

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Department of History
Spring 1993

THE CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE: THE CASES OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN HISTORY
History 573 Undergraduate Seminar in Asian History
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Western civilization since the Enlightenment has been based on the conviction that there is reality objectively existing independently from human subjects, and that truth is accessible, obtainable and correctly representable in words, texts, writings. Such an idea has now been irrevocably challenged. Influenced by a number of French thinkers (Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jean Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Jean Braudillard, for example), more scholars have turned away from attempting to reach the truth, to know reality, or to search for a truth-language. The agenda now is to investigate the history of such a truth, to trace how knowledge is formulated and how it can claim the truth status.

Fundamental to this novel idea is the premise that all knowledge about reality and truth, if there is, are certain kinds of representation. They are intelligible because the plays of signs, signifier and discourses. And all representations are in crisis since they no longer hold the truth of any reality but merely are interpretations, ambiguous signs, or unstable coding. Moreover, there may not be reality outside the operation of signs and codes; no things out there to be represented. Things are inseparable from their representations; they are their effects. Roland Barthes calls "reality effect." Historical knowledge is a significant issue of investigation. How can we know the past? What we know are at best the representation of the past. If so, could there be different past? How can a narrative, words, and literary devices and conventions create such a past?

This course, however, is not a philosophical or a theoretical one. Its aim is not to make students fully equipped with those theories and ideas. Rather, it is an introduction to make students more familiar with them. Southeast Asian history is simply the cases or examples to the ideas and approaches of studies. Through diverse topics in three parts, the course will explore different roles and functions of words, signs, and texts. The first is the operations of signs in three arena: government, rebellion, and everyday resistance. The second is the creation of three reality effects: nation-state, the Orient, and women. The third part deals with the construction of historical knowledge: plot, figurative past, and life-writing (bio-graphy). The final topic is on our knowledge about the Vietnam War. Students should also pay attention to the methodological aspect of each topic, to learn for new ideas and tools for any further study.

Class Meetings: Wednesday 10:00-12:00, Room to be decided.

Credit: 3-4 (graduate 3, undergraduate 4) A-F system

Requirements: 1. One presentation (15 min.) at the beginning of a chosen meeting (to be decided in the first meeting). The presentation must discuss the weekly reading and issue, plus raises questions or topics for the discussion in that meeting. (20%)
2. A short essay (2-4 pages only) on the topic presented. The

script of the presentation is welcome and expected. Must be submitted no later than two weeks after the presentation. (10%)

3. **A research paper** (15-20 pages) on any topic related to the course. A research paper means a written work which show a student's knowledge in the subject, her/his ability in searching materials appropriate to the topic and in analytical and explanatory writing. The paper must be readable and convincing. Anything beyond that (like a very good writing style and creativity) will be bonus. (50%)

4. The research paper must be presented in brief to the class in the last two meetings. (no mark but counted as a part of participation for the benefit of the class)

5. **Participation** in the seminar is crucial.(20%)

-Students must read and prepare for every meeting.

-Students must be an active participant.

-Too many absences and uncooperative sit-ins will be noted.

All papers must be typed, double spacing, letter size paper, with page number. Reference format is flexible.

Office Hours: Rm. 5211 Humanities ph. 263-8931
Wednesday and Thursday 2:00-3:00 and by appointment

NOTES ON READING MATERIALS

The materials with the * mark are required readings for each week. The rest are recommended. The ones with the + sign are somewhat theoretical and relevant to particular topics. The presenter(s) of each week must read the required one(s) plus as many of the rest (or other pieces you find related to the topic) as necessary in order to lead the discussion. Other people may also find the recommended ones interesting for discussion. In case that the required ones cannot be found, please do other readings. Keep in mind that every student must prepare for the discussion each week.

WEEK 1 (Jan 20) Introduction to the course; description, objectives; weekly presentation assignment and papers. No reading.

WORLD OF CODES: SIGNS AT WORK

WEEK 2 (Jan 27) Configuration of power

Issue Power is abstract, but is always concretized in many forms. Do we really exercise or resist power? How does symbolism work, to convey power or authority or even constitute social order in the past? How were they reproduced? The power of rituals, traditions, conventions, orthodoxy.

- * Geertz, Clifford. Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- + Heine-Geldern, Robert. Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia. Data Paper Series #18. Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University.
- Reynolds, Frank E. trans & intro. Three Worlds According to King Ruang (at least intro.)
- Mabbett, Ian W. "The Symbolism of Mount Meru," History of Religions. 23:1 (Aug. 1983), pp. 64-83
- Smith, Bardwell ed. The City as a Sacred Center
- Snodgrass, Adrian. The Symbolism of Stupa
- + Errington, Shelly. Meaning and Power in A Southeast Asian Realm.
- + Eco, Umberto. "Social Life as a Sign System," in Structuralism: An Introduction. ed. David Robey. pp. 57-72

WEEK 3 (Feb 3) Rebellion encoded

Issue The creation, modification, interpretation and communication of the communal symbolism, mostly the same belief as the state, to subvert the state. Styles, forms and media of transmission of the subaltern ideology.

- * Ileteo, Reynaldo. Pasvon and Revolution.
- + Turton, Andrew and Tanabe, Shigeharu eds. History and Peasant Consciousness in South East Asia. 1984, many articles in this volume are useful. See at least Tanabe's article "Ideological Practice in Peasant Rebellions: Siam at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," pp.75-110
- Keyes, Charles F. "Millennialism, Theravada Buddhism and Thai Society," Journal of Asian Studies 36:2, (1977), pp.283-302
- Adas, Michael. "Bandits, Monks, and Pretender Kings: Patterns of Peasant Resistance and Protest in Colonial Burma," in Power and Protest in the Countryside. 1982, pp. 75-105.
- + Guha, Ranajit. Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India.

WEEK 4 (Feb 10) Words and everyday resistance

Issue The operations of power, ideology and resistance in everyday life through language; plural structures of power as expressed in plural structures of discourses; discursive confrontation and limit of domination without rebellion.

- * Scott, James C. Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of peasant Resistance. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1986.
- + Turton, Andrew. "Limits of Ideological Domination and the Formation of Peasant Consciousness." in History and Peasant Consciousness in Southeast Asia. eds. Andrew Turton and Shigeharu Tanabe. 1984, pp.19-73
- Tanabe, Shigeharu. "Spirits and Ideological discourse: the Tai Lu Guardian Cults in Yunnan," SOJOURN: Social Issues in Southeast Asia. 3:1, (Feb 1988), pp. 1-25

REALITY EFFECTS: CULTURAL CONSTRUCTS

WEEK 5 (Feb 17) Imagined Nations

Issue How a nation-state, hence nationalism, was conceived; language and technologies of imagining and creating reality; reproduction of reality effects; power of the imagined communities

- * Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. Imagined Communities. Revised and extended edition. 2nd ed. London; New York: Verso, 1991.
- Thongchai Winichakul. "Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of Siam" in Proceedings of the International Conference on Thai Studies, vol.1, the Australian National University, July 1987, (or ask from Thongchai for other similar versions).
- Chaiwat Satha-anand. "Of Imagination and State," in Ethnic Conflict in Buddhist Societies: Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma. ed. K.M. de Silva, et al.. Westview Press, 1988, pp. 27-41.
- Compare to other approaches to the study of a nation such as Hans Kohn Nationalism.; Hugh Seton-Watson. Nation and States.; Ernest Gellner. Nations and Nationalism.

WEEK 6 (Feb 24) Orientalism: Constructing the indispensable Other

Issue Power and/of scholarship, politics and/of knowledge in the study, creation and occupation of the Other; knowledge and colonialism; tourism, ethnography and effects on the Other; Why the Other indispensable?

- * Vickers, Adrian. Bali: A Paradise Created.
- + Said, Edward. Orientalism. esp. intro. and chapter 3
- "Review Symposium: Edward Said's Orientalism," Journal of Asian Studies 39:3 (1980) pp. 481-516
- Baudet, Henri. Paradise on Earth; Some Thought on European Images on Non-European Man
- + Atkinson, Paul. The Ethnographic Imagination: Textual Construction of Reality. see chap.4

WEEK 7 (Mar 3) Defining Female

Issue Representations of women; the Orientalized women and women from native perspective; the knowledge (science, image and myth) about women, harem and the oriental female, prostitution and sex industry, are there relations among these things?

- * Tiffany, Sharon W. and Adams, Kathleen J. The Wild Woman: An Inquiry into the Anthropology of an Idea. Cambridge, Mass.:Schenkman Pub. Co., 1985.
- Van Esterik, Penny ed. Women of Southeast Asia. Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University
- Keyes, Charles F. "Mother or Mistress but Never a Monk: Buddhist Notions of Female Gender in Rural Thailand," American Ethnologist 11:2, (1984)
- Khin Thitsa. Providence and Prostitution: Image and Reality for Women in Buddhist Thailand. 1980
- Leonowens, Anna. The Romance of the Harem.
- Croutier, Alev Lytle. Harem: the World Behind the Veil
- Troung, Thanh-Dam. Prostitution and Tourism in Southeast Asia. Zed Books, 1990

WEEK 8 SPRING RECESS Mar 6-14

DECODING THE PAST: HISTORICAL NARRATIVE UNRAVELLED

WEEK 9 (Mar 17) The Past Plotted

Issue How the past has been framed by particular plots; Is it possible to recover the true past? Is there the true past apart from representation of it? How to apply White's project? Any caution?

* Ileteo, Reynaldo. "Outlines of a Non-Linear Emplotment of Philippine History," in Reflections on Development in Southeast Asia, ed. Lim Teck Ghee, 1988, pp. 130-59.

* Reynolds, Craig J. "The Plot of Thai History: theory and practice," in Patterns and Illusions: Thai History and Thought. ed. E.C. Chapman and Gehan Wijeyewardene, 1992, pp. 313-31.

* White, Hayden. Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973, introduction at least.

+ White, Hayden. "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," In Tropics of Discourse. 1978; or in The content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation. 1987; or in Canary, Robert H. and Kozicki, Henry eds. The Writing of History.

+ White, Hayden. "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," History and Theory 23:1 (1984), pp. 1-33

- White, Hayden. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," In On Narrative. ed. W.J.T. Mitchell. 1981, pp.1-23

WEEK 10 (Mar 23) The Figurative and Contesting Past

Issue The role and function of trope (in this case "feudalism") in representing the past; rhetoric, metaphor, and figuration in historical narrative; multiple meaning and contesting interpretations of the past; history and domination, history and subversion; should we avoid or promote the "improper" signification of the past?

* Reynolds, Craig J. Thai Radical Discourse: the Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today. Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1987, esp. chap. 2,3.

- Reynolds, Craig J. and Hong Lysa. "Marxism in Thai Historical Studies," Journal of Asian Studies 43:1, (Nov 1983), pp.77-104

WEEK 11 (Mar 31) Bio-graphy or life-writing

Issue Patterns and structures of written lives. How do literary effects and the requirements for a historical study compromise in biography? Or in fact how much fictive is it? Conventions and traditions in cultural contexts of a biography.

* Wang Gang-wu ed. Self and Biography: Essays on Individual and Society in Asia. Sydney University Press, 1975. Read the introduction, and the articles by Sprenkel, Bolitho, Legge, and Wang Gang-wu.

* Mrazek, Rudolf. "Tan Malaka: A Political Personality's Structure of Experience," Indonesia 14 (October 1972), pp. 1-48.

* Anderson, Benedict. "A Time of Darkness and a Time of Light," in Anthony Reids and David Marr eds. Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia (Singapore) 1979, pp.219-38.

- Tambiah, S.J. The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets (Cambridge U.P.) 1984, pp. 81-131 (about the hagiography of Buddhist saints).

- Reynolds, Craig J. Thai Radical Discourse: the Real Face of Thai

Feudalism Today. chap. 1 (about a revolutionary intellectual).

[There are quite a number of biographies and autobiographies of Southeast Asian persons, mainly leaders, which can be taken as our cases. (See a sampling list from Thongchai.) Yet the studies of these writings are rare. The studies (theories, and criticism) of American and English biographies are, however, abundant -- see in the library.]

WORKSHOP

WEEK 12 (Apr 7) The Vietnam War Re-presented

Issue How is the war remembered? What are the pro-war and anti-war plots, and the plots of other V. war? Specify the signs, symbols, metaphors, codes, tropes which signify such meanings. How are those plots and meanings contesting? Is there any history of those plots?

How is the enemy literary created? Who/what is the enemy? What is its function in the representation of the war in American politics? What happen to the hero function in the Vietnam War literature?

The fate and future of the history of Vietnam war: who or what control this past? How? The effects of the Vietnam War Memorial and the Home-Coming Parade on history of the Vietnam war.

Lessons and Comparison to the Gulf war.

Assignment Every student has equal responsibility for this week discussion. In the light of the ideas from previous weeks, the workshop is a kind of laboratory for students to apply them in the reconsideration of the Vietnam war. The materials for discussion are among the followings:-

Films: - The Green Berets, Rambo II,
- The Deer Hunter, Platoon,
- Apocalypse Now, Full Metal Jacket

(At least one from each pair or some other "interesting" Vietnam War films)

Novels: Despatches, Born on the Fourth of July (novel or film), and also see the novel Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad.

Supplementary:

- Auster, Albert and Quart, Leonard How the War Was Remembered: Hollywood and Vietnam.

- Cultural Critique 3 (Spring 1986) on " The Representation of the Vietnam War."

- Dittmar, Linda and Michaud, Gene eds. From Hanoi to Hollywood: the Vietnam War in American Films.

- Feffords, Susan The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War.

- Hellman, John. American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam.

- Lewis, Lloyd B. The Tainted War.

- Lomperis, Timothy J. 'Reading the Wind' the Literature of the Vietnam War.

- Melling, Philip. Vietnam in American Literature.

- Myers, Thomas. Walking Point: American Narratives of Vietnam.

- Searle, William Search and Clear.

- Smith, Lorrie and Gillman, Owen eds. America Rediscovered.

- Wilson, James C. Vietnam in Prose and Film.

- Kail, F.M. What Washington Said: Administrative Phetoric and the Vietnam War 1949-1969.

[There are a number of 'shelves' of books on literature and films of the Vietnam war. The above list are merely examples of them.]

WEEK 13 (Apr 14) Workshop continued/ and Concluding Remarks

WEEK 14 (Apr 21) presentations of research papers

WEEK 15 (Apr 28) presentations of research papers