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“Patterns of Southeast Asian History”**

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Place: ACROS Fukuoka Event Hall (Tenjin, Chuo-ku, Fukuoka City)

Program:

Outline of Forum and Introduction of Panelists

Professor Ishizawa Yoshiaki (Sophia University)

Keynote Speech

Professor Anthony Reid (Academic Prize Laureate)

Panel Discussion

Professor Anthony Reid

Professor Ishii Yoneo (President, Kanda University of International Studies)

Professor Hamashita Takeshi (Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University)

Professor Ishizawa Yoshiaki

Summary

Professor Ishizawa Yoshiaki



Keynote Speech by Professor Anthony Reid

We live in an age that appears to be dominated by the conflict between global pressures and local reactions. Already six years before the World Trade Center bombing and the “war on terrorism”, Benjamin Barber had popularised this dichotomy as *Jihad versus McWorld*, the struggle between economic globalisation and the varied reactions against it.¹ Of course the jihad or nativist sides of this equation, which must include not just Al-Qaeda but the popular burning of McDonalds in France, the anti-WTO ‘battle in Seattle’, or the ‘fourth world’ movements of indigenous peoples, are themselves thoroughly globalised in the way they organise, publicise, and respond to the media. Many have seen the two rival phenomena as so thoroughly intertwined with each other that we need a word like ‘glocalisation’, combining global and local, to really express what is going on.

Our age is particularly obsessed with the conflict between global and local, cosmopolitanism and nationalism, outer and inner, because it strikes at the heart of us all. Nobody is immune from the rival pulls of being up with the international trends and of struggling to retain our own identity. The title of a recent booklet by Indian politician Jairam Ramesh, *Yankee go home—but take me with you*,² well expresses the ambivalence of attraction and outrage which many feel.

Even if it is particularly acute in our age, this tension between global and local has a long history, as Japanese are the first to understand. Probably no country has been as conscious through its history as Japan of the dangers of isolation on the one hand and of losing one’s identity on the other. Japanese history can be read, and no doubt has been, as a constant struggle between the passionate desire to borrow and innovate, and the equally passionate conviction that survival requires barriers against the foreign.

My own field of Southeast Asian history offers few examples of borrowing as systematic and effective as marked the Meiji and McArthur eras, and none of a *sakoku* as purposeful as that of the Tokugawa. Southeast Asia is much too diverse to have ever had a single purposeful policy, and most states within it were so exposed to global trade patterns, and even dependent on them for their strength, that they could never pursue a consistent policy of isolation. Nevertheless I believe there is a rhythm to Southeast Asian history which can also be read as interplay between globalisation and localisation. I propose to use this theme today as an introduction to some of my own work, and the reactions to it on the part of others.

“The Age of Commerce”

I am best known, probably, for my two-volume book entitled *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, c.1450-1680* (1988-93). The essential argument of that book was that there was a period at around that time of extraordinary globalisation, though I did not use that term, when Southeast Asia was largely remade by forces and ideas from outside it. As I put this more recently:

¹ Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantyne, 1995), p.6.

² Jairam Ramesh, *Yankee go home—but take me with you* (New York: Asia Society).

The global commercial expansion of the “long sixteenth century” necessarily affected [Southeast Asia] immediately and profoundly, as the source of many of the spices in international demand and as a maritime region athwart vital trade routes. It was the region most affected by the explosion of Chinese maritime activity at the beginning of the 15th century, and the source of the spices and much of the pepper that drew the Spanish to America and eventually the Philippines, and the Portuguese to India and Southeast Asia. The quickening of commerce, the monetization of transactions, the growth of cities, the accumulation of capital and the specialization of function which formed part of a capitalist transition elsewhere, undoubtedly occurred rapidly also in Southeast Asia during this period. The changes wrought in belief and cultural systems were even more profound. Islam and Christianity became the dominant religions of the Archipelago and pockets of the Mainland, while Buddhism was transformed by its alliance with centralizing states in Burma, Siam, Laos and Cambodia.³

In addition to the profound religious changes just listed, I argued that there was extraordinary cultural innovation tending in the direction of the secularization of performance, literature and art, which had been largely religious or cosmic in orientation before this. Since performance is the easiest element of the globalisation to display graphically, let me say a little more about it while showing some slides.

Some cultural effects of the Age of Commerce

The principal motors of change in the cultural, religious and also political domain were the large and multi-ethnic coastal trading cities which entirely dominated the age of commerce in Southeast Asia. Estimating their size is dangerous, but I believe necessary, and I came up with two sets of numbers which to my surprise have been far more often quoted than challenged, despite their provisional nature. In the 16th century I estimated Hanoi, Ayutthaya, Pegu and Melaka (pre-1511) all had populations around 100,000, before the last three were all devastated by conquest at different points in the century. In the early 17th century, the peak of the Age of Commerce, I had Hanoi, Ayutthaya and the Javanese capital of Mataram at an even larger size, perhaps above 150,000, while Aceh, Makasar, Banten and the southern Vietnamese capital of Kim-long briefly reached around the 100,000 mark. Overall, my estimates suggested at least 5% of the Southeast Asian population lived in large cities of over 30,000 population in the early 17th century, a higher figure than Europe at that time (though probably lower than India or China), and higher than Southeast Asia again reached before the 20th century.⁴

Three factors need to be mentioned in terms of the role of these cities in remaking Southeast Asian cultures and religions:

- i. they were multi-ethnic and culturally very diverse, with distinct quarters for dozens of different groups.⁵

³ Anthony Reid, *Charting the Shape of Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 1999), p.3.

⁴ Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce: Vol. II: Expansion and Crisis* (New Haven, 1993), pp. 68-77.

⁵ “In the port of Melaka very often eighty-four languages have been found spoken, every one distinct, as the inhabitants of Melaka affirm”, *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, ed. Armando Cortesao (London: 1944 [1515]), p. 269.

- ii. they were dense enough for many thousands of people to be able to gather for a festival or great occasion.
- iii. they were wealthy and leisured enough (thanks to a benign and generous environment) to devote substantial resources to the performing arts.

When Nikita Kruschev famously scandalised Sukarno by his impatience with many hours of theatrical performance put on in his honour, he was in a long tradition of European visitors troubled by the exuberance of Southeast Asian cultural life. Eredia complained of 16th century Malays that the upper class “spend their time in pastimes and recreations, in music and cock-fighting.”⁶ Even earlier Tome Pires noted that “The land of Java is a land of mummers and masks of various kinds, and both men and women do this. They have entertainments of dancing and stories; they mime...they are certainly graceful; they have music of bells [i.e. gongs]...At night they make shadows of various shapes.”⁷ In Burma a succession of British envoys to the court found themselves exhausted by the nightly theatrical and musical performances which “continued from day to day almost uninterruptedly.”⁸ In Banten “the dancing goes on all night, so that in the evenings there is a great hubbub of gongs and instruments.”⁹ In Patani the Queen’s court entertained envoys and visitors with dances and theatrical performance, “very pleasaunte to behold, so as I doute not to have seene the lyke in any place.”¹⁰

The Thai king King Rama T’ibodi in the early 1500s already went some way to secularising Thai entertainments. He was the most loved of Thai kings in later centuries because given credit for establishing “the large feasts and gamedays”.¹¹ He is also credited by tradition with introducing live stage plays by having masked dancers imitate the more sacred shadow puppets. Others doubt that this remarkable step towards secularization could have happened so early. A better documented change was in the ceremony of ‘sending away of the waters’ at the end of the rainy season in Siam. As the French observers at the court of King Narai told it, the magnificent appearance of the king and his dozens of glittering galleys on the water had been since old times believed to embody the spirit of the naga of the river, necessary to achieve the feat of turning the waters back from flooding. But:

this prince (Narai) having found by many years experience, that the waters increased sometimes, for all they were ordered to abate, has left off that ridiculous ceremony, and thought it enough this year by going in triumph to the Pagoda, to show the zeal he has for his religion.¹²

⁶ Godinho de Eredia, *Malaca, Meridional India and Cathay*, trans. J.V. Mills (MBRAS Reprint 14 (1997), p.39.

⁷ Tome Pires, p.177.

⁸ R.B. Pemberton, “Journey from Munipoor to Ava, and from Thence across the Yooma Mountain to Arracan”, 1830, ed. D.G.E. Hall, in *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 63, ii pp. 43-4. Also Symes I (1827), p..208-9; Shway Yoe (1882), p. 285.

⁹ Willem Lodewycksz, “Weerste Boeck”, 1598, in *De. eerste schipvaart der Nederlanders naar Oost-Indie onder Cornelis de Houtman 1595-1597*, ed. G.P. Rouffaer & J.W. Ijzerman, Vol. I (The Hague, 1915), p. 30.

¹⁰ *Peter Floris, his Voyage to the East Indies in the “Globe”*, 1611-1615, ed. W.H. Moreland (London, Hakluyt, 1934), p. 87, also-62-3.

¹¹ Jeremias van Vliet, (1640), p.69.

¹² Guy Tachard, *A Relation of the Voyage to Siam Performed by Six Jesuits*, trans. A. Churchill (1688, reprinted Bangkok, 1981), p.187. Also Reid, *Age of Commerce* II (1993), p. 179.

The essentially magico-cosmic purpose of the event had become a means of showing the grandeur of the king to both foreign and domestic audiences, in the name of an orthodox Buddhist *kathina* ceremony of presenting alms to the monks of the temple. The royal procession was in any case a dazzling display of royal splendour, as described by a French missionary source a little earlier:

More than 200 vessels, equipped and decorated in the most superb and striking manner in the world, in which ride the mandarins and other lords, of the court, allow to be seen in their midst another vessel which surpasses them all in beauty and richness. It is so covered with gold on all sides, that it seems to be altogether made of this precious metal. The King, still more glittering with an infinity of jewels, appears there like the sun in the eyes of all the nations who inhabit Siam, and who make sure to turn up en masse on the banks, and in the houses and gardens along the river.¹³

A broader case of this sort of shift of performance into the secular domain appears to have occurred in Java as it accepted Islam during the age of commerce. At least in the view of Pigeaud, the wonderful tradition of shadow theatre, along with masked drama and other forms, were originally “a means to demonstrate visually the cosmic and social order”, representing in visible form the gods and the spirits of ancestors. The reason that Javanese tradition insists (improbably) that both the *wayang kulit* and *wayang topeng* were created by the sainted *wali* who introduced Islam to Java predominately in the 16th century may be that Islam “may have loosened the link connecting the ancient sacral wayang performance with ancestor worship and primeval belief, and so popularization and secularization became possible.”¹⁴ In the cosmopolitan cities of the north coast (pasisir), the wayang stories based on Hindu gods and stories became a kind of “entertainment” since they could no longer be religious acts in a formal sense. They also were exhibited to foreigners in multi-ethnic cities like Banten, Melaka and Patani, where they became the “Javanese” entry in a multicultural, almost competitive, menu of musical offerings.

The royal theatre of State

Whether we read Southeast Asian texts or foreign descriptions of the 17th century courts, it seems almost incredible how much of the time and effort of the state went into organizing royal processions, shows and entertainments. All of the other great courts of Southeast Asia in the 17th century - Siam, Burma, Cambodia, Banten, Patani and Mataram - competed with each other in the magnificence of their processions and entertainments. The courts of such contemporary rulers as Louis XIII of France, James I of England, Shah Abbas in Persia or Akbar and Jahangir in India, were similarly concerned to show the king as the centre of a magnificent drama in which he represented not only power but also wealth, vigour, piety, generosity and illumination. It is an equally curious conjunction, however, that everywhere in Europe and Asia these public court spectacles declined sharply in the second half of the same 17th century.

Important events in the life of the court and the state were always accompanied by processions, music, dance and entertainments. The biggest such events were the

¹³ *Relation... des evesques, 1672-75* (1680), p. 129.

¹⁴ Th.G.Th. Pigeaud, *The Literature of Java* (The Hague: 1967), I: 287.

important religious festivals and the *rites de passage* of the royal family - circumcisions, weddings and funerals. Even the reception of foreign envoys, however, was the occasion for processions and feasting on a grand scale, including this depiction of the reception of the French ambassadors in 1686. Foreign visitors to the courts of Southeast Asia were our best sources for the magnificence of these royal processions and displays; but they were also actors in them. Ambassadors and traders were exchanged between Aceh, Siam, Pegu (Burma), and Banten, and arrived also from the Moghuls in India, Golconda (in South India), Persia, England, Holland, and France. These envoys were used as actors in the theatre of state, their letters being seen as a kind of tribute to local royalty and therefore to be treated with reverence. Performances on a grand scale were arranged for the envoys. Eventually they too, however, were expected to perform.

In Siam and Burma the most majestic processions were on the river, with hundreds of magnificently-arrayed galleys carrying local and foreign dignitaries to the palace.¹⁵ In Malaya and Sumatra, on the other hand, and even Tuban in Java, where there were no native elephants, it was with elephants that the court constituted its most impressive royal processions and brought important visitors to the court. In the Melaka sultanate, according to the *Sejarah Melayu*, the protocol was that people of sufficient rank were brought to the palace by elephant.¹⁶

For royal weddings and rites de passage such as circumcisions (in Muslim countries), there were always elaborate processions, shows and dances. At funerals there was enormous pomp. When Sultan Iskandar Thani of Aceh died in February 1641, a Dutch observer was there to record the ceremonies:

the funeral procession was carried out with royal magnificence: it consisted in a great following of Princes, Lords and Nobles, as well as 260 elephants, all hung with costly silks, gold cloth, and embroidered cloths. Their tusks were covered with gold, others with silver; others had little square houses and lavish tents on their backs, which had many banners hanging from them, worked with silver and gold.¹⁷

Of religious festivals at the court of Aceh, the feast of sacrifice (*Idul Adh*) was celebrated on the most spectacular scale. The *Adat Aceh* listed the 30 groups comprising the procession, the last three of which alone were said to contain 110 elephants and over 15,000 armed soldiers.¹⁸ There may be some poetic exaggeration in the numbers listed in this court work - indeed it is difficult to see how so many men and elephants could be accommodated in the roughly 500 metres between the palace and the mosque. Yet the outline of this description is confirmed by Peter Mundy, who witnessed the extraordinary procession from the palace to the mosque in 1637. After describing and sketching it as best he could, he added:

The march was also very confused and on heaps, there being scarce room or time

¹⁵ As a general Southeast Asian phenomenon, these processions, festivals and contests are described in Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce: The Lands below the Winds* (New Haven, 1988), pp. 173-91.

¹⁶ C.C. Brown (ed.), "Sejarah Melayu or 'Malay Annals'. A Translation of Raffles MS 18," *JMBRAS* 25 (1953), p. 56.

¹⁷ S. de Graaf

¹⁸ *Adat Atjeh dari satu Manuscript India Office Library*, romanized by Teungku Anzib Lamnyong (Banda Aceh, PLPIS, 1976).

for order. However it was all rare and strange to behold, viz., the multitude of great elephants accoutered and armed after several manners, weapons and ornaments, costly furniture, etc., there being near as many more elephants also fitted for this show (that could not march with the rest for lack of room) which stood in sundry places by while others passed.¹⁹

For much of the first half of the 17th century, massive processions such as this were a constant feature of court life, occurring even at the weekly Friday prayer. They must have dominated the life of the city. Typically they culminated in a public display of animal contests, at which foreign visitors were always given a prominent place.

Contests of animals

It is fortunate for the historian that in this way foreign envoys had a glimpse into the life of the court which they recorded in their letters and reports of their missions. In particular they were often allowed to witness the entertainments of the court. Among the most modest but popular were cock-fights, with the king's cock expected to win. But in Aceh during the first half of the 17th century the principal entertainment seemed always to be spectacular contests of the larger animals -- elephants, buffaloes and rams. At the tournaments of Java's courts (known as *senenan* because they were held on Monday, *Senen*), nobles would joust on horseback, and then tigers would be set to fight against buffaloes or against a phalanx of men armed with spears. Similarly in Siam and Laos in the 17th century the king frequently arranged public fights between elephants, or between a tiger and a number of elephants. The elephants would always succeed in killing the tiger by repeatedly throwing it high in the air, just as the *banteng* [buffalo] almost invariably killed the tiger in Java. Similar contests between tigers and either elephants or buffaloes were staged by rulers in what is now southern Vietnam, and in Malaya.²⁰

The dominant motives for these contests appear to have had to do with warfare and with the symbolic victory of the king. Since elephants were regarded as an important royal symbol, staging fights between them was probably intended as both display of this strength and training for the elephants and their handlers. The defeat of the tiger by an elephant (in Siam, Cambodia and southern Vietnam) or a buffalo (in Java) was a symbolic defeat of the forces threatening the good order of the state. It was therefore essential that the tiger lost, and it was handicapped by being tied to a stake and having to fight four elephants at once, or even (in Vietnam) having its claws pulled and its mouth sewn up. Raffles pointed out that the Javanese identified the tiger with the Europeans in his day, and so rejoiced in the repeated victory of the buffalo which they identified with themselves.²¹

Globalised cosmopolitanism in the 17th Century?

In cultural terms as in others, the age of commerce was a high point of globalisation and cosmopolitanism for Southeast Asia. In every field we can point to enthusiastic cultural borrowing, and to a certain competitiveness -- between the mercantile elite and the

¹⁹ *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608-1667* ed. Sir Richard Temple Vol. III, part i (London, 1919), pp. 121-3. In this and subsequent English quotations I have modernized the English spelling.

²⁰ Reid, *Age of Commerce I* (1988), pp. 183-201

²¹ Thomas Stamford Raffles, *History of Java* (London, 1817) 1: 347.

palace on the one hand, and between foreign and local art forms on the other. Performers may have been introduced initially to celebrate each group's religious festivals, and then their weddings, but in the competitive commercial atmosphere of the port they were soon employed as private entertainments. Chinese opera was a good case in point. Scott tells us that the Chinese in Banten performed their plays not only at religious festivals but in thanksgiving or petition as their ships arrived from and departed for China. But one of the English merchants in the same city only a little later described how the principal Chinese merchant in the town, known to them as Kewee, "caused a play to be acted before us by scenics of China, which was performed on a stage with good pronunciation and gesture", at the conclusion of a business deal.²²

In Banten again, in 1605, Scott gives a full description of the entertainments for the circumcision of the boy king, prefacing it by the remark that

The manner of their country is that when any king comes newly to the crowne, or at any circumcision of their king, all that are of ability must give the king a present; the which they must present in open manner, with the greatest show they are able to make. And those that are not able to do it of themselves do join, a company of them together, and so perform it, both strangers and others.²³

After describing all the pageants, historical plays, acrobatics and fireworks for such a festival, Scott added that "All these inventions have been taught in former times by the Chinese.... And some they have learned from Gujeratis, Turks, and other nations which come thither to trade."²⁴

A similar pattern operated in all the other large ports where there were large foreign communities. In 17th century Ayutthaya, for example, the Shi'ite Indian Muslims always attracted a big crowd for their Hasan-Hussein festival, featuring Indian music, dance and pageantry on a large scale, as did the Chinese on their weddings and festivals. On one occasion in 1688 the French described a great public celebration in the capital in honour of the coronation of two European kings in that year, of England and Portugal. The highlights were not the entries from these countries, however, but the displays of Indian puppets, Siamese dancing, Chinese opera, amazing acrobatics, and Siamese, Burmese, Lao and Malay orchestras.²⁵

17th Century Reaction against globalisation

I argue that the increasing reliance on international trade was drastically curbed in a crisis of the mid-17th century, which also involved a rejection of the globalisation of that period. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) established monopoly control over the Archipelago's most lucrative exports, while the commercial centres of cosmopolitan life were either destroyed (Brunei 1578; Pegu 1599; Tuban 1619; Surabaya/Gresik 1625; Palembang 1659; Makasar 1669; Banten 1684) or declined through loss of their vital trade. The capital of Java moved from the commercial north coast to interior Mataram (near Jogjakarta) around 1600. The capital of Burma similarly moved from the great maritime

²² Saris, cited by Blusse, 'The Chinese...in western Java'.

²³ Edmund Scott, 'An Exact Discourse...of the East Indians' [1605], in *The Voyage of Sir Henry Middleton to the Moluccas, 1604-1606*, ed. Sir William Foster (London: Hakluyt, 1943), p.153.

²⁴ Ibid., pp.156-57.

²⁵ Tachard (1688), pp. 184-86.

city of Pegu to Ava (near modern Mandalay), taking permanent root there in 1635. The Siamese port-capital of Ayudhya was the last Southeast Asian capital to retain a major stake in global trade, but after its “1688 revolution” it too turned its back on most Western and Muslim trade, leaving the Chinese and Dutch in command of a much reduced foreign commerce (Reid 1990b, 1993a).

Among the most serious setbacks to Southeast Asian commerce in this period was the destruction of the shipping of the most active maritime traders of the region. An early blow against Javanese and Malay shipping was the arrival in 1509 of the Portuguese, whose ships were few but relatively manoeuvrable and effective in naval warfare. They wrought havoc against the unwieldy Javanese and Malay junks, some of which were as big as 500 tons. These had proved profitable in shipping foodstuffs and bulk goods in peaceful times. But after many were lost in engagements with the Portuguese, Southeast Asians made a long-term transition to smaller and faster vessels involving less risk.

The biggest disasters for shipping were however at Southeast Asian hands. The destruction of the Burmese imperial capital of Pegu in 1599, following the ruinous rule of Nandabayin, removed its Mon seamen and traders from Southeast Asian waters. Many Mon merchants fled to Siam, Laos or Arakan, but their great tradition of seaborne trade was at an end.²⁶ The Javanese of the cosmopolitan north coast, many with Chinese, Indian or other ancestry, had been even more prominent as traders around Southeast Asia, forming a commercial diaspora in ports such as Melaka (until the Portuguese conquest in 1511), Palembang, Banjarmasin, Banda, Ternate, Patani and Phnom Penh. Their home ports of Surabaya and the adjacent Gresik, Tuban, Demak and Japara were the centres of a new cosmopolitan culture, patronised by the commercial elite, which remade what we now know as Javanese culture. But the interior, rice-based regime of Mataram crushed all these ports in the period 1615-25, and subsequently banned Javanese shipping in 1655, lest it provide a threat to the king. These setbacks might not have happened if the commercial element had not been weakened by its competition with European traders, but the immediate agents of destruction were Southeast Asian.

If this turning away from international engagement in the 17th century sounds familiar, it does of course have echoes in the *sakoku* process which the Tokugawa imposed on Japan in the 1630s. Like Japan, Vietnam, Burma and Siam in Mainland Southeast Asia, and to a lesser extent Aceh, Banten, Makasar, Palembang in the Archipelago, consciously distanced themselves from the dangerous elements of maritime commerce in the mid-seventeenth century. Like Japan, these states were thought by Western historians of an earlier era, and by many of their own nationalists and Marxists, to have lost a great opportunity by turning their backs on the globalisation of that time. A newer historiography, however, is more inclined to see strengths in this process, enabling Southeast Asian societies, like Tokugawa Japan, to define their own paths to the modern at a different pace.

I should add that the part of my argument ascribes this turning away from dependence on the world market to the unusually strong effects in Southeast Asia of a global 17th century crisis has had plenty of critics. This auspicious occasion may be an appropriate one to respond to some of these critics and assess what we have learned since I published this book.

²⁶ Reid, *Age of Commerce II* (1993), pp.281-3.

The most effective critic of the 17th century crisis has been Victor Lieberman. In a careful review of my book in 1995, he argued “the thesis of a 17th century watershed seems to me fundamentally inapplicable to the mainland.... In Vietnam no less than in Burma and Thailand, basic political and social changes that began in the 18th century not only continued into the 18th, but accelerated during the 19th to the very eve of colonial rule.” The ongoing trends he instanced here and in elaborated elsewhere, were maritime and domestic trade, urbanization, territorial consolidation of the major states, ethnic and cultural standardisation, and externally validated religious orthodoxy.²⁷ Lieberman has gone on to build an elaborate scheme showing how six Eurasian polities (Vietnam, Siam, Burma, Russia, France and Japan) all were affected by the same consolidating trends between the 15th and the 19th centuries.²⁸

In as under-researched a field as early modern Southeast Asia, a fruitful controversy such as this is to be welcomed enthusiastically, and offered to students as a rare chance to sharpen their analytic skills on a real debate. Let me point at once to what I see as the helpful part of this critique, which is to point towards another period of commercial expansion and urbanisation in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. He and I helped each other towards a better understanding of this phenomenon in a research project I coordinated, and the Toyota Foundation funded, which led to a 1997 book, *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies*.²⁹ I there expressed my regret that “my own work on the ‘Age of Commerce’ of 1400-1650, while intended to undermine any such static assumptions [of pre-colonial changelessness], may have an unintended effect of suggesting that everything after the mid-17th century was commercial retreat and political fragmentation.”³⁰

I was fortunate enough also to be coordinating a research project on the economic history of Southeast Asia (ECHOSEA) in the 1990s, and directed some of its resources to quantifying the most measurable index for regional trade over the long term—the revenues from long-distance exports. The indices we compiled for four leading Southeast Asian exports (cloves, pepper, sugar and coffee) over six centuries demonstrated strikingly the importance of the export boom of the “long sixteenth century”, the profound slump in export revenue from 1660 to 1740 (the 17th century crisis), and the second sustained period of export growth (in revenue terms) between the 1780s and 1840s.³¹ This volume may be pushing quantification as far as it can go with the shaky pre-1800 data as at our disposal, but it does reveal an interesting and believable pattern.

It would be a mistake to infer that Lieberman has undermined the case for a seventeenth century crisis, even in Mainland Southeast Asia, by showing that population, commerce and state control were again at high levels in the early 1800s. No champion

²⁷ Victor Lieberman, ‘An Age of Commerce in Southeast Asia? Problems of Regional Coherence—A Review Article,’ *JAS* 54, no.,3 (August 1995), pp.801-04. Similar ideas had earlier been outlined in his ‘Secular Trends in Burmese Economic History, c.1350-1830, and their Implications for State Formation,’ *MAS* 25 (1991), i, pp. 1-31.

²⁸ Victor Lieberman, ‘Transcending East-West Dichotomies: State and Culture Formation in Six Ostensibly Disparate Areas,’ in *Beyond Binary Histories: Re-Imagining Eurasia to c.1830*, ed. Victor Lieberman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp.19-102.

²⁹ Anthony Reid (ed.). *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies: Responses to Modernity in the Diverse States of Southeast Asia and Korea, 1750-1900* (Basingstoke: Macmillan,1997).

³⁰ *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies*, p. 57.

³¹ D. Bulbeck, Anthony Reid, Tan Lay Cheng and Wu Yiqi. *Southeast Asian Exports since the 14th Century: Cloves, Pepper, Coffee and Sugar* (Singapore, ISEAS for ECHOSEA, 1998).

of the 'general crisis' concept has suggested that economies and populations did not recover within a century or so of the crisis. The general trend of history is for population growth and commercial expansion, so that even a reduction of twenty percent over a period of several decades constitutes a major trauma. Thus when Lieberman says of Burma that "by 1815 maritime exchange and shipbuilding almost certainly equalled the level of 1590 in absolute terms, though perhaps not as a proportion of the total economy",³² he confirms a dramatic 17th century collapse, not the reverse. His data and that of Dhiravat na Pombeijra on Siamese commerce after 1688 is of the same order. It does not deny that international commerce fell markedly after 1688, but only asserts that the Chinese connection enabled it to recover in the 18th century.

A more central argument is how far the undoubted downturn in mid-17th century trade, and the relative impoverishment that followed in many quarters, mattered in the long term. Can we attribute to this setback Southeast Asia's failure to compete with other parts of the world in the 19th century, or did the critical changes in the balance of power and productivity take place only after 1800? This question has been robustly taken up by Andre Gunder Frank, whose *ReOrient* (1998) was a powerful argument for recentering the debate about the origins of the modern world in Asia rather than in Europe.³³ Frank is particularly anxious to debunk the hugely influential schools of Marxist and post-Marxist scholarship which looked to Europe as the source of capitalism, and therefore to European exceptionalism as the chief question to be explained. As he saw it, China was still the dominant world economy in 1800, and the world-system prior to then should not be seen as Europe-centred but as interdependent and if anything Asia-centred. The sources of European dominance in the 19th century, therefore, must be sought by examining that whole world system even-handedly, not by searching for the roots of the earlier capitalist transformation or "the European miracle". As I begin to explain below, I believe he goes too far in minimizing the disadvantages much of Asia, but especially Southeast Asia, suffered from the 17th century.

One part of Frank's argument is his belief that the 17th century crisis was important for setting Europe back, while it "left most of Asia unscathed".³⁴ Most of his attention here is engaged in the larger debate about the nature of the crisis which brought about the fall of the Ming dynasty in China in 1644, but he does devote a little attention to discounting my evidence for Southeast Asia. Unfortunately he read only a small part of this debate and did not refer to my 1993 book where the enormity of the crisis in Southeast Asia is set out rather fully. He was able to assert that Indian traders simply replaced European ones in importing Indian cloth to the Archipelago in the mid-17th century,³⁵ in ignorance of the mountain of contrary evidence, now most carefully assembled by Ruurdje Laarhoven.³⁶ In fact the VOC had established such a dominant position in supplying

³² Lieberman, 'An Age of Commerce', p.801.

³³ Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Frank generalized and extended an argument being prepared with some care for China by Ken Pomeranz, whose major book appeared later – Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

³⁴ *Ibid.* p.353.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 233-5.

³⁶ Ruurdje Laarhoven, 'The Power of Cloth: The textile trade of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) 1600-1780), Ph.D. dissertation, ANU, 1994.

Indian cloth to the Archipelago that only about a third as many Gujerati and Coromandel ships were visiting Southeast Asian ports in the 1640s as had done so around 1600. When VOC exports themselves declined drastically in the last third of the century the Dutch blamed not Indian rivals but the impoverishment of Indonesians, who now had no choice than to make their own modest clothing.³⁷

Another phase of partial globalisation, 1780-1840

In my view the decline in the value of long-distance maritime trade to Southeast Asians, which occurred in the middle of the 17th century, did mark a retreat from globalisation and towards localism in cultural and intellectual terms. In 1993 I was bold enough to say that this crisis

marked a change of direction that was not reversed until another period of crisis in the mid-20th century....Cosmopolitan trading cities did not dominate the life of Southeast Asians, whether demographically, economically or culturally, between the late 17th century and the mid-20th, as they did before or since.³⁸

While I believe this remains in essence true, this statement does mask the other very significant stage of globalisation for Southeast Asia which occurred in the late 18th century. I am now more inclined to see three stages of trade expansion, with consequent greater importance of cosmopolitan influences in political and cultural life (roughly 1480-1650; 1780-1850; 1950-?), alternating with more introverted periods of consolidation and localisation. The middle expansionary phase, however, faced a more limited range of intellectual possibilities than the other two.

Lieberman rightly points out that the second phase of increased trade revenues had different political consequences in the Mainland and the Archipelago. Few Archipelago states were left with enough coherence and autonomy to benefit from this second globalisation as they had from the first. Those that did -- Aceh, Brunei, Riau, Palembang, Sulu, Trengganu, Surakarta, Karangasem/Lombok, Bone -- had much shallower roots and a weaker grip on their populations than the "more stable political systems" of the Mainland.³⁹ Hence it was primarily the three increasingly coherent Mainland state -- Burma, Siam and Vietna -- that were able to emerge from the collapse which each of them underwent in the second half of the 18th century with increased territorial consolidation, administrative centralisation and cultural integration, to use Lieberman's measures.

My present theme of globalisation and localisation leads me to venture briefly into the fascinating but dangerous area of cultural consequences of economic globalisation in this middle phase. A point on which Lieberman and I strongly agree is the effect of the "Age of Commerce" in increasing the appeal of externally validated, globally active, religious systems. In the Mainland as well as the Islands, I would argue, the outcomes of the second stage of globalisation were less open than those of the first. The Age of Commerce proper was "marked by constant innovation, by repeated adaptation and

³⁷ Reid, *Age of Commerce II* (1993): 28-29, 301-2.

³⁸ Reid, *Age of Commerce II* (1993), p.329.

³⁹ Victor Lieberman, 'Mainland-Archipelagic Parallels and Contrasts, c.1750-1850,' in *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies*, ed. Anthony Reid (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), pp.27-38; Lieberman, *Beyond Binary Histories*, pp.23-52.

incorporation of new ideas.”⁴⁰ Southeast Asian elites became for a time obsessed with novel clothes, animals, mechanical devices and inventions of all sorts, just as they were open to new religious and cultural ideas. The adaptations they made by the middle of the 17th century involved the acceptance of what seemed more modern, cosmopolitan and rational world-views embodied in Islam, Christianity and Theravada Buddhism than had been the case with the animistic local spirit-cults which had dominated agrarian life.

Then followed more than a century when international trade was less rewarding, and many rulers urged their subjects not to plant pepper and cloves lest it bring them war and oppression.⁴¹ As economies became more self-sufficient and polities less dependent on trade and its cosmopolitan practitioners, foreign cultural and intellectual models also lost much of their appeal. When Dutch and Spanish monopolies lost their grip in the late 18th century and another trade upturn occurred, Southeast Asians were again exposed to pressures for a scriptural and rational set of values valid in the global marketplace. The shopping basket of options, however, was now more restricted. European models were increasingly dressed with the unattractive arrogance of power, while the choices for Islam, Catholic Christianity and Theravada Buddhism made in the earlier Age of Commerce created a line against enthusiasm for the ideas of the European enlightenment. The radical ideological experiments of this period tended to be of the neo-traditional sort, imposing a kind of scriptural orthodoxy as a weapon against the globalising challenges. The puritannical Wahhabi doctrines of the Padris in Sumatra, or the “grim determination” with which Chinese Confucian models were applied to Minh Mang’s Vietnam (1820-41),⁴² were “modernising” responses to this second globalisation. But we need another term for this type of “stunted” or “limited” modernisation which radically opposes not only local tradition but also much of the dynamic driving the globalisation process itself.

Colonial localisation and contemporary globalisation

The high colonial period (roughly 1870-1930) was in many respects the opposite of globalisation in its impact on Southeast Asian populations. Colonial cities became largely European and Chinese enclaves, while the indigenous populations became more rural and peasant-like than they had been for centuries. In Geertz’s phrase, Dutch rule brought Javanese products into the world market but not its peoples. Colonial administrations encouraged hierarchic stability rather than change among the peoples they ruled. Although there were of course also many respects in which western models became normative for the world in precisely this period, I take the view that colonialism on balance encouraged more localism by its sharp distinctions of race, nationality and language.

The truly globalising factor in the late colonial mix was the imposition of western-style educational institutions and syllabuses in Southeast Asia. By the 1920s and thirties in most countries (and earlier in the Philippines) there were substantial new elites whose education had been wholly western, and who sought radical solutions of their own for their powerlessness. If colonialism in general localised, its education surely globalised. With hindsight we might characterise the approach of these new elites, both in planning for independence before 1945 and in carrying it out thereafter, as a kind of “high modernism”

⁴⁰ Reid, *Age of Commerce II* (1993), p.328.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 298-302,

⁴² the phrase is John Whitmore’s, in Lieberman (ed), *Beyond Binary Histories*, p.241.

(James Scott's phrase) which combined elements of Marxism, westernization and nationalism. Although typically anti-Western in their nationalism, they believed they could create new states on the model of western nation-states with very few concessions to local tradition.

The subsequent generation of elites, sobered by experience and educated in mixed systems, has been less inclined to radical ideologies of globalisation, even while they have faced an ever more globalised world. Again looked at by hindsight, we might see Marxism and perhaps even nationalism as examples of what I called "stunted modernisation", attacking not only local traditions but also the most dynamic elements of global capitalism.

Does this cursory overview of Southeast Asia's past help us to understand the conflict of globalisation and localisation in today's world? It is clear that each stage of globalisation produces losers as well as winners, and a great variety of styles of borrowing, of neo-traditional radicalism, and of genuine innovation. Today's world requires us to ponder more than ever the options for coping with powerful external models. The history of Southeast Asia, as I noted at the end of my 1993 book, "offers abundant evidence of creative responses to rapid economic change, a variety of social forms, and variety of political and intellectual possibilities".⁴³

* The above text introduces the keynote speech given by Professor Anthony Reid, the Academic Prize Laureate of the 13th Fukuoka Asian Culture Prizes 2002.

⁴³ Reid, *Age of Commerce II* (1993), p. 330.