POLITICAL ELITES IN COLONIAL SOUTHEAST ASIA: AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS *

I

Present-day political systems in the nation states of Southeast Asia can be classified in accordance with various criteria; they can, for example, be politically grouped on a spectrum ranging from parliamentary democracy to totalitarian dictatorship. The focus of the present inquiry is the sociology of political elites rather than the forms of polity which these elites have created or helped to create. It deals exclusively with the ruling “national” elites, leaving out of consideration secondary groups, such as territorially- or ethnically-based local and regional elites, religious leaders, and other traditional elites. Two kinds of “national” elite can be discerned in contemporary Southeast Asia, which we shall call “intelligentsia elites” and “modernizing traditional elites”. Disregarding for the time being the constitutional frameworks and the degree of popular participation of each individual state, it may be said that both elites are in many respects oligarchies. Their oligarchic nature stems from the fact, first, that they are by and large the only exponents and representatives of the modern national states of Southeast Asia whose populations are only gradually undergoing the transition from “primordial” to “civil” allegiances. Second, they are also oligarchies in the sense that core members are predominantly recruited from among limited segments of society.

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2 This terminology is borrowed from Clifford Geertz, “Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States”, in Geertz (ed.), Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa (Glencoe, 1963), 105-57.
Intelligentsia regimes, as used in this essay, are polities governed by groups of Southeast Asians whose major, if not sole, claim to the exercise of political power stems from their Western-style education and consequent orientation. In other words, it is not their social background — the group or class of their birth — that is the most significant datum about such intelligentsias (in fact, they usually represent a rather heterogeneous grouping from that point of view), but their commonly experienced training and outlook. Equally important, these intelligentsias are in our definition ruling classes proper: they rule because they are the intelligentsia and not because they are educated members of other ruling groups in society; they correspond rather closely to Karl Mannheim’s *freischwebende Intelligenz* or, for that matter, to Platonic philosopher-kings. Their emergence as a ruling class will be historically traced in this essay; suffice it to say now that their existence is predicated on a present-day social order in which there are no other viable groups able to exercise political power, or where such (usually traditional) groups have been so weakened as to leave the intelligentsia as virtually the sole successful claimant to power.

Modernizing traditional regimes, by contrast, consist of elite groups predominantly recruited on an ascriptive basis, from among established, not to say vested, social classes, strata or groups. It is true, of course, that the modernizing segments of these groups derive their contemporary political pre-eminence also from a Western-style education and outlook, and that they therefore constitute a fairly distinct minority within the traditional classes of their origin. Both elites thus may be said to belong to a modern Southeast Asian intelligentsia in the broadest sense of the term. But the intrinsic differences between them are of greater significance than the basic similarity of their educational experiences: where in the first type of polity intelligentsias act as ruling classes in their own right, the other is ruled by Westernized, “intellectualized” branches, so to speak, of traditionally-established ruling classes or groups. Reserving a closer historical investigation of modernizing traditional regimes for subsequent parts of this essay, we may briefly note that their existence depends on a greater or lesser degree of continuity in the social order, which has permitted traditional holders of power (economic, social and political) to adapt themselves to historical change, and to make some of them at least active participants and, indeed, leaders in the processes of modernization. It does not necessarily follow that in such regimes the

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3 This shared experience and outlook is important for both civilian and military intelligentsias.


Westernized elite is coterminous with the (broadly defined) intelligentsia. Insofar as there exist intellectuals outside the educated traditional oligarchy, they may in fact form oppositional nuclei, as often as not vegetating on the (barely) tolerated fringes of political life.6

In accordance with the above set of criteria, Indonesia, Burma and North (and perhaps also South) Viet Nam may be classified as intelligentsia regimes, while Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaya (Malaysia) and the Philippines belong to the category of modernizing traditional regimes. It should be stressed once again that these categories are sociological rather than political, and that they refer to the composition of the respective elites (i.e., to the question of who they are) rather than to the policies they adopt (i.e., to what they actually do). Such a classification need not ipso facto imply differences in, or even degrees of, “progressiveness”, “modernity”, “democratization”, and such like. Either kind of regime can be progressive, modern or democratic to various extents, just as both can be the obverse to various extents.

II

The existence of these two types of contemporary Southeast Asian political elites is the result of a variety of historical developments. Two sets of such developments will receive detailed attention in this analysis, one rooted in premodern times, the other resulting from the imposition of modern colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first concerns the formative influences affecting the basic social and political structures of the various Southeast Asian societies, and the second, the effects of alien overlords on these structures. The selection of these two sets of historical phenomena is, of course, arbitrary; they are not necessarily the only significant nodal points in Southeast Asian history.7 Similarly, the emphasis on foreign, “imported” factors in Southeast Asian history is largely dictated by the focus of the inquiry itself. Whatever the proper balance between imported superstructure and indigenous substructure may be in each part of Southeast Asia, there seems little doubt that socially and politically the region’s core areas of developed civilizations have been profoundly and more or less lastingly affected from the outside.8 This is particularly true of the premodern era, but to some extent also holds for the colonial period.

According to the early formative influences, Southeast Asia can be divided

into three distinct sectors, the Indianized, Sinicized and Hispanized. Using contemporary national boundaries we would place Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Malaya and Indonesia in the first group; North and South Viet Nam in the second, and the Philippines in the third. Obviously, such a simple tripartite division does inadequate justice to the region's complexity, variety and history. First, though the effects of the three foreign influences on social and political structures were significant and profound, they were the result of quite different, and chronologically disparate, developments. Indianization proceeded gradually and apparently pacifically, the impetus for this acculturation very likely coming from within the area rather than from without; by contrast, Sinicization and Hispanization originated in military conquest and subjugation. It must, second, be borne in mind that all of these foreign elements impinged to varying degrees of intensity upon the different regions of their respective orbits, some parts having to all intents and purposes remained virtually free of their influences. As a rule, it was lowland areas favored by geographic and economic factors that experienced the fullest extent of alien influence and thus developed into core areas of civilization. And within each of these three orbits — and, *mutatis mutandis*, within most of the modern national states — we find a wide variety of cultures and subcultures exhibiting different levels of "imported" structural elements. Third, the boundaries between the various orbits, especially between the Indianized and Sinicized, were not historically static; not only do we sometimes find them side by side in what has become a single national entity in modern times,9 but we also know of examples, notably Champa, where a formerly Indianized polity has been supplanted by a Sinicized one. In the subsequent analysis these highly important qualifications will be ignored, the names of present-day national entities being used as convenient shorthand symbols.

**Indianized Southeast Asia.** The most significant socio-political characteristic of the polities in the Indianized sector was, that all power and, effectively, all right to land, were vested in the kingly office. Accession to kingship was not directly a function of either wealth or ancestry, but rather of possession of the royal regalia.10 In Indianized societies possession of these regalia gave power not only to the king, but also to his kin, and it became normal to parcel out the more important offices of state — particularly those involving the governance of a region — to the close kin of the monarch. If offices were given to a commoner, one of his female kin would often be taken as a royal concubine, thus creating a quasi-affinal relationship between king and official.11

11 See, for example, a contemporary Chinese report on Angkor: "Usually princes are
With such extreme emphasis on the royal power the distinction between "royal" and "non-royal" became crucial. Royalty was a sacral force, *sui generis*, and the social and political division between those in contact with such a force (those of the sacred sphere) and those not in such contact (those of the profane sphere) became absolute.

Since the possession of the symbols of royalty — the capital city, the palace, the throne, the tiered umbrella, the lingam, etc. — was the essential prerequisite of royal power, and far outweighed the family status of any particular claimant, cases of disputed succession were not only frequent but virtually the rule. While succession rules theoretically provided that the ruler's eldest son should succeed him, in fact whoever managed, by guile, personal prestige, or main force to possess himself of the symbols of royalty at the end of a reign automatically became heir to the power of the throne. Most successions were fought over by members of established royal families or nobilities, but there are many instances of successful usurpation of the royal power by commoners. Thus in spite of the gulf separating the royal and non-royal "segments" of society, the vacuum created by the demise of a monarch made it possible for an individual to cross the dividing line and become royal and sacred, and hence possessor of political power.\(^{12}\)

Kingly power was, then, largely personal, not dynastically institutional. It was also virtually absolute or "despotic", though not necessarily only or primarily because of the "hydraulic" nature of many Indianized polities (a characteristic they shared with others) but rather because the realm was not intrinsically conceived of in terms of a functionally controlled and administratively demarcated territory so much as in terms of the radiation, so to speak, of royal charisma, itself a reflection of the sacral, rather than secular, nature of the polity.\(^{13}\) The "patrimonial" realm proper was unstable and almost invariably of limited geographic size; Indianized "empires" (insofar as they were primarily agricultural) were very likely not stable administrative entities so much as at best loose confederacies recognizing the temporary charismatic suzerainty of an outstanding *primum inter pares*. The key to this kind of polity lay in the combination of sparse populations and the absence of landed prop-

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\(^{13}\) The question of the supremacy of royal power vis-à-vis the Brahman priests in India has recently been critically examined by Ludo and Rosanne Rocher, "La sacrnalité du pouvoir dans l'Inde ancienne d'après les textes de Dharma", in *Le Pouvoir et le Sacré* (Brussels, n.d.), 123-37. In the Southeast Asian context, this problem still requires attention. Coedes (op. cit., 206) observes that in Cambodia and Champa the Brahmans did not occupy as pre-eminent a position as in India, but apparently a position inferior to that of the king.
erty. All land (with some specific exceptions) “belonged” to the king and was farmed, so to speak, in usufruct, whether by individual peasants or corporate villages. Indianized Southeast Asia had no landowning classes, such as gentry or feudal nobilities. Royal officials were appointed by the ruler; they were, it is true, rewarded by tax farming privileges, but not only were these privileges by definition revocable at the whim of the king, they applied — as e.g. in the Javanese tjiatjah — to at times disparately located groups of human beings rather than to contiguous territorial entities. This concentration of power thus precluded the existence of “countervailing” power stemming from more or less independently-wielded administrative, territorial control. The bilateral kinship system prevailing in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Java may have further tended toward the dispersal rather than the conservation of landed wealth, prestige and power. In any case, official tenure was non-hereditary, as often as not tenuous and brief, and frequently entailing dismissal and even loss of life. Last but not least, the rule of decreasing descent precluded the perpetuation sine die of ascriptive charisma.

If we disregard the complex problems of village autonomy and of the “countervailing” power at times available to religious, notably Theravada Buddhist and Muslim, elites in later centuries, we may say that basically the “sacral” Indianized polities were characterized by dualism, a division into two social compartments, the royal and the non-royal, and that the political gap between these two compartments was not spanned by an institutionalized system of graded power based on landownership or other socio-economic criteria.

14 The exceptions were lands — at times entire villages — granted to religious personnel, usually in perpetuity.


19 This kind of polity was limited to profoundly Indianized areas only where, as Coedès says (op. cit., 204), “plusieurs facteurs ont contribué à briser les barrières entre groupes fermés les uns aux autres, et à les fondre dans une organisation plus ou moins centralisée.” Elsewhere, as e.g. in Western Malaya but also in parts of Sumatra, royal power, though it used the panoply of the Indianized monarchy, was restricted and circumscribed by the existence of the “countervailing” power — whether landed or mercantile — of territorial or kin chiefs. See e.g. J. M. Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya (London, 1958), 49.
Sinicized Southeast Asia. In contrast to this dualistic, sacral Indianized polity the Sinicized and Hispanized polities both could be termed structurally hierarchical and “secular” (or territorial). Both possessed social groups spanning the gap between royal (albeit ideologically absolute) power and peasant society. These groups as a rule had direct access to, and command over, landed wealth — and hence over segments of the population living on these lands — which provided them with “countervailing” power. It is these groups that, in turn, supplied the personnel for what was essentially functional, territorial administration.

The Sinicization of Vietnam (with the exception of its Southern “Cochin-Chinese” part, a late colonization territory) which occurred during the first millennium of the Christian era was structurally so profound that it survived the end of Chinese political control in 939 A.D. by several centuries. Whatever the causal relationship between “hydraulic” agriculture and political authoritarianism, the Sino-Vietnamese polity was primarily differentiated from its Indianized counterparts by the absence of absolute, “despotic” political power. Certainly the Vietnamese state par excellence was the centralized monarchy.20 The emperor was thus far more than mere primus inter pares, and the charisma of the imperial office was of crucial importance; but the emperor was the guardian rather than the owner of the realm: though the Son of Heaven, he was not a deva-raja. The imperial throne as such was open to usurpation, but more than possession of the charismatic paraphernalia of emperorship was involved in successful usurpation of the intrinsically secular power at the apex of the polity. Compared to the Indianized polities, power in the Sinicized state was institutional rather than personal, and dynasties were relatively long-lived. More important still, continuity was embedded in a hierarchically structured officialdom, the Confucian-trained bureaucracy. It was, it is true, appointed by, and responsible to, the emperor, but it was — ideally, at least — recruited on merit, not on the basis of ascriptive criteria, let alone at the whim of the emperor. Indeed, though the scholar-officials were dependent on the emperor, the emperor was almost equally dependent on a cohesive, institutional group which could and did survive not only individual rulers but even changing dynasties.21


21 Unfortunately no institutional study on the Vietnamese bureaucracy has to my knowledge yet appeared. While it was obviously very closely modelled on the Chinese bureaucracy, on which the analysis in the text is largely based, the parallel may have to be qualified in the light of specific data at a later date. Dr. Truong Buu Lam, Director of the Institute of Historical Research in the University of Saigon, currently

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The key to the Vietnamese polity was not only the centralized monarchy, but also a "gentry", which to a large extent derived its status from a system of land tenure that permitted patrilineages to accumulate lands (though individual tenure could, partly due to the absence of primogeniture, vary a great deal from generation to generation). This gentry could exercise independent, "countervailing" social power, whether as notables in the Vietnamese commune (in French administrative parlance) determining local and regional affairs by virtue of the example they set of Confucian civic morality, or as members of the central bureaucracy, the "mandarinate". While it is true that this meritocracy was open to candidates from all social classes, the social outsider was very likely at most times in a small minority; in any case, the Confucian school-tie made him into an assimilated member of what in essence was a gentry-dominated group of literati-officials; very likely, too, accession to political office may have helped to accumulate landed wealth.

Thus, whereas a great social and political gap existed between the royal and non-royal in the societies of Indianized Southeast Asia, in the Sinicized polity of Vietnam that gap was bridged by powerful lineages (often of landowners) able to exercise independent economic, social and — to some extent — political power.

Hispanized Southeast Asia. If India and China had brought new systems of political organization to the greater part of Southeast Asia, in the Philippines this task fell to medieval European Spain. Indian influences had apparently at best only been of peripheral and even then isolated significance in the is-

at Harvard University, has been kind enough to read the sections on Vietnam. On the Chinese gentry, I have drawn on Fei Hsiao-tung, China's Gentry: Essays in Rural-Urban Relations (Chicago, 1953), esp. Chs. I and II; Hsiao Kung-chuan, Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century (Seattle, 1960); and on Chang Chung-li, The Chinese Gentry: Studies on their Role in Nineteenth-Century Chinese Society (Seattle, 1955), according to whose tabulations landownership played a relatively insignificant role in gentry recruitment.


23 The social origins and composition of the Vietnamese 'mandarinate' has, once again, not yet been systematically investigated. Lê Thánh Khôi (op. cit., 328) stresses the 'democratic' recruitment through open examinations as one of the great reforms of the Nguyễn dynasty in the 19th century, but his assessment appears legalistic, devoid of sociological insights. Ch. Gosselin, L'Empire d'Annam (Paris, 1904), 39, observed that "tous les lettrés du pays, organisés depuis des siècles en une espèce de franc-maçonnerie [sic], se prêtent mainfaste les uns les autres ..." Cited in Paul Isoart, Le phénomène national vietnamiens (Paris, 1961), 61. Cf. also Jean Chesneaux, Contribution à l'histoire de la nation vietnamienne (Paris, 1955), 85-86. For China, see i.a. Hsiao, op. cit., 382-83, 390-91, and for an earlier period, E. A. Kracke, Jr., Civil Service in Early Sung China, 960-1067 (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), 69-70.
lands; with the exception of Muslim strongholds in the south. Preconquest Philippine social organization was limited to the barangay, a territorially circumscribed village group largely bound together by kinship ties and led by datus. Competition for leadership was a constant feature of these geographically small entities, which moreover feuded with each other without ever attaining even a limited measure of political consolidation into larger, more viable political units. In the areas where the Spaniards came to exercise control from the late sixteenth century onward, a new and centralized political super-structure emerged. But the Hispanization of the Philippines did not lead to a replica of the Hispanic-American societies based on latifundia and a numerically and socially significant Spanish-Filipino mestizo class. Rather, due to the limited number of Spaniards (the result in part of geographic distance and in part of the relative economic, especially mineral, poverty of the islands), the new order to a large extent involved the gradual transformation of the preconquest Filipino ruling group of datus into a privileged, landed class of principales, the major beneficiaries of the new social, economic, and legal order introduced by the Spaniards. Though political — and ecclesiastic — control remained firmly in European hands, and though commercial wealth until the end of the eighteenth century was likewise primarily a Spanish — and to a lesser extent a Chinese — monopoly, land continued to be predominantly owned by a segment of the native population.

Not too dissimilar to the Vietnamese social structure, Filipino society thus possessed a native class with access to an increasing measure of social power, and it was from that class that the alien rulers recruited the subordinate officialdom on whose existence and loyalty their political hegemony ultimately depended. For our present, limited purposes of comparison, the major structural difference between Vietnam and the Philippines was, that in the former, political power at the apex had been wrested from foreign rulers in the middle of the tenth century, whereas in the latter, the process of merging socio-economic with national political power only took place under American aegis during the first half of the twentieth century.

III

Though European maritime and commercial influence in Southeast Asia commenced in the early sixteenth century, the Western impact on, and inter-

24 Muslim power actually extended to Luzon in the 16th century, but the Spanish conquest pushed it Southward. — My colleague, Professor Harold C. Conklin, was kind enough to read the sections dealing with the Philippines critically, and to suggest some corrections and improvements.

ference with, the native social structure remained for long limited to parts of the Philippines and to Java. It was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that European colonialism came to embrace all of Southeast Asia — with the exception of Thailand — and to affect the area more or less profoundly. According to the incidence and type of colonial rule and its impact on the indigenous elite structure, we shall now super-impose on our original tripartite division of Southeast Asia into Indianized, Sinicized and Hispanicized regions an additional division into areas under direct and those under indirect colonial control. Quite briefly, in terms of “ideal types” direct rule implies the abrogation or destruction of the existing political system — the elimination of the traditional political elite qua elite — and its substitution by a Western administrative apparatus staffed by nonascriptive personnel, Western as well as indigenous. Indirect rule, by contrast, indicates the continuation of the precolonial system, and the maintenance of traditional political elite groups as at least de jure rulers; in such systems, the Western element operates “indirectly”, i.e., it technically restricts itself to an outside, advisory function, without introducing a separate, modern administrative apparatus.

Important as this typological distinction is, colonial practice here and there resulted in what might be called “mixed” systems. More than that, several colonies comprised both directly and indirectly ruled territories: thus the hill peoples of Burma were ruled indirectly, Burma proper directly; in the Netherlands Indies, most of the so-called Outer Islands were under indirect, Java to all intents and purposes under direct, rule; in French Indochina, Laos, Cambodia, Tonkin and Annam were indirectly ruled protectorates, Cochinchina a colony under direct rule; finally, the Straits Settlements fell within the orbit of direct rule, the Federated and Unfederated Malay States that of indirect rule. Spanish as well as later American colonial control in the Philippines can be classified as direct rule. The coexistence of the two administrative systems within a given colony led to diverse configurations which cannot be examined in detail here; but two major aspects deserve brief attention. In the first place, in Burma and the Netherlands Indies direct rule prevailed in the most heavily Indianized areas, leaving the peripherally Indianized peoples under indirect rule. A contrasting pattern emerged in Vietnam, where the Sinicized heartland remained under indirect rule, with the southern frontier-land falling un-

26 The outstanding example is Java which, though technically under direct rule, was administered by a dual hierarchy, one Dutch, the other native. Thus Furnivall (Netherlands India, 258) claimed that “the distinction between Direct and Indirect Rule was of legal rather than practical interest, for in the parts under Direct Rule it was Dutch policy to leave the people as far as possible under their own heads...” But the important fact of this dual system was that native officialdom had developed into a bureaucratic hierarchy subordinate to its European counterpart, so that, though ethnically separate, it progressively ceased to function in its own right, as a truly indigenous administrative apparatus.
der direct rule. In Malaya, the directly ruled areas were in fact restricted to small, newly-created, European enclaves, known as the Straits Settlements. Second, in Indonesia and Vietnam the directly ruled areas acted as social "magnets" which attracted, or siphoned off, potential elite members from the indirectly ruled territories within the same colony.27 In Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Malaya, on the other hand, this phenomenon was apparently far more limited on account of the ethnic, cultural and religious barriers separating the populations of indirectly and directly ruled territories.28

We shall now briefly examine the impact of the two colonial administrative systems on the various polities in Southeast Asia, with special attention to political and economic modernization. As we already observed in passing, direct rule led to the virtual destruction of the political precolonial status quo. In the case of Burma, the last incumbent of the throne and his immediate entourage were forcefully removed from the country after the third Anglo-Burmese War in 1886. The case of Java is more complex. The territory of the realm of Mataram was continually reduced in size, in addition to being divided, during the 18th and 19th centuries; while the rump principalities were preserved as autonomous, indirectly ruled territories, they lost all political significance after 1830. In modern times, then, practically the entire island was directly administered. Sudden or gradual, the imposition of direct rule in both Burma and Java resulted in the actual or virtual disappearance of the sacral, charismatic, despotic Indianized monarchy, though of course not in the destruction of the old elite groups as such. Alien, modern (and in a sense modern and efficiently despotic) colonial states took their place, geographically symbolized by the new seaboard capital cities of Rangoon and Batavia. Since sacral kingship and the court had been coterminous with the Indianized realm, the decapitation of the royal "segment" actually amounted to the destruction of these polities. Deprived of their apex, and without entrenched hierarchies of social classes, Burmese and Javanese societies were in effect rendered politically elite-less, reduced to undifferentiated peasantries.

27 This "magnet effect" needs a great deal of careful research. One typical example is that of Sumatrans drawn to Java in colonial times. A study of Indonesian "political decision makers" in the mid-1950's shows that Sumatrans, who in 1930 accounted for 8% of the total population of the Netherlands Indies, supplied 20% of cabinet members and 18% of top-level civil servants. See Soelaeman Soemardi, "Some Aspects of the Social Origin of Indonesian Political Decision Makers", Transactions of the Third World Congress of Sociology (London, 1956), 340; on the coincidence of such high offices with university training, see ibid., 342.

28 Educational statistics for French Indochina indicate that of a total of 525 students enrolled in the University of Hanoi in 1921-22, 265 came from Tonkin, 133 from Cochinchina (both in effect directly ruled), the protectorates of Annam, Cambodia and Laos supplying 70, 19 and 5 students, resp.; in 1929-30, the corresponding figures were 298 and 84, 98, 6 and 7 (breakdowns for the intervening years were apparently not published). See Joanne Marie Coyle, "Indochinese Administration and Education — French Policy and Practice, 1917-1945" (Unpubl. doctoral diss., Fletcher School of Diplomacy, 1963), 187-90.
The new polities were alien, the new political elites composed of foreigners; though the traditional sub-elite could, as in Java, continue a vestigial administrative existence, it could at best exist on the periphery, and in the service of, the modern colonial-bureaucratic apparatus without affecting its political destiny.29

Increasingly, the supra-village vacuum came to be filled with new social elements, recruited — largely through the medium of Western-style education — into the modern colonial social order. The process of modernization, then, *inter alia*, called forth an intelligentsia — in the widest sense of the term — whose members staffed posts in the modern bureaucracy, especially its technical services, the school systems, clerical posts in Western enterprise, and ultimately also the modern indigenous organizations, social and political, of the 20th century. Obviously, traditional elite families in Burma and Java supplied a large, perhaps even a predominant, percentage of the first generation of this intelligentsia; but the social origin of its individual members became progressively far less significant than its social function as a more or less distinct group in these directly-ruled colonial dependencies. Membership in the modern intelligentsias of Burma and Java was not based on ascriptive but primarily on educational and functional criteria. Equally important, the intelligentsia’s social and political abode was the Westernized cities, its social, and in a sense even its political, loyalty lay not with the *ancien régimes* but with the modern order: For all its anticolonialism, intelligentsia-led nationalism avowedly aimed at the creation of a modern state, not at the restoration of the Indianized monarchy.30 At the same time, however, these intelligentsias only had a limited “stake” in colonial Burma and Java as such. In part, this was doubtless due to the colonial relationship itself; but to a perhaps even greater extent their aloofness from the colonial order stemmed from the fact that, as a group (and in many instances also as individuals) the intelligentsias did not “own” anything but their educationally-acquired proficiency. Just as the aristocracies in Indianized polities had derived their status from royal appointment rather than from territorial control, so the modern intelligentsias, regardless of their social origin, derived their status directly or indirectly from the colonial order, without “representing” a vested corporate or personal interest rooted in economic or other power.

To phrase this somewhat differently we might say that the new elites were the socially unattached, *freiischwebende* beneficiaries of (largely unplanned) political modernization, without being holders of traditional power, such as

29 See Note 26, above, On the modernization of the administration, coupled with the disintegration of the traditional system of Burma, see Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, op. cit., 73-75. On the extent of “Anglicization” among Burmese colonial officials, see the case studies in Lucian W. Pye, *Politics, Personality, and Nation Building: Burma’s Search for Identity* (New Haven, 1962), 211-44.

landed wealth. Indeed, the lack of such a secular power base may to some extent at least account for the insignificant role played in economic life by modern as well as traditional elites in the Indianized orbit.\textsuperscript{31} Doubtless colonial policies favoring Western capitalism, no less than traditional religious-ideological orientations, both had their share in continuing this disability into the realm of economic modernization. The result was an economic dualism\textsuperscript{32} expressed in ethnic pluralism, in which, in addition to a European leading element, Asian minorities represented the main intermediate layer in the modern economic sector. It is true that the "ubiquitous" Chinese became the artisans and retailers \textit{par excellence} throughout colonial Southeast Asia. But only in Indianized Southeast Asia did they — or, less frequently, Indian \textit{chettyars},\textsuperscript{33} Arabs or even Vietnamese\textsuperscript{34} — also become the major purveyors of ready cash, the moneylenders linking the modern and traditional sectors of the dual economy.\textsuperscript{35} Little wonder that the politically conscious Burmese and Javanese intelligentsias, condemned to the oppositionist fringe of colonial political life and aloof from modern economic life, could only envisage independence in terms of the elimination of alien overlordship together with that of the alien, capitalist economy. Sociologically and ideologically \textit{etatisme} if not socialism provided the intelligentsias with a logical, perhaps the only logical, prescription for national salvation; and, though inspired by conscious visions of modernity, such "national socialism" could in fact be nourished by long, often hidden, traditional roots.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{31} In the peripherally Indianized societies — as e.g. in parts of Sumatra — the response to economic innovation was far less passive. This contrast requires a good deal of careful investigation. In Clifford Geertz's \textit{Agricultural Involution: The Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia} (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963), it is explained in terms of different "eco-systems" and in relation to Dutch economic activities in Indonesia.

\textsuperscript{32} The term is here used descriptively to denote the existence, side by side, of a capitalist and a subsistence economy. I am not here concerned with the inferences drawn from this co-existence by such scholars as H. Boeke, which have given rise to a voluminous and controversial literature.

\textsuperscript{33} On the Indian \textit{chettyars} in colonial Burma and Malaya, see Usha Mahajani, \textit{The Role of Indian Minorities in Burma and Malaya} (Bombay, 1960), 16-22, 98-101.

\textsuperscript{34} On the Vietnamese in Cambodia, see David J. Steinberg, \textit{Cambodia: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture} (New Haven, 1959), 40-42.

\textsuperscript{35} In Vietnam (especially in French Cochinchina), moneylenders were not primarily Chinese, as a reading of Victor Purcell's \textit{The Chinese in Southeast Asia} (London, New York & Toronto, 1951), 236 ff. would suggest, but also Vietnamese landlords. See Charles Robequain, \textit{The Economic Development of French Indo-China}, tr. by Isabel A. Ward (London, New York & Toronto, 1944), 40n., 85-86, 192-93, and Pierre Gourou, \textit{L'utilisation du sol en Indochine française} (Paris, n.d.), 276-80. In the Philippines, Purcell (op. cit., 635) writes, "that the Filipino is always in debt to the Chinese is undoubtedly true, but the evidence is all to the effect that the Filipino \textit{cacique} is even more oppressive and usurious."

\textsuperscript{36} The interplay between traditional religious or ideological and modern socialist, especially Marxist thought, has as yet received inadequate attention. A penetrating analysis of Confucianism and Marxism can be found in Mus, \textit{op. cit.}, Chs. XIV, XVIII and XIX. Cf. also Emanuel Sarkisyantz, \textit{Russland und der Messianismus des Orients}:

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Indirect rule was variously applied and covered a wide variety of societies with differing degrees of Indianization. Without investigating the historical reasons for its introduction or the varieties of its application in the orbit of Indianized Southeast Asia, we shall limit ourselves to a few generic observations. It is above all of paramount importance not to confuse the political aspects of indirect rule with its sociological consequences. While there has been some recent controversy regarding the residual legal sovereignty retained by native rulers, especially by Indonesian potentates under Dutch indirect rule in the 19th century, the intrinsic political impotence imposed upon traditional indigenous elites by the "protective umbrella" of indirect rule seems to be reasonably well established. To be sure, the degree of European control varied considerably from area to area, as for example between the Federated and Unfederated Malay States, but all native rulers under Western suzerainty ipso facto forfeited some essential attributes of sovereignty, notably in the realm of foreign affairs. Yet, however circumscribed in matters martial and political, the native elites were not only permitted to survive as a social group, but, thanks to the pax occidentalis, they were in effect given greater stability and internal cohesion. If the policing power of the colonial regimes removed the perennial strife endemic among Indianized polities, the introduction and stabilization of the principle of hereditary monarchy, with more or less orderly succession, virtually terminated their equally perennial internal instability.

Positive as well as negative consequences accrued from these innovations. Undeniably indirect rule, in its arbitrary support of the representatives of the socio-political status quo, tended to inhibit the growth of competing elite groups, particularly in areas subject to intensive economic modernization through Western enterprise. It is similarly true that the new, artificially protected, colonial security, combined with political impotence, could and did lead to what we might term social and cultural involution. The carefully preserved Indianized "Establishment", that is to say, could succumb to stagnation, it could withdraw from reality and narcissistically contemplate its traditional grandeur; and it could give birth to a tropically luxuriant profusion of offices and office holders, usually at the expense of the taxing, non-royal

Sendungsbewusstsein und politischer Chiliasmus des Ostens (Tübingen, 1955), and the same author's "Marxism and Asian Cultural Traditions", Survey 43 (1962), 55-64 and 129, and "Kommunismus und Geisteskrise Asiens: Marxismus und orientalische Weltanschauungen", in Dieter Oberndörfer (ed.), Wissenschaftliche Politik: Eine Einführung in Grundfragen ihrer Tradition und Theorie (Freiburg, n.d.), 335-64.

For a careful analysis of indirect rule in British Malaya and the Netherlands Indies, see Rupert Emerson, Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule (New York, 1937).


component of Indianized Southeast Asian politics. On the credit side of the ledger, however, stand continuity, or rather the possibility of gradual modernization, of change within continuity. For sure, this is the very virtue which the most eloquent (though not invariably the most Machiavellian) colonial administrators read into the necessity of indirect rule. But one need not share their apologetic romanticism in order to admit the sociologically significant fact that indirect rule at least obviated the social and political vacuum which was the concomitant of direct rule, and that it allowed (even though it did not necessarily encourage) the modernization of members of the traditional elites in Indianized principalities. It could even be argued that some Indianized monarchies under indirect rule, shorn of responsibility for the conduct of political affairs proper, may have gained in charismatic lustre and stature, developing with the aid of modern media of communications into symbols of traditional-modern grandeur.

Just as in Burma and Java, Western education constituted by far the most prominent avenue to modernization in indirectly ruled territories. But whereas we saw that in these directly ruled colonial dependencies education took the place of ascription, in Malaya, Cambodia and also in Laos perhaps education in a sense enhanced ascription. The younger generation of the traditional Malayan, Cambodian and Laotian elites thus became the beneficiaries, first, of an increasingly institutionalized charisma, and, second, of Western education. These (potentially) modernizing traditional elites, then, were socially a far more homogeneous group than the intelligentsias in directly ruled colonies. And, unlike their often radical counterparts, they could, individually and corporately, afford to espouse a more conservative approach to social and political problems. It would be a mistake to assume that the colonial status quo as such inspired true loyalty, but aloofness from the foreigner rather than radical nationalism — let alone socialism — may have been prevalent; in any case, the social order of things was not a primary target of attack for the modernized members of the traditional elites, as it certainly was for the intelligentsias. Both kinds of elite, we should add, partook of political modernization far more widely and avidly than of economic modernization; we have already suggested that this imbalance may have been the result of the

40 This process is well demonstrated in the Javanese princely states of Mataram from the eighteenth century onward. In Malaya, a new religious officialdom was created in the late nineteenth century. Cf. William R. Roff, “Kau Muda-Kau Mua: Innovation and Reaction amongst the Malays, 1900-1941”, in K. G. Tregonning (ed.), Papers on Malayan History (Singapore, 1962), 162-92.

41 Since this essay deals with colonial Southeast Asia, the special case of Thailand has been omitted from this discussion, even though important parallels do exist. Cf. David A. Wilson, Politics in Thailand (Ithaca, 1962), Ch. I, and Lauriston Sharp (ed.), Thailand (New Haven, 1956), Ch. 6.

essentially non-economic base of the Indianized polities, as well as of the
traditional value systems and of colonial policies.43

The distinctions between direct and indirect rule which we have so far
examined in the Indianized orbit are in several respects less applicable to
Vietnam. Although theoretically only Cochinchina was directly ruled, in fact
Tonkin’s virtual removal from the jurisdiction of the Vietnamese court from
1886 onward brought the North under more or less direct French control.
Even in Annam itself, the Protectorate progressively turned into a legal fic-
tion, relegating court and mandarinate to a shadowy existence.44 The artificial
colonial dismemberment of the Vietnamese realm went hand-in-hand with
the creation of the no less artificial Indochinese Union (embracing Laos and
Cambodia in addition to the three Vietnamese “pays”). To all intents and
purposes, direct rule was of far greater significance than indirect rule, and
the coexistence of the two in such close proximity inevitably led to the su-
premacy of the directly ruled areas. Like its counterparts in some of the
Indianized states, Huế, the traditional capital city of Vietnam, had to cede
pride of place to modern urban centers: to Hanoi intellectually and to Saigon
commercially.

Nonetheless, the sociological consequences of French rule differed in the
three parts of Vietnam. Its most important concomitants occurred in thinly-
populated Cochinchina, where Vietnamese rule had only been established in
the 18th century and where French hydraulic technology created one of
Southeast Asia’s most fertile rice granaries in modern times. While the com-
mercial wealth resulting from this agricultural revolution primarily benefited
French (and Chinese) capital, ownership of the newly opened lands was pre-
dominantly Vietnamese.45 The origins of this new and increasingly “Gallic-
ized” class of landowners are not yet clear; but very likely some, perhaps
most, of its members belonged to lower-rank Vietnamese mandarinal official-
dom (the higher mandarins having left the area after the French conquest).
Whatever its origin, the new class showed an easy adaptability to economic
change: significantly, moneylenders in Vietnam were primarily Vietnamese,
not Indians or Chinese. In Tonkin, where — as in Annam — the elite pattern
was far less profoundly affected than in Cochinchina, we even find some few

43 Since the traditional Thai elite demonstrated a negative response to economic
modernization quite similar to that of elites in colonial, Indianized Southeast Asia, the
Geertz (op. cit., 130 ff.) draws parallels between Java and Japan which would seem less
relevant than comparisons within Indianized Southeast Asia.

44 For a brief summary of French colonial policies towards the three pays, see Philippe
Devillers, Histoire du Viêt-Nam de 1940 à 1952 (Paris, 1952), 28-29. Cf. also Isoart, op. cit., Ch. IV, and Lê Thanh Khôi, op. cit., 394-406. Of Cochinchina one French historian observed that it possessed “une tonalité française, caractéristique de cette
portion d’Indochine”, Georges Taboulet, La geste française en Indochine, I (Paris,
1956), 522.

45 Cf. Devillers, op. cit., 39-40, Mus, op. cit., 240-41, Chesneaux, op. cit., 166, Isoart,
op. cit., 255-58.
but significant, positive Vietnamese responses to economic modernization (banks, trading houses, factories, etc.). These positive reactions stand in marked contrast to the on the whole negative responses to economic change in the Indianized polities, and are very likely anchored in the presence of an intrinsically “secular” indigenous social structure.

Political modernization in Vietnam — largely again the result of Western education — must be primarily viewed in the context of direct colonial rule. The predominance of direct over indirect rule in contiguous territories, combined with the rapid weakening of the traditional political structure, greatly inhibited a systematic modernization of the court and mandarinate as a cohesive elite. In the twentieth century, most of the beneficiaries of Westernization thus came to be oriented towards French metropolitan culture and modern administrative and political forms. Though Western-educated members of the traditional elite in Annam here and there doubtless played important roles, the modern history of Vietnam was apparently made in Tonkin and Cochinchina. Socially, a large segment of the modernized elite very likely came from the mandarinate (in the North) and the landowning class (in the South), rather than from the “unattached” intelligentsias we observed in directly-ruled Indianized Southeast Asia. But this social anchorage did not preclude the emergence of a radical wing, side by side with a moderate wing, in Vietnamese nationalism. The latter — notably strong in Cochinchina — primarily aimed at political emancipation from foreign rule, the former, Tonkin-centered, at complete independence and, indeed, at social revolution.46

Philippine social evolution can be dealt with more briefly on account of its basic continuity. We saw that Spanish colonialism had called into being a class of native principales deriving its status from landed wealth. Increasing exploitation of the islands’ resources, accompanied by commercialization of Philippine agriculture from about the middle of the eighteenth century on, initiated a period of accelerating social change. Above all else, new opportunities for capital accumulation came into existence. Recent research indicates that the main beneficiaries of this economic modernization were, in addition to Filipino caciques and Chinese, the numerically strong group of Chinese mestizos.47 After the mid-nineteenth century immigrant Chinese started to supplant these Chinese mestizos as a commercial, urban middle class, but they retained status and prestige derived from landed wealth and from Hispanization. As in Vietnam, the moneylender in Luzon and other islands was a native (and mestizo) rather than a foreigner. Towards the close of Spanish rule, there thus existed a specifically Philippine ruling class com-

posed of native and mestizo members. While the colonial power had created the preconditions for economic modernization in the Philippines, Europeans actually played a less important part in it than did Chinese and Chinese mestizos, in sharp contrast to the colonial empires of the capitalist Western nations in Southeast Asia. Philippine nationalism was thus primarily political, not socially radical: its leaders strove for political equality within the Spanish empire, and also the "nationalization" of Spanish, notably Church, landholdings; but they did not aim at destroying the social status quo as such. American colonial rule, though it commenced with the destruction of the short-lived Philippine Republic, almost immediately turned into preparation for autonomy and independence. It thus helped to consolidate the Philippine elite and to increase its landholdings; it also offered new commercial, and far-reaching educational and administrative opportunities. The politically active elite members were thus firmly rooted in a class that had enjoyed, and continued to enjoy, the privileges of acculturation, education and wealth.

IV

The foregoing analysis of Southeast Asian elites in terms, first, of pre-modern social structures and, second, of the variegated influences of different European colonial regimes, may provide a useful tool for the understanding of the emergence of what we have called intelligentsia-rulled polities and polities governed by modernizing traditional elites in postwar Southeast Asia. Like all selective investigations, structural elite analysis, however embedded in historical data, only deals with some aspects of social and political history, without seeking to explain all its ramifications. Obviously such a schematic presentation must appear misleadingly rigorous; it neither can nor does in fact fully explain or account for the existence, let alone the operational modes, of present-day political systems. More particularly, it cannot possibly do justice to the significant regional and local variations which of necessity modify the generic classifications here attempted. Thus for example the problem of economic modernization of indigenous elites, especially in the Indianized orbit, has only been peripherally touched upon; if the case of Malaya deserves separate treatment on account of very large non-indigenous Asian groups, Bali presents an interesting case study of economic modernization on the whole unhampered by such alien competition. The brief analysis of the Vietnamese elites is similarly inadequate to account for the emergence of extreme radicalism.

While we may have succeeded in showing how various national elites came into existence in colonial Southeast Asia, we have not attempted to trace their

actual rise to power in the often turbulent era of decolonization, as well as their performance as ruling classes in independent nation states. For such purposes our social and historical scaffolding would have to be amplified along lines which we can only briefly suggest, without developing them in this essay. First, the emergence, during the Japanese occupation era, of military elites — in part an adjunct to the modern intelligentsias, though not necessarily coterminous with them — and that of younger echelons of potential leaders has obviously profoundly affected the elite structure, and with it contemporary politics, in such countries as Burma and Indonesia. Second, the interplay between different social systems within the same political boundaries has likewise provided some of the most noteworthy dynamics in modern political history, most notably perhaps again in Indonesia (with the occurrence of “social revolutions” in several, previously indirectly-ruled, territories, as well as with the tug-of-war between Indianized Java and some of the peripherally Indianized Outer Islands), in Burma (with a similar tug-of-war between Indianized Burma proper and non-Indianized minority groups) and in Vietnam (where the struggle in part revolves around the dichotomy between Sinicized Vietnamese and non-Sinicized montagnard minorities). Third, though rarely prime actors, religious elites have nonetheless also helped to shape the recent national histories of several Southeast Asian countries. In the fourth place, the picture must be supplemented by close study of the role of Communist leadership, ranging all the way from gaining political power in part of Vietnam to launching unsuccessful revolts, e.g., in the Philippines and Malaya. The social roots and character of that leadership differ from country to country; where in Vietnam, Burma and Indonesia it formed part of the general intelligentsia elite reared in directly-ruled colonial areas, in Malaya it originated among the Chinese urban middle class, and in the Philippines among the marginal intellectual sub-elit

Finally, an examination of both the internal policies pursued by each individual ruling elite and its external or international orientations may yield significant insights and perhaps correlations. It is probably true that on the whole intelligentsias have embarked on wholesale social transformation while modernizing traditional elites have tended towards social and political conservatism; but exceptions to this rule can be found. It is, again, possible to detect a preponderance of “pro-Western” international orientations among such elites and “neutralist” ones among intelligentsias, but this generalization is even more questionable, less relevant, and, indeed, subject to change, depending upon international rather than domestic configurations.

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