

Transforming Societies in Myanmar

The Dynamics of Conflict and Cooperation



Lahpai Seng Raw
Ramon Magsaysay Awardee

Keynote Address delivered at

The 12th Asia and the Pacific Sociological Association (APSA) Conference
Transforming Societies: Contestations and Convergences in Asia and the Pacific
In Conjunction with the 50th Anniversary of
the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University

15-16 February 2014, Chiang Mai, Thailand



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The Dynamics of Conflict and Cooperation
by Lahpai Seng Raw*



Preface

Asia and the Pacific today faces momentous challenges as it enters the second decade of the 21st century, in the wake of the rapid processes of social transformation in the region precipitated by globalisation. While we see bustling cities and towns and modernisation of rural areas in some parts, we also witness the choking of cities and the ensuing culture shocks, as well as the uprooting and depopulation of rural communities and areas.

Various countries in the region – from China to the Pacific Islands, from the South China Sea to the Indian subcontinent and beyond – are experiencing different degrees and speeds of urbanisation, industrialisation and development. It is a region of great promise and huge potentials. Yet, it is also a region full of diversity and paradoxes. It must also be recognized that many countries in the region face rising inequalities and conflicts that threaten their social fabric and stability. Various classes and groups of people, in particular the younger generation and indigenous communities, face a revolution of rising expectations, yet many experience a revolution of rising frustrations. Issues of identity revolving around ethnicity, religion, and sub-regions often crop up, raising tensions and anxieties. All these must be addressed effectively and with a long range view, bearing in mind that people in the region face a common future.

Given the above background, the role of sociology in particular and social sciences in general as the corpus of knowledge to analyse and interpret changes in the 21st century is very critical. Hosted by the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, with the support of the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT), Siamese Association of Sociologists and Anthropologist (SASA) and the Global Studies Center, Chulalongkorn University, the 12th Asia and the Pacific Sociological Association (APSA) Conference Transforming Societies: Contestations and Convergences in Asia and the Pacific brought together more than 400 sociologists and other social scientists, activists and non-government organisation over two-days to make sense of these contestations and

challenges, examine possible convergences, and suggest alternatives for the benefit of the respective societies and for humankind.

This conference was special for us in another way as it marked the 50th anniversary of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Chiang Mai University. Founded in 1964, the Faculty of Social Sciences was one of the first three faculties of Chiang Mai University. Since then, it has expanded substantially in terms of its teaching, research, community services and other academic activities. At present, the Faculty has 34 faculty members, approximately half of whom hold the doctorate degree.

We are delighted to publish the conference's keynote addresses by Daw Lahpai Seng Raw and Professor Jonathan Rigg. They were, without doubt, thought provoking and stimulating. I thank them for the opportunity to publish their papers so that a broader audience may also engage with and be challenged by their ideas and research.

Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaphuti
Director
Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD)
Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

Biography



Daw Laphai Seng Raw
Ramon Magsaysay Awardee, 2013 and
Co-founder of Metta Foundation

Born in the Kachin State and a graduate of Rangoon University, Daw Laphai Seng Raw was a stay-at-home mother before embarking on a career in social development. She is a co-founder of the Metta Foundation, Burma's largest civil society organization, which provides support to displaced persons in Burma's conflict-torn areas. The Ramon Magsaysay Award 2013 was awarded to her for the recognition of "her quietly inspiring and inclusive leadership—in the midst of deep ethnic divides and prolonged armed conflict—to regenerate and empower damaged communities and to strengthen local non-government organisations in promoting a non-violent culture of participation and dialogue as the foundation for Myanmar's peaceful future."



Transforming Societies in Myanmar: The Dynamics of Conflict and Cooperation

Lahpai Seng Raw

Sawadee Kha

It is my great privilege to be with you all this morning at this international conference, reflecting on the intricacies of effecting social transformation in the Asia Pacific region. It is also a great honour to be present at the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University. I apologise that I will not be able to take part full time with you at this auspicious event but I wish you all the very best for this two day-celebration and hope my small contribution will complement it in some way.

As Dr. Mukdawan Sakboon mentioned in her introduction, I am a Myanmar citizen from the Kachin ethnic minority, and a recipient of the 2013 Ramon Magsaysay award. My award citation says my “quietly inspiring and inclusive leadership – in the midst of deep ethnic divides and prolonged armed conflict – to regenerate and empower damaged communities and to strengthen local non-government organisations (NGOs) in promoting a non-violent culture of participation and dialogue as the foundation for Myanmar’s peaceful future”

I just want to add that my good friend Matt has said he agrees with all aspects of the citation except for the “quietly” bit. This is just to give you a heads-up that I will be open and not all that “quiet” today.

I was a bit apprehensive when first approached about giving this address as it would set the tone for this two-day event. I only accepted when Ajarn Chayan Vaddhanaphuti assured me that I would not be expected to give an academic talk. So I will be drawing mainly from my own experiences in talking about the hopes and fears, the challenges and opportunities that we, the peoples of Myanmar, face at this time of unprecedented change in our country.

The title I have chosen for my keynote address is: Transforming Societies in Myanmar: The Dynamics of Conflict and Cooperation.

I use “societies” here to highlight the need to move away from the tendency of focusing on the majority ethnic group at the expense of minority ethnic societies. This long-standing myopia has contributed to the great divide in Myanmar society along ethnic lines.

Also, I will be referring to the majority ethnic group of our country as “Bamar”. I beg for my fellow countrymen’s indulgence if they should find the term “Bamar” too colloquial or disrespectful, as I use it only to avoid confusion with the country name “Myanmar”.

The other ethnic nationals will be referred to as the “minority”. “Minority” is used simply to indicate that they are fewer in numbers, not to imply deficiency in any other way. I hope for your understanding.

I will call my country Myanmar because it has been so from the very beginning: *Pyithaung Su Myanmar Nainggyan* - Union of Myanmar. At this juncture, whether we say Burma or Myanmar, the content is the same to me. Name change, flag change, and the planned ceremonious signing of a Nationwide Ceasefire, all are empty if they do not signify actual milestones of progress.

To quote from the Christmas message of Bishop Charles Bo, the Archdiocese of Yangon, “Name without content is empty. We need a name that is married to the dreams”. The Bishop’s message is clear. We have yet to make our dreams converge into one vision and transform it to reality.

On finding out that the land size of Myanmar is equal to that of Thailand and Cuba combined, it dawned on me that there is a lot we can learn from these two countries.

I lived in Thailand for seven years before accompanying some 10,000 Kachin refugees from China to return home and rebuild their lives. The experience and lessons learned while living as a foreigner in Thailand served as the motivation behind my desire to return and work in my country. Compromising where necessary, crossing thin lines subtly, showing no aggression, being respectful to all, are some values of my host country that I have tried to adopt to the best of my ability. Whatever success I have today stems from you.

And my special gratitude to Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa. Sulak was among the first Thais to respond to the needs of the new arrivals at the border in the aftermath of the 1988 uprising. On looking back, I realise it is acts of kindness like Sulak's that raised my own consciousness – to put passion and energy into a cause that is not necessarily of one's own country or people. It is my great privilege to be acquainted with such a personage. Our country is fortunate in that it attracts such committed good-hearted individuals, and it is because of them that we are where we are today.

Even today, I have discovered another lesson from your country. Please bear with me if I am politically incorrect, but I hope so much that our countrymen, especially the Bamar - the majority - the elites - learn from your experience, the pitfalls of prioritizing the central at the expense of rural people from the borderlands, who, sidelined and neglected, become more open to populist appeals. In the Myanmar context, these rural people are the ethnic nationals - the co-founders of the Union. Marginalised and excluded from the decision making process, they have taken up arms to make their voices heard. The upshot of years of armed conflict in ethnic regions is uneven distribution of wealth and lack of access to education. This has the potential of making minorities more susceptible to the false promises and short-term development offers of government cronies and foreign companies out to further their own economic interests.

And yes, we the minority, the non-Bamar ethnic nationals, must also learn from Thailand that it is high time that we seek to cultivate the Bamar majority's support in our cause and merge our respective goals into one.

The success of the Save the Irrawaddy Campaign is just such an example. The fight to stop construction of a major dam on the Irrawaddy Confluence was first initiated by the Kachins, at the upper reaches of the river. But when the devastating consequences of such a dam caught nationwide attention, concerned citizens from all walks of life and ethnicity joined hands to launch the campaign that compelled the President to suspend construction during his term of office.

Also, I would be remiss here if I do not acknowledge the commitment of ordinary Bamar citizens who have rallied in support for peace in the Kachin region, and relief for Kachins displaced by the war.

As for Cuba, we all know that like our country, Cuba was governed for 55 years by one man: Fidel Castro, and now his brother Raul. They too have huge economic problems but a very big difference is that the Castro regime emphasizes education and healthcare, so that standards in these sectors are very high. Whereas Cuba exports doctors to other Latin American countries, our own educated people escape to other countries that recognise their values. This you know as many such people are with you. But Cuba also faces the same challenge as we do - namely, the role of the military in the country's political life.

So the question arises: what, in the Myanmar context, is the role of the military, or the *Tatmadaw* as it is known in Burmese?

First, let's consider the official stated role of the *Tatmadaw*. The three main objectives of the *Tatmadaw*, as summed up by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Commander in Chief of the Defence Services, in his Armed Forces Day speech last year are: non-disintegration of the union, non-disintegration of national solidarity, and perpetuation of sovereignty.

Then we have Article 340 of the 2008 constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar which states: With the approval of the National Defence and Security Council, the Defence Services has the authority to administer the participation of the entire people in the Security and Defence of the Union. The strategy of the people's militia shall be carried out under the leadership of the Defence Services.

There can be no dispute that in present day Myanmar, the role of the *Tatmadaw* is not simply confined to national defence. The *Tatmadaw* is currently the most powerful single block in Parliament, with 25 per cent seats held by military personnel who are appointed directly by the *Tatmadaw* and a further 52 per cent held by the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party. This gives the *Tatmadaw* in essence, absolute legislative control, as Section 436 in the Constitution stipulates that constitutional amendments can only be made by a vote of more than 75 per cent of all the representatives of Parliament or the *Pyidaungsu Hluttaw* as it is known in Burmese.

Also of serious concern is the very structure of the State in which military spending is estimated to take up as much as 21 per cent of the national budget. Added to this is the burden borne by communities in ethnic regions for the upkeep of non-state military groups, and the people's

militias created by the *Tatmadaw* to further expand military control over contested territories and act as counters to ethnic opposition forces. As long as conflict continues, maintaining these forces will be a drain on local finances and communities.

All armed groups would do well to take note that provisioning their troops with local supplies invariably incites the people against them, as evidenced by the end result of Napoleon's strategy of living off the land during the early 19th century Peninsular War that led to his down fall.

In the face of all these complexities, transitioning the present *Tatmadaw* into a more inclusive federal army, as envisioned by 17 ethnic resistance organisations, presents itself as an attractive, viable alternative.

Maj-Gen Gun Maw, deputy chief of the Kachin Independence Army, and a key negotiator in peace talks with the government, and incidentally Myanmar's 2013 Person of the Year in an online survey conducted by the Democratic Voice of Burma, had this to say when asked to comment on the topic in a recent interview with the Irrawaddy.

“What we want is a Tatmadaw that includes all nationalities, because we all live in this country together. That is why we are calling for a Federal Union Army. But how to transform the current Tatmadaw is something that we have to discuss with everyone concerned.”

President Thein Sein's monthly radio address on February 1, urging lawmakers to take into account the demands of ethnic armed groups in any future constitutional amendments, gives reason to hope that the evolution of the *Tatmadaw* into a more ethnically integrated military can become a reality once a strong federal structure is in place.

A good model for such a force would be the British Armed Forces, with its proven track record of integrating different national contingents like the Irish, Gurkha and others from Commonwealth countries under one command. In fact, I believe the UK is in a very good position to enable this process as it is currently “engaging with” the *Tatmadaw*, providing “training aimed to expose future senior officers to new thinking, and encourage the *Tatmadaw* to prepare for a new role.”¹

¹ UK Foreign Office Minister Hugo Swire's Jan 30, 2014 press conference in Yangon

So in this centennial year of the outbreak of World War I, I would like to challenge the British government to commit to this cause in commemoration of the Kachins, Chins and Karens who served and fought valiantly side by side for the British Empire in the Mesopotamian Campaign, and for the Allied cause in World War II.

Resource sharing is another contentious issue in our country. Myanmar is a resource-rich country, and government revenues come chiefly from selling off these resources which are found mainly in ethnic minority states. As a result, one large and growing barrier to peace in our country is the resource trade.

There is bound to be conflict when the government acts arbitrarily in garnering the country's natural resources, leaving local populations out in the cold. The inequity in resource sharing, the land grabbing and environmental destruction that accompany resource extraction, have further exacerbated the acrimony that already exists over political inequality.



The UN Human Rights Rapporteur Mr. Quintana, whose visit to Rakhine in August 2013, coincided with the local peoples' call for resource sharing, had this to say:

“Addressing the issue of underdevelopment and poverty, including the sharing benefits from the state’s natural resources with local inhabitants, must be considered as vital to finding solutions to the crisis in Rakhine State.”

The Rakhines simply wanted to know what they, as the locals, would get from all the resource trade in their region. It is only natural that they should want a certain amount of local autonomy, budgeting, authority in education and legislation to develop their own communities and state. This call of the Rakhine represents that of all other states – Chin, Kachin, Shan, Karen, Kayah and Mon. In short, it is important that as our country presses on to resolve a myriad of underlying political difficulties and grievances, it should not be allowed to side-step resource-sharing issues. Durable peace and a genuine transition to democracy must be inclusive and take into consideration the needs of all ethnic groups within the country.

I would like to quote Bishop Charles Bo again here:

“But we are afraid. Afraid that things are going on as usual. The people and the cronies who benefitted last 20 years are the major beneficiaries once again. The real estates, new agreements with the foreign companies, the desire to loot and load the resources – it looks like business as usual. The blood and the sacrifice of hundreds, thousands, who died a silent death yesterday so that the Myanmar of tomorrow may be just and equitable, that blood and sacrifice might be destroyed in the darkness of new greed of the old cronies. Shall we keep Silent?”

We assure you Bishop Bo, we have not been silent!!

Indeed, since 2011, the Myanmar people have become more emboldened to come out and use their rights to demonstrate their grievances. We are now in an era where we can make comments and give our opinions.

Let’s take one example - the National Census that is to take place at the end of March. Almost all non-Bamar ethnic nationals have expressed their concerns about the population census process assisted by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Most ethnic peoples in Myanmar - the Kachin, Mon, Chin, Shan, Karen and Rakhine – have expressed doubts about the validity of the government’s official tally of 135 recognised ethnic groups. Many civil leaders see the census procedure as alienating and breaking up ethnic national identity, and many have made known their objections officially. It is encouraging to see how strong local NGO voices refuse to be undermined by an ill-considered programme, however well-intentioned. A centrally-controlled process without the full participation of, and dialogue with all stakeholders, should be avoided at all cost, especially in a country as complex as ours.

Myanmar's current constitution is not inclusive nor does the current initiative for peace lay out a clear plan to address the legitimate concerns of the co-founders of the Union, the non-Bamars. The reality so far is a huge contestation. It is not encouraging that amending this flawed constitution is in the hands of a handpicked legislature which is in no way a body representative of society as a whole.

Currently, our government is pushing for a nationwide ceasefire that would lead to a peaceful settlement with the armed ethnic groups. Those of us who have doubts about the capacity and political will of the government's professed search for peace should consider ways and means of transforming conflict into lasting peace. Ceasefires are of no value unless transformed into lasting peace. And for that to happen, civil society needs to be at the helm as the real owner of the process. Armies can agree to ceasefires between themselves, but they cannot make peace - peace requires the people. We need to look at a comprehensive peace process that involves grassroots people and civil societies, not just military and political leaders. A successful transformation will rely on the extent to which the communities are empowered, and the support local organisations get. In other words, strengthening civil society and building peace are intertwined.

I may be repeating myself, but I cannot stress enough how years of mismanagement by successive authoritarian governments and unabated armed conflicts have impacted Myanmar society and paralysed it. There is no short cut to reverse this, but the fact remains; getting civilians to make their own choices and getting their voice back are the deciding factors in bringing about lasting peace in our country.

In the "open" and "new Myanmar" loads of funds are being made available under the heading of "Peace". For those advocating change in Myanmar, I would caution them not to undermine local initiatives, as the reality is that local agendas are vital to bringing about true democracy and lasting peace.

Interestingly over the last 20 years, scarcity of aid in our country had actually created more room for local agencies to determine eventual programming. Had we been flooded with aid after the 1990 elections, local NGOs like Myanmar Egress, Metta, Paung Ku, Ecodev, Shalom, etc. would not have had the chance to grow and flourish as they have done. It is ironic that now that the country has become more open, more challenges are being faced to strengthen civil society.

To those who think Myanmar civil society groups do not have the capacity to act as agents of change, let me give this example. Since 2008, before women became a special “target” for funders, a local group of women has been self-funding a mission to strengthen women from the home to the community, to the nation. Working as a small group with no staff, they first conducted research on women’s awareness of sexual issues in Yangon. It revealed that most young women who had to take the bus to school and work faced serious sexual harassment in this daily activity. No one had done anything about it, although everyone seemed to know about it.

In an evolving growth of knowledge and self-confidence, the women gathered over 300 volunteers in less than a month to launch a campaign called Whistle for Help to stop this ugly behaviour. They distributed over 30,000 whistles and information sheets in one month. This campaign was the first led by women for their own benefit in the country’s history-accomplished without outside determination of need, funding, or under “women’s empowerment”.

What happened in Kachin state last November is another good case study. In the wake of clashes between Burmese government forces and the Kachin Independence Army around Mansi Township, up to 3000 Kachin villagers were forced to flee their homes. After trekking through the jungle to escape the fighting, these internally displaced Kachins were met with trucks organised by local NGOs and brought to safety. This incident clearly shows that local NGOs are in a better position to operate more efficiently in assisting the internally displaced persons (IDPs). They are the lead agencies and are familiar with the local context. They are from the areas in question, speak the local languages, have a working history which gives them more access, even to conflict zones. They have managed to find ways to reach IDPs, even on the other side of the Myanmar border, travelling between the border and the conflict zones. This also means that they were often able to reach the IDPs in the most difficult times. Because of their efforts, no IDP has died of hunger. They are, however, very much in need of funding.

On the overall IDP situation, there are currently about 500,000 IDPs countrywide, with about half of them in Kachin and Rakhine, living in appalling conditions and in urgent need of humanitarian help in spite of the basic help which local NGOs – above all in Kachin – can and do supply. In addition to providing for the most essential needs of these innocent civilians caught up in the crossfire of conflicts, we need

to explore existing and potential solutions to ensure their protection and rights. On an encouraging note, although it is true that the IDP population has actually reached its present high level under the current government, more opportunities to improve the situation have opened up with increased visibility, reduced isolation and increased access. Space has opened up for the media to report freely and the international community to be better informed of what is actually happening on the ground.

With regard to how the Bamars, the ethnic majority group, view ethnic minorities, a couple of quotes I found, stuck away in apparently non-contentious articles, to be quite disquieting and revealing. Nobel Peace Prize winner and opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, on her recent visit to Chin State was quoted in *The Irrawaddy*² as saying, “The government should keep in touch with ethnic people to learn what they need.” To me, the quote comes across as saying: ‘We the government, We the NLD, We the Bamars, will look after you’. The way I see it, if ‘the government’ includes true representatives of the ethnic peoples – not just those that are centrally handpicked - they will make sure their constituents’ interests and needs are heard and attended to. That is what federalism is all about.



On a similar note, Dr Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam of the University of Passau, Germany, in her paper, *Approximations to the Kachins*, explains why the British were caught so off guarded in 1946, when the Kachins opted for independence and Union with the Bamars and other ethnic groups. She writes:

² <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/chin-govt-allegedly-keeps-supporters-away-suu-kyi-speech.html>

“In hindsight, it is not really difficult to see why. The Kachins were treated by the British something like the gnomes of Harry Potter fame, the useful and loyal, but in the first place slightly dumb and easily-led lesser beings, who are supposed to exist to serve the higher wizards. The perceptions of the British were coloured by their own interests: they presumed to speak for the Kachins, but rarely bothered to find out what the latter actually thought and wanted.”

I sincerely hope today's Barmars, the elites and the more educated, do not have the Harry Potter wizard syndrome.

Another instance which is equally appalling is a draft from a government committee overseeing the Comprehensive Education Sector Review.³ The committee is apparently appointed and doesn't include outside educational experts. Section two includes a description of education goals which says “the students have to be taught to have the right idea based on Myanmar national characteristics.”

‘Right idea’? Only ‘Myanmar national characteristics’? What of all the other ethnic groups? Many were horrified to think how this could be interpreted or put into practice. On the positive side, these objections and queries have been put up to the committee for review.

Unless we resolve the underlying political issues which are the root causes of armed conflict, crises caused by human rights violations, displacement, poverty, drugs, corruption, militarisation and the culture of using rape as a weapon, will not go away. This could lead to an eventual return to square one of a centralised authoritarian government. That horrific road has been travelled before many times in the past seven decades.

To sum up, the hard work begins. Constitutional reform, legal reform, investment reform, redefining the roll of the military, tackling systemic corruption, achieving sustainable economic development, restoring rights to public education and health care, stopping continued human rights and environmental abuses – all this will take many years. Needless to say, an enabling environment in which civil society can thrive is crucial.

³ <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/education-organisations-criticize-govt-education-policy-draft.html>

Leaders and members of Asia and the Pacific nations: Over the years you have shared our burden in assisting the many refugees, migrants, internally displaced, prisoners of conscience and students requiring further educational opportunities. Many of your countries have recognised the positive changes in our country and have resumed past relationships.

May I take this opportunity to appeal to you for your perseverance in working towards the goal of regenerating the diverse societies of Myanmar. I earnestly believe that a steadfast regional commitment will be vital in resolving the two major conflicts that currently plague Myanmar – the Kachin War and the sectarian strife in Rakhine – both of which have ramifications far beyond our borders.

To conclude, let me reiterate that there will be no lasting peace settlement in Myanmar unless there is a just and equitable relationship among the various ethnic groups and faith communities in the country. Failure to achieve this will only perpetuate long-standing conflicts, human suffering and political crises, with the potential of straining, once again, Myanmar's relations with the international community.

Khob Khun Kha!

The Shadows of Success

Transformation and Marginalisation in Southeast Asia



Jonathan Rigg
National University of Singapore

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Preface

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Various countries in the region – from China to the Pacific Islands, from the South China Sea to the Indian subcontinent and beyond – are experiencing different degrees and speeds of urbanisation, industrialisation and development. It is a region of great promise and huge potentials. Yet, it is also a region full of diversity and paradoxes. It must also be recognized that many countries in the region face rising inequalities and conflicts that threaten their social fabric and stability. Various classes and groups of people, in particular the younger generation and indigenous communities, face a revolution of rising expectations, yet many experience a revolution of rising frustrations. Issues of identity revolving around ethnicity, religion, and sub-regions often crop up, raising tensions and anxieties. All these must be addressed effectively and with a long range view, bearing in mind that people in the region face a common future.

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Biography



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Professor Rigg's research interests encompass the problems, tensions and potentialities of development in the Southeast Asian region. He has a long-term commitment to the region dating back to research conducted in 1980 in the field of agrarian studies. Another thread has been his continuing interest in the environment and political ecology. This is reflected in an edited volume and papers on topics such as dam construction, forest management, and non-timber forest products. His work on rural areas of Southeast Asia has led to subsidiary interests in contemporary development issues: on the role of non-government organisations in development; on languages of modernization; and on exclusion, ethnicity, citizenship and nation building.



The Shadows of Success: Transformation and Marginalisation in Southeast Asia

Jonathan Rigg

This presentation is an attempt to rehearse the arguments of a new book that I am in the middle of writing.¹ Normally I like to talk without notes; today I will be reading from my notes from time-to-time because the argument here is new – at least for me – and I want to try and get it right.

It is often imagined that as we get older we get more conservative; in my case, it seems to be working the other way around and I am slowly becoming a bitter and twisted ageing academic.

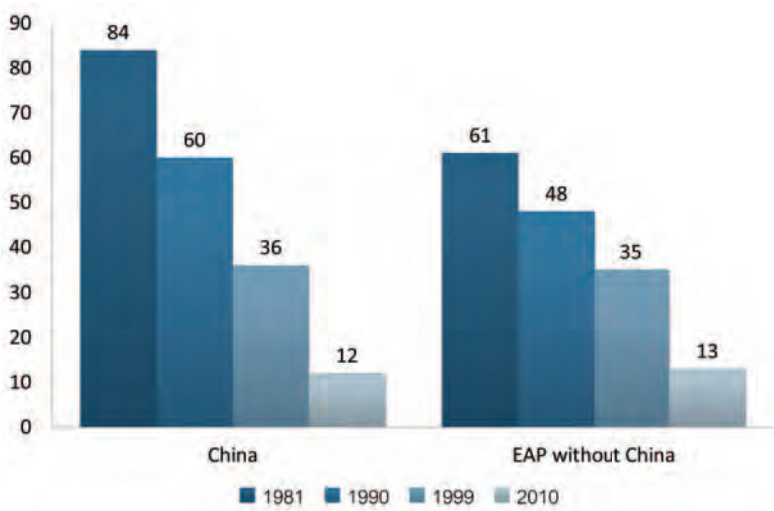
The headline story of Southeast Asia is one of success, a story which has been re-told for more than two decades, so much so, and so many times that it has lost its ability to impress or enthrall. Asia's miraculous growth is shrugged off as routine, even mundane and the 'Asian Century' has become a hackneyed phrase. We have grown weary of the growth thesis, almost to the point of distraction.

Producing Poverty and Destitution in Contexts of Prosperity and Growth

On the face of it, Southeast Asia's success in reducing poverty has been remarkable. As has been said so many times, never before in history have so many people been lifted out of poverty in such a short time as they have in East Asia over the last half century. Between 1980 and 2010 the proportion of the population in Asia living in absolute poverty declined from around 70% to about 12%. What I want to suggest to you today is that if we broaden our conceptualisation of the poor then this perspective becomes increasingly problematic.

¹ Professor Rigg's forthcoming book, *Southeast Asia: the shadows of success* (working title), will be published by Routledge and available in 2015

Extreme poverty in the Asia-Pacific: 1981, 1990, 1999 and 2010



Asia's Five 'Poors'

There are five ways in which we can think about poverty and the poor in East Asia. I am including Southeast Asia here as the populations occasionally overlap, but not always and perhaps more importantly, the ways that poverty is produced and reproduced are different; and the policies that might underpin the amelioration of these poverties are also different.

Asia's five poors

Type of poverty	Character	Measurement	'Solution'
Poverty 1.0: poverty born of dearth and under-development	'Traditional' poverty; lack of food, health facilities, education, clean water - 'basic' needs. Lack of income.	Absolute and usually measured in monetary terms (income or consumption). Allows inter-country comparison	Economic growth
Poverty 2.0: poverty born of inequality	Poverty created by the unequal distribution of growth and the failure of some people's incomes to keep pace with the general rate of expansion, leading to relative decline	Relative and usually measured in monetary terms but against median income	Pro-poor growth (neo-liberal solution), redistribution (more radical answer)
Poverty 3.0: Poverty born of affluence	Conditions that are akin to poverty in their social effects but which are often a by-product of the elimination of Poverty 1.0	Largely over-looked by economists, this is poverty that arises from the failure of people to fulfil their aspirations to become neo-liberal consumers	
Poverty 4.0: Poverty born of development	'Impoverishment' – poverty that is created by processes of development	Overlooked by policy makers; invisible to or seen to be undeserving by the wider public	Politicisation
Poverty 5.0: the uncounted poor	Transnational migrants – uncounted and unreported	Unmeasured	Recognition and inclusion

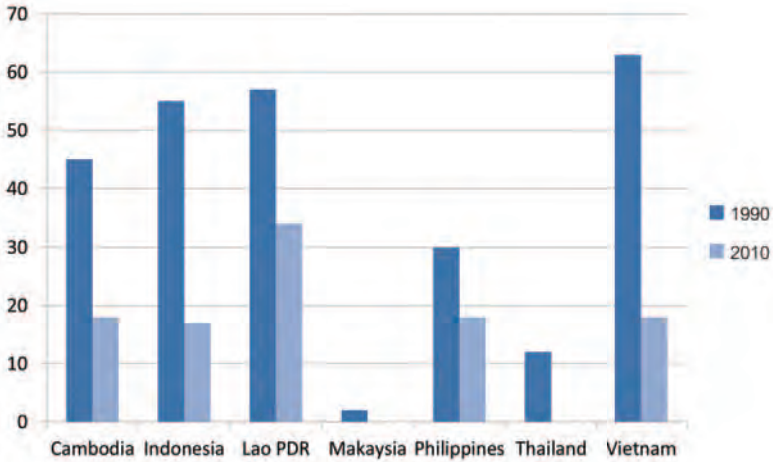
Poverty 1.0

Poverty 1.0 refers to absolute poverty; these are the poor we are familiar and, in a sense, comfortable with: the meagre poor. These are the poor who are often said to be 'trapped' in inherited poverty, and who continue to live meagre lives in absolute poverty, with incomes of less than \$1.25 per day.

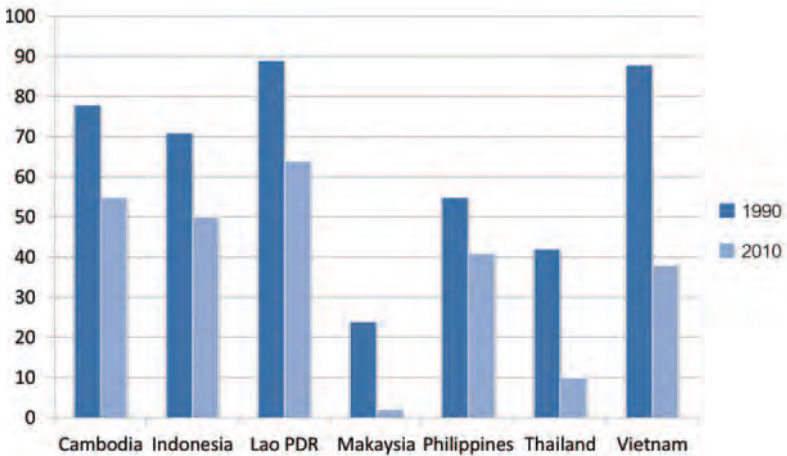
On this basis, in some countries of Southeast Asia, the poor have been 'eradicated'. As Kishore Mahbubani (2001) has written of Singapore "there are no homeless, destitute or starving people in Singapore. Poverty has been eradicated..." The same claim for the eradication of poverty has been made for Malaysia, with Hatta and Ali (2013: 53) claiming that "Malaysia can effectively declare victory in its fight against poverty", with hard core poverty in 2009 standing at just 0.9 per cent.

However, if we raise the threshold to \$2 per day, miraculously a significant number of poor living in absolute poverty appear. Where we draw the line is not only contentious and difficult; it is also far from academic.

Proportion of the population below the poverty line at \$1.25 per day, 1990 and 2010 (%)



Proportion of the population below the poverty line at \$2.00 per day, 1990 and 2010 (%)



Where do the Poor Live in Southeast Asia?

It is often assumed that the challenge of poverty in Southeast Asia lies with – and in – the region’s poorest countries. However there are, today, far more poor people living in middle income than in low income countries in the region, even using the \$1.25 international poverty line. The difference becomes starker still if a more generous \$2.00 line is used. This distribution of the poor between low and middle income countries is new: in 2005, across developing Asia, 69 per cent of the poor lived in low income countries; in 2008 the figure was 19 per cent.

The poor in Southeast Asia, \$1.25 and \$2.00 poverty lines (2010)

	\$1.25 per day poverty line		\$2.00 per day poverty line	
	Headcount (%)	No of poor (millions)	Headcount (%)	No of poor (millions)
Low income countries				
Cambodia	27.2	4.1	55.0	8.3
Lao PDR	31.8	2.0	64.0	4.1
Myanmar	-	-	-	-
Timor Leste (2007)	37.4	0.4	72.8	0.8
Total		6.5		13.2
Middle income countries				
Indonesia	18.6	43.1	50.6	117.4
Malaysia	0	0	2.2	0.6
Philippines	16.7	15.6	41.1	38.4
Thailand	0.2	0.1	9.7	6.6
Vietnam	12.6	11.1	37.8	33.3
Total		69.9		196.3
High income countries				
Brunei	0	0	0	0
Singapore	0	0	0	0
Total		0		0

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Total		69.9		196.3
High income countries				
Brunei	0	0	0	0
Singapore	0	0	0	0
Total		0		0

Whether measured in terms of \$1.25 or \$2 per day, there are many more poor in middle income countries than in low income

This is not because a new stock of poor people has suddenly revealed itself in middle income countries. It reflects the transition of formerly low income countries to middle income status even while their poverty challenge has remained to be comprehensively addressed. This is the regional incarnation of a ‘new geography’ of global poverty, one where we need to pay attention to the partially obscured poor in what may well be rapidly growing – and therefore ‘successful’ – countries (Sumner 2012). This concern for the poor in middle income countries shifts the terms of the debate, and more than geographically, from the so-styled ‘bottom billion’ (Collier 2007) living in low income countries, to the poor living in middle income countries.

When the poor were concentrated among low income countries it was usual to see poverty as a problem of low growth and underdevelopment. The solution was clear: encourage growth. The persistence of poverty in rapidly growing middle income countries, however, reflects something rather different, and arguably more intractable. The question in these countries is: why do we not see an eradication of poverty in the context of rapid growth? This leads us to Poverty 2.0.

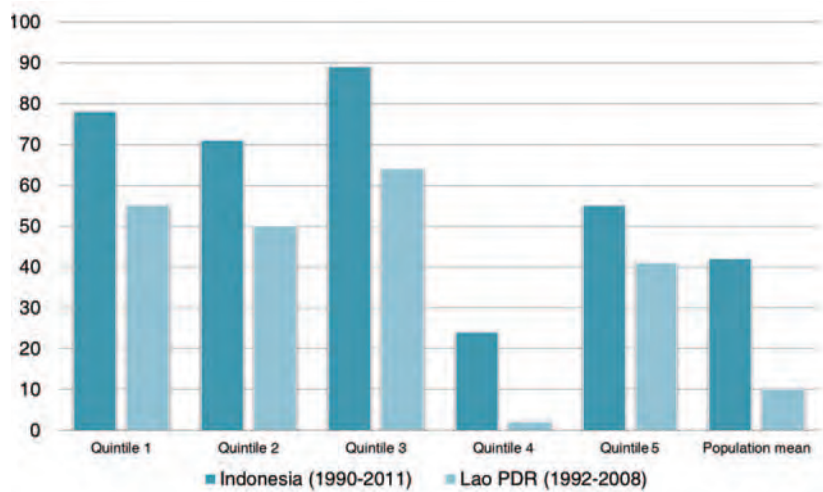
Poverty 2.0: The Growth of Inequality and Interest in Inequality

The standard answer to this question is that it is because growth has been unequal and this, in turn, has informed the policy debate over how to support and generate pro-poor growth.

While poverty has declined across developing Asia, this would have been even steeper had growth been more equally distributed. Four-fifths of developing Asia’s population live in countries where inequality deepened in the final decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century (ADB 2012: xi).

The impact of unequal growth in terms of poverty rates can be seen by looking at two countries that have experienced rising levels of inequality over the decade before and the decade since the year 2000, namely Indonesia and the Lao PDR. Here we see that annual expenditure has been growing progressively faster for richer than for poorer quintiles in both countries. It is this that lies behind the striking difference in actual and simulated poverty levels.

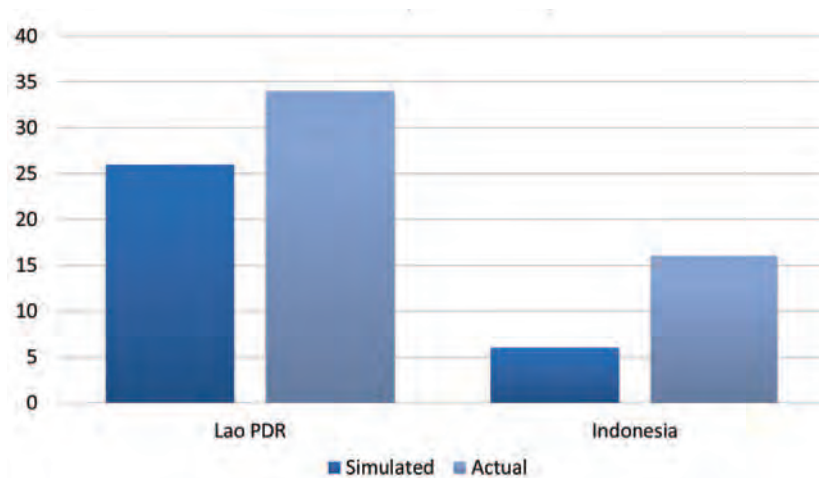
**Growth incidence of expenditure by quintile, Indonesia and Lao PDR
(annual growth of mean per capita expenditure by quintile)**



Note: growth incidence curves show the distribution of income (or expenditure) growth between two periods across income groups.

Source: ADB estimates using PovcalNet extracted from ADB 2012: 49

**Actual and simulated poverty rates at \$1.25 (%), Lao PDR and Indonesia
(1990s-2000s)**



The importance of addressing the inequality that seems to be a growing feature of economic growth in the region is political, as much as it is moral and humanitarian:

“Rising inequalities in Asia pose a clear and present danger to social and political stability and, therefore, the sustainability of the growth process itself” (Ali and Juzhong Zhuang 2007: 9).

Stark differences in the depth and pattern of inequality between countries indicate that the nature of inequality is shaped in market economies by much more than just the operation of the market. Writing of inequality in the US, Joseph Stiglitz observes that:

“American inequality didn’t just happen. It was created. Market forces played a role, but it was not market forces alone. . . .our growing inequality is a distinctly American ‘achievement’” (2012: 28).

The case for pursuing growth with equity (or equity with growth) extends beyond its greater poverty reducing effects. There is growing evidence, admittedly mostly from the rich world where supporting statistics are broader and more robust, that societies where income is unequally distributed tend to be less healthy whether measured in terms of life expectancy, obesity or infant mortality; more violent as reflected in higher levels of homicide, crime and imprisonment; display greater social problems such as mental illness, teenage births and drug abuse; and have poorer educational outcomes (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). Indeed, it is remarkable the degree to which problems with a social gradient are more pronounced – by a factor of between two and ten – in more unequal societies (Wilkinson and Pickett 2013: 176-177). This even applies to the richest five or 10 per cent who similarly show worse outcomes than do their equivalent in more equal societies.

Poverty 3.0

Poverty can also be said not so much to have persisted, but to have been re-worked in new forms through and by the achievement of development and a degree of material progress. To understand these poor requires us to study the non-poor because it is in relation to the rich that they emerge, not so much in statistical terms, but experientially. For the 3.0 Poor, while they find their living conditions improving in real terms, are unable to fulfil their aspirations to become fully contented neo-liberal consumers. They are frustrated in this desire.

Poverty 4.0

Poverty 4.0 is poverty created by development – through a parallel process of ‘impoverishment’. For Mosse, “the poverty of certain categories of people is not just unimproved by growth or integration into (global) markets, but deepened by it” (2010: 1161).

The more radical view of this process is that the forces of globalisation exert downward pressure on wages as investment seeks out those locations where labour is cheapest. The progressive shift of low wage activities in the Asian region in the light of prevailing wage rates tends to support this interpretation of how global capital operates in an internationalising context. It has variously been termed ‘immiserising growth’, ‘competitive austerity’, the ‘race to the bottom’, and a ‘not-so-friendly-to-labour’ mode of industrialisation or, alternatively, 3D development (dirty, dangerous, demeaning) or 3L development (low skill, low pay, long hours). Even Joseph Stiglitz who, as chief economist at the World Bank was at the heart of the globalisation project would seem to accept the logic of the immiserising growth thesis: “With capital highly mobile – and with tariffs low – firms can simply tell workers that if they don’t accept lower wages and worse working conditions, the company will move elsewhere” (Stiglitz 2012: 61).

Poverty 5.0

Finally, there is poverty 5.0. These are the poor who never enter the national statistics. They are not counted, as I will argue in the moment, because they do not count.

So:

- the residual poor – those who have been ‘left behind’ in the wake of economic transformation
- the unequal poor – those whose poverty is linked to the unequal distribution of growth and their ‘falling behind’ in relative terms
- and the produced poor – those whose poverty is linked to the very processes that have generated growth, or the ‘immiserated’ poor

We can add to these three, a fourth category:

- the unreported poor – those people who are poor but, for various reasons, are not counted as such; the ‘invisible’ poor

I want to spend the rest of my time focusing on Poverty 4.0 and Poverty 5.0.

The Produced Poor

A general point made here is that market integration – or capitalism – harms as well as helps people. That it, in a real and not just a rhetorical or discursive sense, creates poor people. As Harriss-White writes:

“...poverty cannot be eradicated; on the contrary poverty is continually being created and recreated under the institutions of capitalism. ... States may...seek to mitigate poverty, but in order to do so effectively the processes which create poverty must be openly understood and the – sometimes perverse – consequences of the various mitigating strategies on these poverty-creating processes must be recognised” (2006: 1241).

For this argument to have credibility, however, and not just to appear to be political posturing or arising from ideological partiality, it needs to be grounded in examples that demonstrate the selectively harmful effects of the very processes and policies that have also produced prosperity. There are three key processes at work here:

- Dispossession – the taking, sometimes by force, of the resources (especially land) of the poor
- Displacement – the removal of people, against their will, from their spaces of living, work and social interaction (e.g. through resettlement)
- Casualisation (or precarisation) – the restructuring of modes of work into forms that lack security of employment and income and the various protections that come with formal, secure employment

Dispossession

Of the countries of Southeast Asia, it is possibly the Lao PDR where debates over the developmental effects of land scale, land enclosure or land grabbing have been most vociferous. Studies in Laos reveal common threads in the way that such frontier spaces and people are characterised: that land is unused or inefficiently used; that upland people are ‘backward’ and poor because of their adherence to traditional livelihoods; that their style of living does not contribute to national development; and that the best means to develop both the people and the land resource is through marketisation. The ADB and the Lao government, furthermore, have been instrumental in this characterisation of large areas of the country as ‘empty’ and ‘undeveloped’, thus creating a frontier space – a fictive frontier – that capital can exploit through the transfer of land in the form of land-scale land concession.

The subtle morphing of unpopulated into underused, and then underused into under-productive, often underpinned by notions of backwardness, are all too clear. Given that ‘empty’ lands are rarely empty, to make space available for capital requires clearing it of people. As Susanna Hecht said in a workshop I recently attended at CIFOR in Bogor, ‘Forests without people are an invitation to plunder’(2013). This underpins the logic of dispossession: only by dispossessing, uprooting and resettling people can land be possessed by capital.

There is a corollary effect to ‘turning land into capital’ when that land is occupied; and that is to turn ‘people into labour’, a point that Ian Baird (2011) makes. Having uprooted people from their traditional lands, settling them in villagers and thereby connecting them – in a physical sense – to the mainstream, these settlers can then be drawn into market relations. Only in this way can minority peoples, partially separate and separated from the market, contribute to the national development project. We therefore see in the Lao PDR, and also in upland Vietnam, in Malaysian and Indonesian Borneo, and in West Papua both a land and a labour process in train:

- Land effects: Depopulation → Expropriation → Enclosure → Capitalisation
- Labour effects: Displacement → Resettlement → Incorporation → Proletarianisation



Displacement, Casualisation, Informalisation and Precarity

Having been physically displaced, the already vulnerable have found themselves in new, even less secure, employment contexts. The casualisation – or sometimes ‘flexibilisation’ and, more recently, ‘precarity’ – of work is seen to be one of the defining features of advanced capitalism as countries are forced to compete with each other for mobile capital. The outcome is that economic growth has often not translated into security; indeed, often quite the reverse.

A significant but frequently overlooked character of this trend towards increasing precarity is that it reverses the direction that employment conditions took through much of the 20th century, where increasing formalisation of work was normal and, furthermore, was expected to advance as countries advanced.

The informal economy, ‘discovered’ in Kenya by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1972, was thought to be a product and a reflection of underdevelopment, and thus would gradually disappear as development proceeded. The Kenya report coined the term ‘informal sector’ and described the sector and its role and significance in the following terms:

“The problem with employment is that the statistics are incomplete, ...omitting a range of wage earners and self-employed persons, male as well as female, in what we term ‘the informal sector’. ...from the vantage point of central Nairobi, with its gleaming skyscrapers, the dwellings and commercial structures of the informal sector look indeed like hovels. For observers surrounded by imported steel, glass and concrete, it requires a leap of the imagination and considerable openness of mind to perceive the informal sector as a sector of thriving economic activity...” (ILO 1972 quoted in Bangasser 2000: 9).

The puzzle is that in many countries of Asia, while labour legislation has become more comprehensive in scope, the actual experience of work has become less secure. A process of informalisation has occurred in the context of development. Chang (2011) calls this the informalisation of the formal sector, a subtle but momentous shift from the region being characterised by an informal sector, to having an informal economy. “Contrary to many expectations”, Chang writes, “that growing national wealth or poverty reduction could resolve the problem of the growing informal sector in developing countries, the bigger the economy grew, the bigger became the population that came to work informally” (Chang 2009: 165).

The size of evolution of the informal economy in Southeast Asia

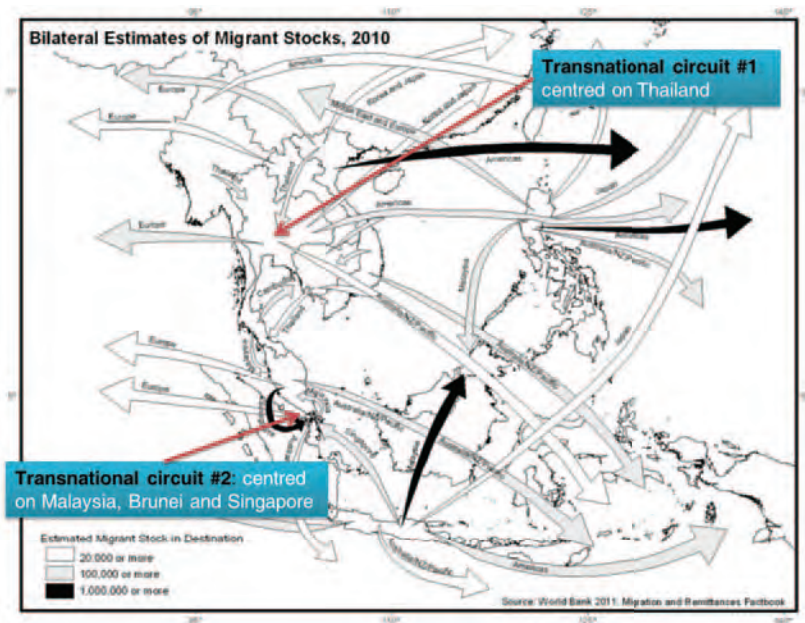
Country	Size of the informal economy			Informal economy Trend
	Earliest date (year)	Middle date (year)	Latest date (year)	
Indonesia	25% (1971)	42% (1990)	66% (2010)	Expanding
Philippines	57.6% (1980)	49.3% (2000)	41.5% (2010, BLES) 77% (2006, ECOP)	Expanding
Thailand	77% (1980)	58% (2000)	63% (2012)	Expanding
Vietnam	-	-	82% (2007)	Expanding

The Unreported and Uncounted: Tracking the Living and Lives of Southeast Asia's Transnational Migrants

This creation of a precariat is occurring as nationals are incorporated within the capitalist system but on unfavourable terms; it is also occurring beneath the radar as transnational migrants increasingly fill the interstitial spaces in national economies.

Data on migration and mobility, both intra- and trans-national, are poor. National censuses often do not pick up short-term movements and population registers are either lacking or provide only rudimentary coverage. The same is true of trans-national movements where there is often a significant underestimation of the scale of migration flows across international borders, with large numbers of irregular migrants.

Notwithstanding these caveats, however, we do know that socio-economic and political transformations over the last forty years, and particularly over the last two decades, have served to create a vital landscape of human mobility. There are two general circuits of transnational movements in the Southeast Asian region, one centred on Thailand which lies at the core of a mainland Southeast Asian human resource economy; and the other centred on Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei which likewise have become nodal destination sites for insular Southeast Asia.



While the situation varies between countries, we can make four statements that have general validity and purchase:

- such workers are hired on a temporary basis;
- they do not enjoy the same rights as citizen employees and are barred from achieving citizenship;
- they are low paid, work long hours often in poor and sometimes dangerous or degrading conditions; and
- they are situated at the margins of mainstream society. They are classically 'socially excluded' but are also indispensable elements of the labour system as it has evolved in the Southeast Asian region.

The emergence of a vital regional human resource economy in Southeast Asia has led to what I term the triple paradox of the transnational labour migrant.

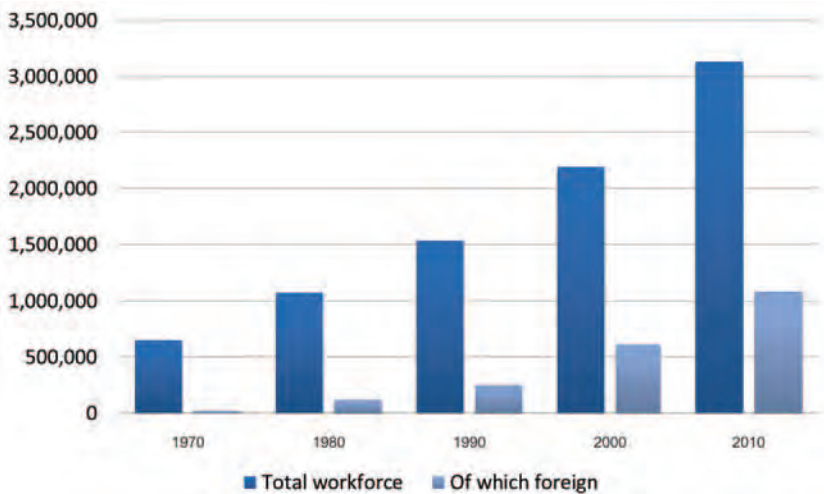
The Triple Paradox of the Transnational Labour Migrants

First, migrants are often critical components in national development, essential for processes of capitalist accumulation; at the same time, however, they are often only given a grudging welcome at best, and their presence is conditional.

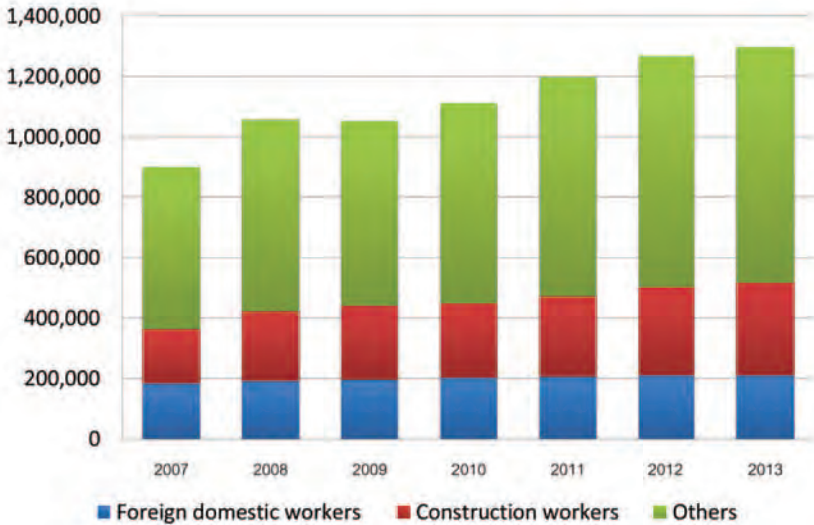
Forty years ago, Singapore was a place that met its own labour needs. In 1970 the non-resident population of the country was less than three per cent. By 2010 it had risen to 26 per cent, and in 2013 reached 29 per cent. In 2007 Singapore's foreign workforce numbered 900,800; in 2013 it was 1,296,800, comprising around 40 per cent of the total workforce.

Migrants in Singapore face discrimination and, often, public prejudice. Following the first riots in more than three decades in Singapore by labour migrants from South Asia, one reader of the Straits Times wrote to the newspaper saying that 'foreign workers are here to make a living and they should do just that, instead of creating trouble', while a second said that 'foreign workers need to know that they cannot import their culture or their way of life here [to Singapore]', adding 'kudos to the authorities for adopting a tough and resolute stance against the rioters' (Straits Times, 10th December 2013).

Singapore workforce, 1970-2010



Singapore's foreign workforce, 2007-2013



Partly reflecting such public views, most countries have policies and laws that seek to limit migrant numbers, control their employment, channel their activities, and maintain a degree of surveillance over their daily lives. This then creates a second paradox: laws are put in place ostensibly to protect migrant workers but, in practice, these laws become a means by which employers can restrict and exploit their workers.

This is reflected in the scores of factories that have sprouted in and around Mae Sot, close to the Burmese border, since the late 1990s and early 2000s. Arnold and Pickles (2011) not only highlight the racialised discrimination that occurs but also the shockingly low wages paid and conditions endured. Mae Sot, they contend, “is a quintessential example of a garment-producing center that attracts employers keen on squeezing or sweating labor” (2011: 1610). A survey undertaken by MAP Foundation (2012: 6) found that for Burmese migrant workers without documentation, their average wage was 46 per cent of the minimum wage of 251 baht per day; for those with a migrant workers card it was 62 per cent, and for migrants with a Temporary Passport it was 89 per cent.



The third paradox also emerges from the legal context that exist in most destination countries: migrants are, by definition, mobile and yet their daily mobility becomes tightly circumscribed. Derks (2010: 930) writes of the ‘politics of immobilisation’ and quotes the words of a Cambodian fisherman, Thou, on a Thai trawler in Rayong:

“Living here means that we don’t have rights. We don’t have much freedom. We have no clear timeframe. When we work for them [fishing-vessel owners], it is all up to them. When they want us to stop, for several months, for years, it is up to them.”

At one level, it is clear that globalisation and capitalism shape the processes and outcomes discussed above. The fact of growing mobility and migration, and the ways in which migrant labour sojourners are implicated in and insinuated into national development projects, are quite clearly tied up with broader currents of economic transformation.

In Singapore, as one might expect given the city state’s reputation, we find a carefully and finely calibrated policy context that structures and manages migration. These policies are segmented according to sector, and to skill and salary levels. For example, employers of Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs, or ‘helpers’) have to pay a monthly ‘FDW levy’ of S\$265 per month, a security deposit of S\$5,000, while the workers themselves are required to undergo a medical test within 14 days of arrival (including pregnancy, STD and HIV tests) and every six months thereafter. They are not permitted to be accompanied by dependents, are prohibited from becoming pregnant or having a child while holding on a work permit, and are also prohibited from marrying Singapore residents or permanent residents without approval from the Controller of Work Passes.

Policies are crafted to deliver a migrant workforce that will, on the one hand, contribute to Singapore's economic progress and, on the other, do so in a manner that will not be disruptive to the smooth functioning of Singapore society (Yeoh and Annadhurai 2008: 549).

This is reflected in the debate over whether FDWs should be legally entitled to a day off a week. Singapore is one of the few countries where this is not currently legally mandated. The Ministry of Manpower in Singapore has adjusted its policies in line with international accepted practice but with the addition of the rider 'while providing flexibility to employers and FDWs who wish to accept monetary compensation in-lieu of their rest day'.

'This is bad news for women who are working. If I let her go out four days a month, it will be very hectic for me. I need to rest on Sunday too'—Poon Boon Eng, mother of 4

Economic growth in the countries of Southeast Asia that receive large numbers of transnational migrants – Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand – has been importantly founded on flows of cheap labour from neighbouring countries, as well as further afield. The incomes of these migrants are not recorded in national statistics and their poverty, therefore, goes unreported. But it is the poverty of these new poor who, in a real sense, have helped to make the old poor, non-poor. Consider the numbers: Malaysia, in 2010, had a population of 600,000 living below the \$2 poverty line; in the same year there were more than three million transnational migrant workers, five times the number of recorded poor. In Thailand, in 2010, there were 6.6 million poor, and perhaps 3.5 million migrants.

'Made in Malaysia', 'Made in Singapore' and 'Made in Thailand' become, given the level of transnational migrant work and their contribution to the economy only a partial reflection of the people behind the production statistics. Textiles from Malaysia should have sewn into their hems 'Made in Malaysia, Produced by Vietnamese', tins of seafood from Thailand might be labelled with 'Produced in Thailand, Fished by Cambodians and Burmese', and young men and women in Singapore stamped with 'Born in Singapore, Raised by Filipinos'.

To point out that transnational migrant workers in Southeast Asia are vulnerable and open to abuse is hardly novel; it has been extensively documented for years. Furthermore, it is not just a Southeast Asian affliction but is echoed, time and again, across the world. The abuse of migrants is, moreover, scarcely a new phenomenon. In the 1860s, Mark Twain wrote this of Chinese migrant labourers in California:

“I have seen Chinamen abused and maltreated in all the mean, cowardly ways possible to the invention of a degraded nature, but I never saw a policeman interfere in the matter and I never saw a Chinaman righted in a court of justice for wrongs thus done to him” (quoted in Chang 2013: 79).

What, on first glance, may appear perplexing is that notwithstanding very significant extensions to the legislative frameworks in both Singapore and Thailand, ostensibly designed to protect migrant workers from abuse and exploitation, both continue – and at a wide level. Appreciating this legislative failure requires that we view international labour migration in terms of the neoliberal context that underpins and drives the process. Wages are poor and conditions are dangerous because they need to be so in the context of neo-liberal growth; regulations are put in place because migrants are needed, but not wanted; and laws that might protect workers are either lacking or poorly policed because the conditions in which migrants work are not of central public anxiety and therefore of political concern.

In the main, Southeast Asian countries have been very good at generating growth and reducing Poverty 1.0; they have been rather less good at addressing Poverty 2.0, but nonetheless the success of the growth agenda has made this, until recently, less urgent. It is with regard to Poverty 3.0 and, especially, Poverty 4.0 and Poverty 5.0 where the achievement of success really does have to be qualified and it is here that the emerging development challenge lies.



Q&A with Professor Rigg

Q: I'm curious, I know this is a work in progress so I'm wondering whether you are considering including the unreported or invisible resources that have been lost to people who are poor like protein intake – it doesn't get counted because it doesn't go through the market system. Have you thought about how that might be incorporated in this model you are developing?

Prof. Rigg: I haven't thought about including protein, that hasn't been on my agenda. I thought you were going to ask a different question when you started which is about the way in which natural resources get relocated from one country to another. For example if you look at sand mining in Cambodia, the effect of sand mining on local livelihoods, the destruction of fisheries, and that the sand ends up in Singapore growing the nation state of Singapore in physical terms. That enables Singapore to do things and that resonates back to Cambodia. When you think of the haze from last year that affected Malaysia and so on which comes from the clearance of land for palm oil; its foreign capital, much of it Singaporean and Malaysian which is driving that process, so there are invisible trans-border flows and links I am going to focus on. I hadn't thought about protein but I am interested in thinking about how environmental challenges, the obvious one is of course, climate change, now require us to look across national borders. Here in Thailand, the logging ban of 1989 and the effect of that in displacing logging into Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar. So you end up solving one problem and creating three more. I am looking at that, so a partial answer to your question.

Q: Thank you for such an important paper. My work is on India, and I can see lots of resonances and I'm reminded of Jan Breman's classic article on the informal sector when you were talking about there's nothing formal about the informal sector. So in this sense it seems to me it is classic capitalism repeating itself. The only exception being migrant labour and in labour surplus economies like in the subcontinent, poverty is visible; in Southeast Asia it's invisible. Other than that, it is actually neoliberal capitalism on a global scale seeing its manifestation in a particular way. It's just a comment and in terms of observation, what I see in Southeast Asia is that poverty is hidden, it's there but it's hidden, it's being done by someone else.

Prof. Rigg: Yes I think that's right. You are correct in saying it's hidden from view. When I talk to my students in Singapore I ask them a leading question: Are there any poor in Singapore? And they say "no of course there aren't". Then we begin to discuss it and they say "well of course I do know there are these people who are hidden from view that are counted as poor" and I guess that is repeated in other countries. The whole dispossession issue and accumulation by dispossession, which is part of the taking of land; I think a lot of the accumulation in East Asia has occurred without dispossession, although people are losing their land in Laos, here in Thailand people are not losing their land but they are still being incorporated into the capitalist system. So I think this is an interesting way we can draw a distinction between accumulation by dispossession and accumulation without dispossession. I think without dispossession is a particular feature of East Asia growth and certainly different to Latin America and Africa, certainly Latin America, so there are a few interesting distinction between the regions about how capitalism operates in different regional contexts.

Q: I found this a fascinating presentation, addressing a lot of issues with new perspectives regarding poverty. You've been highly critical of the development and the capitalism economy as the force producing or reproducing poverty. Could you outline your view of an alternative and a more positive development?

Prof. Rigg: I am not advocating for a North Korea model as an alternative but there are a set of processes that people need to think hard about their effects on people and places, so I think a softer type of capitalism, more like a European model. The effect of capitalism on excluded groups, on vulnerable groups has to be acknowledged and not just pushed to the margins. I am not suggesting some alternative to market relations and capitalism, I think it can be address in policy terms. I've only been in Singapore for six months, but it's amazing the debates that go on there; should they give domestic workers a day off and to me, yes, come on it's obvious, of course they should. But it's amazing that debate is going on and they come to the decision that employers can decide not to give them a day off if it gets in the way of their everyday life. That's where the state needs to come in and provide the corrective and that can be extended into multiple different arenas. That's an inadequate answer to a huge question, but I don't have an alternative to market relations but some of the excesses can be tempered.

Q: Thank you for this wonderful presentation. Are these group of people, who you have identified as invisible, are they trying to make themselves visible and fight for their rights? For example in Taiwan, more and more migrant workers go there to work and originally they were invisible but their increasing population has enabled them to get together and initiate an association to fight for their rights. Are there similar thing happening from your work?

Prof. Rigg: Certainly yes. They are not invisible. People in this room have studied them. There are non-government organisations that fight for their rights and there have been attempts to create Filipino workers groups in Hong Kong and have been very successful in that regard. I suppose I was thinking of invisible in two ways: one is invisible that have been pushed to the margins in a physical sense and also invisible in that they don't appear in the statistics. These are not people who count. So when you look at levels of poverty in Singapore, for example, zero per cent, doesn't recognise that there are 1.3 million people who are probably not living far off that figure because they are not citizens of the state and the state feels they are not our responsibility so the invisibility is both statistical relating to counting and the other is a physical one relating to the living in dormitories on the margins of the state, they tend to eat in particular places. They're not seen like they might in the mainstream.

Q: What you mention can be applied to trans-national migrants. In Cambodia for example, migrants are totally unwelcome, they are denied access to different services, including health services. There are also new regulations relating to security drafting measurements which are supposed to regulate migrants and “trouble makers” in which police and military are supposed to control those people who are coming from outside. Thirdly, even if those people are coming as temporary or long term migrants, they are working on innovations and creating new opportunities but they are not recognised. Also in one province in Cambodia where indigenous people are living, there are more and more groups including NGOs who are writing about how local groups can be protected.

Prof. Rigg: I’m sure you’re right. I’ve never worked in Cambodia, I’ve read work but never done fieldwork myself there but I’d like to think some of the themes I’m looking at can be seen and reproduced in the Cambodia context. It’s a control issue, security issues get raised every time, there are debates about it where there are “trouble makers” but I think the wider question is where there are denizens who become citizens and of course so many policies prevent that from happening. Foreign domestic workers have to have a pregnancy test before they arrive in Singapore because they do not want foreign domestic workers to have children in Singapore because then, god forbid, they might become Singaporean. They’re not allowed to marry without the permission of the Singapore state, they’re not allowed to marry Singaporeans. So these are all ways in which that shift of denizens into citizens, which has been such a feature of human history, gets stopped because of all those sorts of fears.

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