN THE STUDY OF SOUTH-EAST ASIAN SOCIETIES*

HANS-DIETER EVERS

THERE is hardly any study on South-East Asia that fails to allude to the extreme social, cultural and political diversity of the area. Often the attention of readers is drawn to the fact that the term South-East Asia was a rather late invention of military leaders to designate an operation theatre between India and China during World War II. There is, undoubtedly, some unity ranging from a certain 'South-East Asianism' in culture and social organization to a communality of political interest expressed in the recent formation of ASEAN. But there is no need, in my mind, to deny the obvious diversity in the South-East Asian region. In fact, this diversity of culture, social structure, economic and political history in the region as a whole, as well as within individual countries, should be recognized and analysed. There is a good reason to follow this line of argument. Confronted by the diversity of South-East Asia and the startling differences between South-East Asian societies and their well-known neighbours, particularly India, China and Japan, social scientists had to develop new concepts and new theories to tackle the empirical problems posed by their objects of research. Thus, Boeke used the term 'dual organization' for his analysis of colonial Indonesia, Furnivall, dealing with Burma and Indonesia, invented the concept of 'plural society', Embree coined the term 'loosely structured social system' by contrasting Japanese with Thai rural society, and Geertz brought out his theory of 'agricultural involution' after comparing Javanese social development with that of Japan's. All these terms, originally developed in the context of South-East Asian studies, have found wide acceptance in social research elsewhere and have become standard concepts of textbook social science.

DUAL SOCIETIES

As early as 1910 the Dutch scholar and colonial administrator J. H. Boeke expounded his theory of social and economic dualism in his doctoral dissertation (Boeke, 1910). By that time economic liberalism and free trade had brought tremendous benefits to Europe and America and led to a rapid expansion of estate agriculture and mining throughout South-East Asia. The GNP or rather gross colonial product rose rapidly. The benefits of this development did, however, not spread to the South-East Asian peasants, whose welfare, particularly in the Netherlands Indies and in Burma, declined considerably. Even government intervention (like the so-called 'Ethical Policy' of the Dutch Colonial Government) or 'development programmes' as we would call them today, could not prevent the increasing gap between the two parts of what Boeke called the dual society.

If the social and economic situation and the discussions surrounding it sound surprisingly contemporary, so does Boeke's interpretation of the situation. Boeke drew attention to the unifying force of capitalism in Europe and asked why capitalism did not exert a similar influence in South-East Asia (Boeke, 1961: 171). He showed how mass products from the colonial metropolitan countries destroyed native handicraft and trade. To South-East Asian indigenous societies

... capitalism only offered new products and did not provide any new sources of labour. From a social point of view its effect was destructive rather than constructive. Instead of enriching the pattern of oriental society it made forms of social activity superfluous. ... The development of the West meant the retrenchment and diminishing differentiation of the East (Boeke, 1961: 172-173).

*This chapter is based on a paper read at the Southeast Asian Cultural Week in Tübingen, Germany, September 1977, and at the Conference on Southeast Asian Studies at Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, November 1977.

In this process the lower stratum of South-East Asian society became impoverished, the upper stratum Westernized, urbanized and affluent. In Boeke's view the spread of the colonial economy thus created a capital-intensive growth sector and, on the other hand, an underdeveloped 'Eastern society'.

There was, however, another aspect to Boeke's paradigm which deserves severe criticism. In trying to explain why one part of the dual society thrived while the other became increasingly underdeveloped, he put a large share of the blame on undifferentiated 'Eastern society' in which social rather than individual economic needs dominate (Boeke, 1940). At times he came dangerously close to perpetuating what Prof. Syed Husin Alatas has called 'the myth of the lazy native' (Alatas, 1977). On the other hand, it would be shortsighted to deny differences in cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs, and their impact on social development. In the words of Prof. Koentjaraningrat,

... walaupun kita mungkin tidak mau mengikuti pesimis-menya dan tidak mau percaya bahwa rakyat petani di Indonesia itu ... tidak pernah akan dapat maju ekonominya, namun kita harus mengakui bahwa ciri-ciri mental seperti apa yang diajukan oleh Boeke itu, *untuk sebagian memang ada* pada rakyat Indonesia (Koentjaraningrat, 1969: 11). (Even if perhaps we don't wish to go along with his pessimism, and don't want to pose that the Indonesian peasantry will never advance their economy, still we must admit that the mental attitudes like those submitted by Boeke, up to a certain point, indeed exist in the Indonesian population.)

The dual character of colonial and post-colonial economies became widely recognized. Economists today speak of dual economies with an unlimited supply of labour, in which one sector is characterized by unemployment and low technology, the other sector by highly developed technology and employment (Higgins, 1955; Singer, 1970; Watanabe, 1965: 293). Sociologists have contrasted a traditional and a modern sector, postulating that 'modernization' would eventually bridge the gap and lead to a disappearance of traditional society. (For a critical discussion of modernization in South-East Asia, see Evers, 1973.)

On the other hand, Boeke's theory has been challenged as soon as it was made public. Next to his early critics from Dutch universities (Wertheim, 1961), the British scholar and administrator, Furnivall, criticized Boeke's paradigm implicitly and offered instead his model of a 'plural society' (Furnivall, 1939). Since then major critical reviews of 'dualism' have appeared (Higgins, 1955; Nash, 1964; Martinelli, 1972; and many others) without, however, having been able to ban the term from the scientific literature.

PLURAL SOCIETIES

The model of a plural society soon became fashionable in academic circles and among politicians side by side with the concept of the dual society it had thought to replace. Though its dynamic aspects were eventually lost and the model assumed static proportions, and thereby lent itself to a justification of apartheid and racialism, Furnivall had used a historical approach to develop his model. He relegated the dual society to the distant past of the Majapahit empire though even this became more differentiated with the immigration of Chinese merchants. 'Thus in Hindu Java, besides the ruling race and subject race, there was already a Chinese element interested solely in commerce, in economic contact with local society but forming no part of it. There was, as now, a plural economy' (Furnivall, 1939: 8). Towards the end of colonial rule in the twentieth century, a distinct South-East Asian type of social organization had developed, particularly in Burma, Malaya, and the Netherlands Indies. In the latter, he claimed, 'there are three social orders, the natives, the Chinese and the Europeans, living side by side but separately and rarely meeting, save in the material and economic sphere' (Furnivall, 1939: 239). In the by now famous definition he characterized a plural society as 'comprising two or more elements or social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling in one political unit' (Furnivall, 1939: 446).

Furnivall's paradigm spread fairly rapidly and was applied to a great number of societies, particularly in South-East Asia and in the West Indies. It also carried favours with politicians and nation-builders. Slightly modified to 'multi-racial society' it became part of the national ideology of the Republic of Singapore in which an extreme diversity of ethnic and cultural groups was neatly classified as 'Malays, Chinese, Indians and others', granting cultural and language autonomy to each community, but demanding political and economic co-operation.

In addition to supplying a conceptual scheme for the analysis of plural societies, Furnivall also proposed a number of hypotheses about the social and cultural properties of pluralism. Three problems or hypotheses were proposed:

1. A plural society, said Furnivall, resembles a confederation of allied provinces but within one territory. Therefore, 'in a plural society there is no common will' (p. 447). The question whether political conflict and racial strife is inherent in plural societies

has been hotly debated by social scientists who have tried to buttress their point of view by examples drawn from societies as far apart as Switzerland or Malaysia. All seem, however, to agree, that nation-building in a plural society is an uphill task (Chan and Evers, 1973).

2. Furnivall pointed out that there is a general disorganization of social demand as the structure of demand and economic motives is not co-ordinated by common cultural values. 'The emphasis on production', says Furnivall, 'rather than on social life, is characteristic of a plural society' (p. 450). Achieving equality of opportunity, social mobility and an equitable distribution of wealth is, therefore, a greater problem in plural society than in any other type.

3. Furnivall takes an even dimmer view of the cultural prospects of plural societies. As each 'community tends to be organized for production rather than for social life' (p. 459), cultural as well as moral standards deteriorate. Very little research has been done to test this unseemingly harsh hypothesis, though existing studies tend to show a dedifferentiation and simplification of cultural patterns and standards of language in plural societies. And the attempts of some South-East Asian politicians to blame the deterioration of moral and cultural standards they apparently perceive in their countries, on Western influence, provide food for thought in this context. In any case, there is no doubt, whatsoever, about the extreme richness of South-East Asian cultures, indigenous as well as immigrant.

Whereas social scientists of the colonial period, like Boeke and Furnivall, appear to have had a fairly simplistic view of indigenous South-East Asian peasant societies, post-World War II scholars, particularly anthropologists, sociologists and geographers, have studied South-East Asian villages in greater detail. Here again, South-East Asia has provided a challenge to social scientists who found many of their conceptual tools inapplicable or inadequate. Thus, an American anthropologist found it necessary to coin a new term, namely 'loosely structured social system' to describe Thai peasant society. We shall, therefore, draw attention to the issues that have arisen out of the debate following his study.

LOOSELY STRUCTURED SOCIAL SYSTEMS

The term 'loosely structured social systems' was coined by Yale University anthropologist John F. Embree and later taken up and elaborated by a

great number of scholars, particularly a group of researchers from Cornell University, who studied the Thai village of Bang Chan on the outskirts of Bangkok. The loose-structure paradigm has been used in numerous studies on Thailand, but also on Kalimantan (Pouwer, 1960), Sri Lanka (Ryan and Strauss, 1954; Evers, 1968) and comparatively on samples of societies (Pelto, 1968; Evers, 1969b; Potter, 1976). The critical debate on the paradigm came to a climax in 1969 with the publication of a book edited by a German sociologist (Evers, 1969a).

The development or, one is tempted to say, struggle for a new concept to analyse Thai and other South-East Asian societies was brought about by observations that had already led Boeke and Furnivall to describe South-East Asian indigenous societies as homogeneous. In contrast to the Chinese or Japanese, the Thais do not know corporate groups, clans or lineages, nor are their village communities clearly defined and integrated. Individual mobility was found to be high and primordial sentiments largely absent. Without going to the extreme of posing that 'between the individual and the nation there is nothing', the following points have been noted by a supporter of the loose-structure thesis:

(a) Economic cooperation, other than that occurring within the kindred, normally rests upon ad hoc dyadic ties and implies no lasting relationship between individuals or families. Enduring cooperative work groups, as such, are all but non-existent.

(b) Focuses of local concern, such as school and temple, normally entail little in the way of concerted social activity on the part of villagers. . . .

(c) Patron-client relationships, between both individuals and families, normally are informal arrangements with little likelihood of long-run stability.

(d) Networks of ceremonial cooperation, although often relatively durable, consist almost exclusively of dyadic ties between families. In short, other than the nuclear family or household, the kindred and the Buddhist monkhood, there are virtually no durable, functionally important groups on the local level (Piker, 1969: 63).

The relevance of this paradigm for Boeke's original thesis of the dual society is obvious. Thai peasant society, as described by the loose-structure theorists, conforms very much to the model of a homogeneous 'Eastern society'. On the other hand, Thai society does not answer to the description of a 'traditional society' as it does not seem to have all those features 'modernization' is supposed to destroy.

The 'loose-structure' concept has, however, not remained unchallenged. Universität Saarbrücken psychologist Boesch stresses the rigid hierarchic struc-

ture of Thai society, which diminishes the impulses for individual initiative (Boesch, 1962: 43). The Thai sociologist Boonsanong Punyodyana extends this argument to a societal level and draws attention to the social class position of Thai peasants *vis-à-vis* the bureaucracy. He points out that

... the Thai government 'administers' the peasants in a great number of ways concerning a great number of matters which affect the very existence of the peasants themselves. The peasants have always been conscripted to the *corvée* labour force and later to the armed forces. They have been taxed annually and perpetually. Their means of livelihood, e.g. rice production and exchange, has been continuously subject to elaborate measures of control devised by a central government in whose policy-making they have no choice (Boonsanong, 1969: 95).

This statement reminds us of the danger of looking at peasants or peasant villages in isolation. Focusing attention on towns, regions or whole societies in a historical and a comparative perspective and taking into account the pressures of the international system, will provide a more accurate picture of South-East Asian societies and social development. Such an approach was, indeed, taken by Clifford Geertz, who tried to meet the challenge of social and cultural diversity by propounding his theory of 'agricultural involution'. A short critical evaluation of this theory will end our review of concepts and theories that derived from South-East Asian studies and have stimulated the development of social science research world-wide.

INVOLUTION

Geertz concentrated his attention on the indigenous section of Furnivall's plural society. He analysed 'streams' (*aliran*) of socio-cultural organization and thereby extended the principle of pluralism to Javanese society that had formerly been described as homogeneous.

Geertz also elaborated on Boeke's scheme by drawing attention to the existence of two ecological systems in Indonesia, the Inner and the Outer Islands. Only to Java and adjacent areas does Boeke's theory of dualism apply.

Thus, as the bulk of the Javanese peasants moved towards agricultural involution, shared poverty, social elasticity, and cultural weakness, a small minority of the outer island peasants moved towards agricultural specialization, frank individualism, social conflict, and cultural rationalization (Geertz, 1963: 116).

Javanese and Minangkabaus were used as an illustration of these two social types.

Both Boeke and Geertz saw Javanese peasant society as economically and socially static. Both scholars emphasized that this inertia, this inability to change, was not an innate characteristic of the 'oriental mentality' but had 'resulted from the intrusion of the colonial economic system into the previously balanced social equilibrium of peasant community' (Koentjaraningrat, 1975: 84). But Geertz added a new dimension by analysing how this state of affairs came about. The process was one of involution rather than evolution. By this he meant an 'overdriving of an established form in such a way that it becomes rigid through an inward over-elaboration of detail' (Geertz, 1963: 82). The expansion of the colonial economy during the nineteenth century had forced the Javanese peasants to become more productive without, however, allowing them to accumulate some of the surplus produced in their economy. Any such surplus was siphoned off by estate companies and eventually led to a strengthening of the capitalist sector of the colonial dual economy. The basic pattern of peasant production remained, but, in order to support the increasing population, social and agricultural involution was inevitable. A

... 'late gothic' quality of agriculture increasingly pervaded the whole rural economy. Tenure systems grew more intricate, tenancy relationships more complicated, cooperative labour arrangements more complex, all in an effort to provide everyone with some niche, however small, in the overall system (Geertz, 1963: 82).

Geertz's concept has been used to analyse urban areas (McGee, 1971; Evers, 1974, 1978) and other South-East Asian societies, like Singapore (Buchanan, 1972, chapter 3) and the Philippines (van den Muijzenberg, 1971), but its spread was somewhat hampered by the Latin American theory of international dependence and dependent reproduction that addressed itself to similar problems.

An elaboration and further development of the theory of involution, perhaps in conjunction with dependence theory, appears, nevertheless, most important because of the policy issues involved. As governments of the ASEAN states attempt to develop and strengthen the capitalist sector of their economies both in estate agriculture and industry, the repercussions on traditional peasant societies should be taken into account.

If peasants are driven into involution, the development of a modern farming economy may be delayed or even made impossible. What makes involution in Indonesia, according to Geertz, 'tragic rather than

merely decadent is that around 1830 the Indonesian economy could have made the transition to modernism, never a painless experience, with more ease than it can do today' (Geertz, 1963: 82).

OUTLOOK

I have so far stressed four concepts and theories that have been developed out of empirical research on South-East Asian societies. They represent in a certain way South-East Asia's indigenous contribution to the development of social science. As these theories have been applied to societies elsewhere, other theories that have emerged from research on other societies in other continents, have also been applied in the South-East Asian context. Thus, the theories of the great German sociologist Max Weber were used to explain social and religious change in South-East Asia (Schrieke, 1953, originally 1929; Alatas, 1963, 1973; and many others). Theories of modernization that dominated the field of social change in developing societies from the 1950s onward were also taken up by South-East Asian scholars though perhaps with less enthusiasm than elsewhere (see the contributions in Evers, 1973). In many studies it seems the term 'modernization' has been used in a fairly general sense and for want of a better term, but without indicating allegiance to the modernization theories of American sociologists.

Another equally debated approach to macro-sociological change has gained currency in recent years under the name of 'dependence theory'. This approach associated with the name of Andre Gunder Frank and others had its origin in Latin American research. It is of interest to South-East Asian studies as it is concerned with some of the major issues debated already under the heading of 'dual societies' or 'involution' as discussed above. The results are often similar but differences in terminology make comparisons unnecessarily difficult.

Though detailed field research is still an important task for South-East Asian sociologists, a rethinking of basic theoretical issues is certainly necessary to enable a thorough analysis of long-term trends in social change and development in South-East Asia. A greater knowledge and awareness of theories that have emerged out of South-East Asian research in the past as well as appreciation of theories dealing with developmental and macro-sociological problems in other areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America, will certainly help to achieve this end.

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SOUTH-EAST ASIA includes a considerable part of the Asian continent—Burma, Thailand, the Malayan Peninsula, Kampuchea, Laos, and Vietnam—and two large island groups: the Indonesian archipelago and the Philippines. In terms of population, the archipelagoes together slightly outnumber the continental countries: nearly half of the total population of South-East Asia belongs to Indonesia alone. Still more striking is that nearly one-third of the total population of the area is found on an island of very moderate size: Java, with over seventy million inhabitants in an area of only 132 000 sq. km. The total land area of South-East Asia is 4.5 million sq. km.

These few figures may suffice to indicate one of the characteristics of the area: the extreme differences in population densities. Despite rather similar climatic conditions—described by the term ‘monsoon Asia’ sometimes applied to this area—the distribution of the population is uneven. This may be due partly to differential soil fertility: the extremely fertile riverine valleys of the mainland and the volcanic soils of Java allow population densities unknown in rural areas in the Western world. The differences are also partly due to cultural factors, related to the prevalent type of land use. Even in early times populations that grew rice in open irrigated fields were well distinguished in cultural traits from the peoples of forest areas who practised swidden cultivation of the slash-and-burn type.

EARLY CIVILIZATIONS

THE INLAND STATES

The areas of irrigation agriculture in South-East Asia were generally those most deeply affected by Hindu civilization. Though irrigation may have been developed, particularly in Java, before contact was made with the Indian world, it is probable that Brahmins called to the princely courts of South-East Asia

played an important role in the further spread of Hindu civilization, including irrigation techniques. The Dutch sociologist J. C. van Leur has put forward a hypothesis that it was Indian Brahmins who provided a sacral legitimation to ruling dynasties by furnishing mythological sanction to genealogy. At the same time they probably served these princes as chancellors, advisers in matters of government and the domestication of the rural population as well as in the construction of temples and irrigation works (Van Leur, 1955: 103–104, 257–258). Thus, they laid the foundation for the greater South-East Asian empires based on irrigated rice-field cultivation. Within this category one could include the central Javanese kingdom of Mataram until the tenth century, the Khmer kingdom of Angkor in the area that at present constitutes Kampuchea, and to a lesser extent the preponderantly mountainous Champa kingdom in the southern region of what is currently known as Annam. In the Red River basin a similar state structure emerged under Chinese influence; but in this case it was not cultural diffusion of the type carried by individual Brahmins but military conquest during the Han dynasty that laid the foundations for the bureaucratic structure. In later centuries the centre of the Javanese empire temporarily shifted to eastern Java, whereas on the continent new empires emerged in the Irrawaddy and Menam delta regions.

The empires based on levies from the yields of irrigated rice fields and on socage are defined by Van Leur in a Weberian term—‘patrimonial bureaucracies’. He describes these *oikos* states in the following way:

... mass domestication made possible by river and canal irrigation farming formed the basis for control of the population by the officialdom of the ruler. All subjects were required to render service to the authority, and that service was organized and directed bureaucratically by an administrative apparatus. The chief role of the cities was that of being royal seats—*kraton* towns, thus—in which levies in kind were brought together from the whole country, and royal store-

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houses in which the levies were stocked and from which the host of officials, the army, and the royal household were provided. The same system was used for lower administrative units. Large-scale planned projects of agrarian colonization were undertaken, and with the services of the subjects monumental building activities were accomplished. They were forced-labour states, socage states or liturgical states. The legal status of the agrarian population could vary from that of freeholders to that of serfs and slaves brought into the state by predatory war, purchase, or subjugation and established in agrarian colonies (Van Leur, 1955: 56–57).

Though a certain amount of central authority is essential for the maintenance of irrigation systems, Wittfogel's picture of these ancient Asian empires as strongly centralized units over which the prince exercised 'total power' would appear to be far removed from historical reality (1957: *passim*). The very fact that the rulers had to use force time and again to keep the local lords under their control is not a sign of absolute power, but rather of weakness. Among the means tried to prevent imperial disintegration and to ensure the regular payment of tribute, Weber (1922) mentions periodic royal tours; dispatch of confidential agents; demands for 'personal guarantees' (such as hostages or regular appearances at the court); attaching sons of officials to the courts as pages; putting relatives in important positions (which usually proved to be a double-edged sword), or just the reverse—appointing people of inferior class or foreigners as *ministeriales*: brief terms of office; exclusion of public servants from seigniorages over territories where they had landed property or family connexions; attaching celibates or eunuchs to the court; having officials supervised by spies or censors. None of these expedients proved to be a panacea, and imperial unity was continually threatened from within by decentralizing tendencies.

Most of the practices listed by Weber as characteristic of patrimonial states were also tried by South-East Asian rulers to check the ever-threatening centrifugal tendencies (Schrieke, 1955–7, Vol. 1: 184–185, and Vol. 2: 217–221; Vella, 1955: 322–331).

More difficult than a general characterization of the bureaucratic structures is a description of the basic units—the villages in the irrigated rice-growing areas of early South-East Asia. The available literary and epigraphic sources are, in general, exclusively concerned with the description of life at the courts and in monasteries. In order to get some insight into village life we must make more or less conjectural inferences from observations of later periods.

It is highly probable that the villages were largely

characterized by a subsistence economy, a high proportion of the surplus being levied, through village authorities, by the bureaucratic apparatus to sustain the larger and smaller courts and the town population surrounding them. But the concept forwarded by Boeke (1948: 5, 13) of completely closed village economies in early South-East Asian societies cannot be upheld: in Java, for example, a group of neighbouring villages were connected by a single market system. Moreover, the peasantry were partly dependent upon tools external to the village economy, such as imported iron plowshares.

The Marxian concept of a typically Asian mode of production—characterized by a lack of private ownership of land and the complete subjection of the individual peasant to village authority, and accounting for a basic unchangeableness of ancient Asian societies—should also be reconsidered (Chesneaux, 1964: 47–53). Marx's interpretation of Asian village society, based on a rather shallow range of reading, appears untenable in the light of present-day knowledge of early peasant societies in South-East Asia. The kings and their chroniclers kept up a pretence of the king's absolute ownership rights over all the lands belonging to his realm and denied any rights of the individual peasants. It is this formal interpretation that was greedily adopted by later colonial governments to substantiate their claim, as successors to the king, to domainial rights. But social reality may have substantially differed from this legal construct, as was demonstrated by a study of land law in Ceylon (Pieris, 1956: 1–22).

Though it is highly probable that the village communities in general had rather extended powers over land use and crop rotation schemes, this does not exclude the possibility that in some areas individual peasants may have enjoyed private, even hereditary, rights to definite plots of land, whereas in other areas periodic redistribution of plots may have been the normal procedure.

A rejection of Marx's concept of an 'Asiatic mode of production' is not necessarily an endorsement of the Marxist concept of the evolution of the Western world—from slavery to feudalism to capitalism—as valid for Asian societies. There are strong indications that slavery never had the importance in South-East Asian rural economies that it had in ancient Greek–Roman civilization. Socage, not slave labour, in all probability furnished most of the manpower needed for the construction of monuments and irrigation works. This may explain why huge Hindu and Bud-