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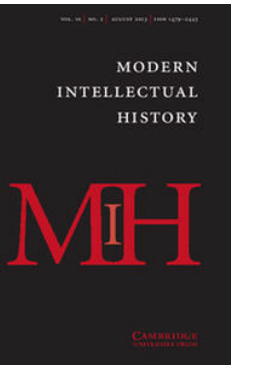

BETWEEN ORIENTALISM AND NATIONALISM: THE LEARNED SOCIETY AND THE MAKING OF "SOUTHEAST ASIA"

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BETWEEN ORIENTALISM AND NATIONALISM: THE LEARNED SOCIETY AND THE MAKING OF "SOUTHEAST ASIA"*

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Departing from the "Orientalist" view of the learned society in South Asia, this paper examines the role of the learned society in Southeast Asia as a site of sociability and intellectual exchange. It traces the emergence of such societies as independent, rather than official, initiatives, from nineteenth-century societies in Singapore to the Siam Society and Burma Research Society in the early twentieth century. Their journals provided pluralist interpretations of the nation, turning from grand histories of kings to new practices of social history. While such societies were limited to a small circle of European and Asian literati, they also contributed to an emerging intellectual culture of libraries, public lectures, and universities. Moreover, via correspondence, travel, and exchanges of publications, such societies contributed to a growing sense of Southeast Asian regionalism, laying the institutional foundations for in-depth study for the region and the post-war emergence of Southeast Asian studies.

In the wings of the world's great repository libraries lie shelves of periodicals classified meticulously by discipline and region. On stacks of journals about Asia one can trace the weathered spines of two centuries of intellectual production by amateur and professional linguists, ethnographers, historians, naturalists, religious scholars and literary critics. A glance through their pages reveals a world of interactions between members of learned societies—as noted in committee meetings, anniversary lectures and obituaries—and also between societies, in the lists of publications exchanged on a regional and global basis. Many articles are written by Europeans, yet from 1900 Asian names appear increasingly. Such collections help track the emergence of new nations and regions as conceptual fields within a global domain of academic scholarship. What was once the

* I am grateful to Tim Harper, Michael Dodson and Henk Maier for their comments on various drafts of this article. Any remaining shortfalls are my own.

"Further East", in the *Asiatic Quarterly Review* later becomes "East Asia", the "Dutch East Indies", and "Malaya, Burma, and Siam". In 1900, Western scholarly knowledge about Southeast Asia paled in comparison to what was known about China, Japan and India; yet over the next two decades, scholarly circles began emerging in cities throughout the region, conscious of their place within a transnational network of learned societies. In a 1922 article in the Burma Research Society's journal—one of the first scholarly essays to use the term "South-east Asia"—the ethnologist L. F. Taylor observed of the society that it "only exists to help us to further our aims and to enable us to co-operate with our fellow members and with similar societies in other places."[1] A region thus emerged in the imaginations of scholars operating within an Asia-wide republic of letters, one composed of multiple centres and vantage points.

Beginning with the founding of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1784, learned societies of "orientalists" shaped the way in which European intellectuals thought about Asia—and in some cases what Asian intellectuals thought of themselves. As Edward Said has famously argued, their discourses promoted a binary political vision between the familiar, rational and scientific "West" and the strange, spiritual and fallen "East." Historians have sought to provide nuance and historical context to Said's formulation, particularly in India, where the production of colonial knowledge has been situated as a contested and dialogic process.[2] More recently, scholars have focused on the transformative power of ideas in opening up new vocabularies for Asians to contribute to and shape their societies.[3] Michael Dodson observes that processes of historical knowledge gathering are, for Asians involved, "part of the practice of historical self-fashioning, in which historical actors, drawing from the diversity of resources available to them, are continually constructing an authoritative, because specifically inflected, site of knowledge production."[4]

Projects of classification, philology and ethnography initiated by learned societies were indeed integral to the imperial project, helping colonial states to govern more effectively. Yet by the early twentieth-century they also contributed

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1 L. F. Taylor, "Ethnological and Linguistic Research in Burma and South-East Asia", *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 12/1 (1922), 1.

2 See, for instance, Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford, 1990); Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Delhi, 1997); and more recently, Sudipta Kaviraj, "Said and the History of Ideas", in Sugata Bose and Kris Manjapra, eds., *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (New York, 2010), 58–81; Suzanne Marchant, "On Orientalism and Iconoclasm: German Scholarship's Challenge to the Saidian Model", in ibid., 260–83

3 See Shruti Kapila, "Preface: An Intellectual History for India" *MIH* 4/1 (2007), 3.

4 Michael S. Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India 1770–1880* (Basingstoke, 2007), 16.

to the production of national historical narratives, and nationalism itself, as scholars of Southeast Asia have shown (Penny Edwards's excellent analysis of the study of Angkor in cultivating a sense of Cambodian identity is discussed below). In contributing to the national imaginary, learned societies played a role close to that of the census, map and museum described by Benedict Anderson.[5] Yet the learned society, as it evolved in Southeast Asia, was also a different kind of institution, one nestled within an emerging public sphere, and thus closely related to the growth of print culture and the increasingly widespread availability of books and periodicals in cities. As sociable spaces, societies could allow for multiple perspectives on the histories and cultures of Asian societies and a basis for comparison with those of others. The "serial", multi-authored, and interdisciplinary nature of learned journals suggested the possibility of ongoing discourse rather than stark reification of ethnicity and identity.

Moreover, both Asian and Western members of learned societies were aware of their place within an expanding scholarly field outside the borders of the state. Anderson argues that European powers severed their imperial possessions from each other, so that, by 1900, young educated people in Batavia, for instance, knew more about Amsterdam than about Cambodia, a region with which they had once shared close ties.[6] Learned societies cut across these imperial intellectual linkages, emerging within regional geographies of knowledge production and transmission, often in dialogue with each other. Such dialogues were symptomatic of modes of circulation and exchange that emerged besides that of metropole and colony, as suggested by Tony Ballantyne's formulation of the "*webs* of empire." Calcutta, he argues, might be seen a subaltern centre, but in order to "develop Said's insistence that Orientalism was a system of circulation", we must consider it within particular geographies, chronologies and regional networks of patronage, accumulation and communication to the South Asian hinterland and beyond to Southeast Asia and the Pacific.[7]

This paper thus maps the transnational genealogy of the learned society as an institution, tracking its emergence through various Asian entrepôts with a focus on the Straits Settlements, Siam and Burma. By doing so it traces the intellectual networks and circles that formed much of the basis for Southeast Asian studies, a field which, in its early stages, consistently battled Eurocentrism as well as scholarly assertions that much of the region's cultural influences came from India

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5 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991).

6 Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London, 1998), 5.

7 Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke, 2006), 14.

and China.[8] In forming learned societies, the field's early practitioners created new intellectual centres within a scholarly network of Asian cities. Throughout the nineteenth century, Calcutta's Royal Asiatic Society developed new branches and associate institutions in Bombay, Ceylon, Singapore, Hong Kong, Yokohama and Seoul. Projects of classification and the production of civilizational discourses continued, contributing to the construction of national and ethnic narratives, but so did more qualitative enquiries into local cultures and dialogues between Western and Asian scholars, made public in the pages of journals. The learned society, by 1920, had become a flexible, adaptable institution by which both European and Asian literati, based in distinct locales, sought to carve out new, creole cultures of scholarship and local intellectual narratives within an expanding field of knowledge about Asia.

Along with the Ecole française d'extrème orient (EFEO), the Royal Society's counterpart in Indochina, independent learned societies—the Siam Society, the Burma Research Society and still others whose journals never made it to the shelves of metropolitan libraries—emerged in Singapore, Bangkok, Rangoon and elsewhere, shaping local, national and regional histories. These learned societies in Southeast Asia emerged independently of colonial governments and constituted intimate spaces in which diverse intellectual traditions were brought into contact with each other through the voluntary association of intellectuals. They began, usually, as initiatives by Europeans, driven more by a spirit of intellectual inquiry than by the demands of colonial governance—but in the case of Siam and Burma they morphed, necessarily, into joint projects with Asian counterparts. They were dictated by the conditions of bourgeois sociability, an ability to converse in European languages and a familiarity with the disciplinary practices and concepts of the European scholarly academy. As such they were exclusionary spaces, normally accessible to a very small minority of talented Asian scholars, often versed in multiple languages and educational traditions.

Yet while they reinforced Western standards and methods of intellectual inquiry, they also prized linguistic and cultural expertise about Southeast Asian societies, creating intimate social hierarchies based on linguistic proficiency and familiarity with local cultures, from literature and folklore to religion and mysticism. They were also creative spaces, producing new kinds of scholarship and pioneering work in emerging scholarly fields of folklore studies and ethnomusicology. New forays into social history questioned the centrality of kingship in Burma's tradition of historical writing, and thus indirectly in colonial-era Siam, still run by an aristocracy that put kings at the centre of the national

[8] See D. G. E. Hall, *History of South-East Asia* (London, 1955), vii; John Smail, "On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia", *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2/2 (1961), 72–102.

historic imaginary. Learned societies were sites of friendships, professional networks, and fostered a new, public intellectual life within the cities in which they emerged. In tracing the transnational roots of these institutions, we can come closer to understanding the way in which the study of Asia and Asian societies became a field composed of multiple centres, through which Western and Asian scholars began speaking to each other, first at the local level and then with the rest of the world, in shared intellectual vocabularies.

COLONIAL CULTURE AND THE LEARNED SOCIETY IN THE STRAITS

The learned society existed within a particular space of intellectual idealism, a belief in the interaction of a community of scholars, gentlemanly sociability and education as the basis of an informed public sphere. It formed the backbone of the great arc of Enlightenment, beginning with the first meetings of the Royal Society in London in 1660, founded with the words *Nullius in Verba* ("on the words of no one"), signalling man's freedom from the command of another via the tenets of scientific rationality. The eighteenth century saw the blossoming of a free press, the modern university and a culture of criticism in Europe, encapsulated in the explosion of periodicals and critical publications, not only in metropolitan London, but also in the provinces, producing what Paul Elliot calls a "creative class" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[9] Via an expanding republic of letters and learned societies as sites of discussion, members, texts and authors spoke to each other in a supportive as well as a critical relationship. The making of an institutional space for such interactions, among amateur and professional scholars, was embodied in the learned society in eighteenth-century Europe as it was in early twentieth-century Rangoon, two moments linked by the tracks of two long and violent centuries of imperialism.

Europeans came to the coastal ports of maritime Southeast Asia on the tides of commerce and colonialism, and were generally cut off from rich, existing traditions of indigenous learning that thrived in court cultures and religious institutions. The founders of the first learned societies in the Straits—Jacobus Radermacher, Stamford Raffles and James Logan—were men of letters and products of the Dutch and Scottish Enlightenments. They drew inspiration from and wrote for the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, and also belonged to metropolitan institutions such as the Ethnological Society of London and learned societies in Amsterdam. They relied on interlocutors who were willing to teach them local

9 Paul Elliott, "The Origins of the 'Creative Class': Provincial Urban Society, Scientific Culture and Socio-political Marginality in Britain in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries", *Social History* 28/3 (2003), 361–87.

languages and cultures, and of whose lives we know very little. The exception is the ever-conspicuous Munshi Abdullah, who emerged as the pioneering figure of Malay literature in the mid-nineteenth century and was one of a number of scribes employed in Raffles's circle. Abdullah never wrote or belonged to any of the early learned societies in the region in the first part of the nineteenth century, though as a Malay teacher he had close contacts with prominent early scholars such as Raffles, William Marsden and John Leyden, who translated Abdullah's *Sejarah Melayu*, annals based on Malay court chronicles, for an anglophone audience.

Contributors to learned societies in Southeast Asia were "amateur" scholars as well as colonial administrators, and the lack of Western scholarly interest in the region allowed such figures to quickly assume the role of experts.[10] The original learned society in Southeast Asia, the Batavian Academy of Arts and Sciences, was established in 1778 by Radermacher, who also founded the colony's first Masonic lodge, the first sites for European society in Batavia to congregate and raise their standing in colonial society.[11] With a lack government patronage and with Radermacher's departure the academy soon ceased to function. It was revived in Singapore in 1812 by Raffles, who was inspired by his interactions with academy members on a visit to Java, particularly given his frustration with the dearth of intellectual culture in his first post at Penang.[12] The *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia* was a rival publication established in 1848 by James Logan, a lawyer and journalist who sought to foster a vibrant public sphere in the

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10 H. A. M. Snelders, "Professors, Amateurs, and Learned Societies: The Organisation of the Natural Sciences", in Margaret Jacob and Mignhardt Wijnand, eds., *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century: Decline, Enlightenment, and Revolution* (Ithaca, 1992), 308–23. For an excellent analysis of the relationship to metropolitan academia in France and colonial scholars in Indochina see Pierre Singaravelou, *L'Ecole française d'extreme-orient ou l'Institution des Marges (1898–1956)* (Paris, 1999).

11 See Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Madison, 1983), 85–7; Huib J. Zuidervaart and Rob H. van Gent, "A Bare Outpost of Learned European Culture on the Edge of the Jungles of Java: Johan Maurits Mohr (1716–1775) and the Emergence of Instrumental and Institutional Science in Dutch Colonial Indonesia", *Isis* 95/1 (2004), 1–33; and, for a comprehensive study of the Batavian association in Dutch, Hans Groot, *Van Batavia naar Weltevreden: het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, 1778–1867* (Leiden, 2009).

12 C. E. Wurtzburg, *Raffles of the Eastern Isles* (London, 1954), Maurice Collis, *Raffles* (London, 1966). For an excellent account of the debilitating perspective of Raffles and Marsden on the Malays and their religion see Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, *Rethinking Raffles: A Study of Stamford Raffles' Discourse on Religion amongst the Malays* (Singapore, 2005).

Straits; Logan also started the *Singapore Free Press*, one of the first newspapers in the city.[13]

From the late nineteenth century, Southeast Asian port cities grew as multi-ethnic commercial worlds, structured through clubhouses, chambers of commerce, clan associations and racetracks, where Europeans and Asian elites mingled, tenuously, aware of the racial divisions between them.[14] Racial animosities also emerged in Bangkok, subject to unequal, extraterritorial treaties with foreign powers, where expatriates would often congregate in sports clubs to disparage the "backwardness" of the Siamese and maintain white prestige.[15] Yet as Tim Harper has observed of Singapore, there were layers of sociability where strict racial hierarchies, particularly between Asians themselves, became more ambivalent, "defined by conversation and letters, and also by a vocal public opinion".[16] The learned society was one of a number of different venues where such sociability occurred. Such cities were also hubs of diverse print cultures; Singapore, for instance, hosted a vibrant Arabic, Chinese, Tamil and Malay press by the end of the nineteenth century.[17] While there was a multiplicity of print languages and educational opportunities available, colonial governments, as well as the Siamese monarchy, began investing in primary vernacular education and heavily in English and legal education, seeking to create a class of clerks and lawyers to aid in administration.

It was within an emerging sphere of cosmopolitan sociability and an increasingly informed and educated Asian public that the learned society began to evolve, from a strictly Western intellectual pursuit to one that included a new class of Asian literati. In 1868, the first president of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, based in Singapore, noted that the contributors to Logan's journal were English, Swiss, French, German and Dutch, as well as one Chinese member, "a

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13 Jean Debernardi, *Rites of Belonging: Memory, Modernity, and Identity in a Malaysian Chinese Community* (Stanford, 2004), 49.

14 See John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya, 1880–1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia* (Oxford, 1979); C. A. Bayly, "Ideologies of the End of the Raj: Burma, India and the World, 1940–50", in Durba Ghosh and Dane Kennedy, eds., *Decentring Empire: Britain, India and the Transcolonial World* (London, 2006); Thant Myint-U, *River of Lost Footsteps* (London, 2006): 189–190.

15 See Andrew Freeman's memoirs, *Brown Women White*, reprinted as *A Journalist in Siam* (Bangkok, 2007).

16 T. N. Harper, "Globalism and the Pursuit of Authenticity: The Making of a Diasporic Public Sphere in Singapore", *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 12/2 (1997), 261–92, 273.

17 Su Lin Lewis, "Print and Colonial Port Cultures of the Indian Ocean Littoral: Penang and Rangoon", *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 82/2 (2009), 9–24.

promise for the future".[18] Asian entry into the learned society, however, depended upon the assumption of bourgeois sociability and familiarity with Western modes of articulation. The most prolific early contributors to learned journals were highly educated, diasporic Chinese with distinctly "hybrid" identities who moved between different worlds of the colonial port city: Lim Boon Keng in Singapore and Taw Sein Ko in Rangoon. Both were extraordinary, multilingual, prominent public men versed in Western and Asian educational systems, and formed by the local Straits and Burmese cultural worlds from which they also claimed a lineage.

Lim founded the Straits Confucian association and the Straits Chinese Literary Association, modelling both on the gentlemanly sociability of European clubs, while seeking to foster a unique sense of Straits Chinese identity. The Straits Philosophical Society was a joint undertaking with European civil servants, soldiers, missionaries and educated Chinese—meetings included formal dinners, where papers on Spencer and Darwin, race and religion were read and discussed.[19] Like Lim, Taw Sein Ko was a polymath, educated in Burmese, Chinese and English schools, attending Cambridge University, London's Inner Temple and Peking, and conversant in Burmese, Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, Hindustani, Shan and English.[20] He became a frequent contributor to the *Journal of the Burma Research Society* as well as the *Asiatic Quarterly Review*, while writing for the English, Chinese and Burmese press. A graduate of Rangoon College and affiliate of Calcutta University, Ko campaigned early on for the founding of a university in Rangoon, arguing that it is a "common platform on which people of all classes and creeds could meet, and is the best place for generating feelings of friendship and fraternity among the diverse races", and urging patronage from European, Indian, Chinese and local communities.[21]

Whereas the earliest learned societies in Southeast Asia were composed overwhelmingly of Europeans, Asian scholars were, by the end of the nineteenth century, welcomed and encouraged. Polyglot Asian scholars emerged within the context of multilingual public spheres. They sought to belong to a learned society in order to expand their intellectual networks as they promoted the cause of education and social reform. Such aspirations coincided with a feeling among European colonial scholars and expatriate literati throughout Southeast Asia that educated Asians, drawing on Munshi Abdullah's legacy, had a duty to take

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18 "Inaugural Address" in *Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1 (1868).

19 Harper, 277; Mark Frost, "Transcultural Diaspora: The Straits Chinese in Singapore, 1819–1918", *Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series* 10 (2003), 30.

20 See Penny Edwards, "Relocating the Interlocutor: Taw Sein Ko (1864–1930) and the Itinerancy of Knowledge in British Burma", *South East Asia Research* 12/3 (2004), 277–335, 279.

21 Taw Sein Ko, "A Plea for a University" (1910), in Ko, *Burmese Sketches* (Rangoon, 1913).

written history out of of the court and make it accessible to a wider public; this idea formed the basis of the foundation of the Siam Society.

A SIAM SOCIETY IN COSMOPOLITAN BANGKOK

In Bangkok, a cast of expatriates began pressuring the royal administration to form a new learned society. Early foreign scholarship on Siam had appeared in the two Straits publications mentioned above, in an article on Siamese law by C. L. Low in the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago* and a bibliography of Siam, which appeared in the *Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. In 1888, W. H. Mundie, editor of the *Bangkok Times*, published an editorial titled "Siamese Historians:—A Want" as an incitement on the part of the foreign community that Siam needed its own history and that Siamese, not Europeans, needed to write it.[22] Intellectual inquiry, for these Europeans, required dialogue between "native" and "foreign" points of view, with the learned society acting as a contact zone whereby Europeans could gain access to intellectual cultures hitherto closed to them behind palace walls. The "incitement" further criticized vertical hierarchies between ruler and ruled in Siam. Mundie reprimanded Siamese aristocrats and rich commercial classes, who sent their children abroad or to private schools but failed to spread such opportunities to a wider public. The need for a "national" narrative was of utmost importance: "A history of one's country ought to be the first object of study for the young so they may grow up animated with a deep historic perception of what their country has been, is at present and could be in the future."[23]

To be sure, the royal courtly cultures of Siam and Burma had long legacies of cosmopolitan intellectual interaction from at least the thirteenth century: the court of Ayutthaya translated and adapted Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit tales, while the royal court of Mrauk-U in Arakan welcomed Bengali poets, Persian and Hindi translators, Islamic scholars and Japanese Christian samurai. Over the centuries, regional wars and the entry of foreign powers eroded the interactions between elite Asian literati. From the mid-nineteenth century, Burmese and Thai courts turned inward, assembling royal chronicles for the purposes of legitimizing their rule and creating a strong dynastic lineage. Transnational networks among Buddhist scholars, however, remained strong, contributing to simultaneous efforts to reform Theravada Buddhism throughout the region in the midst of European intrusion and the availability of print.[24] Outside the walls of the

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22 Editorial, *Bangkok Times*, 17 March 1888, as quoted in Bonnie Davis, *The Siam Society under Five Reigns* (Bangkok, 1989), 11.

23 Ibid.

24 For excellent recent work on the impact of the colonial encounter on Buddhist scholarship in Thailand, Burma and Cambodia see Michael W. Charney, *Powerful Learning: Buddhist*

palace in nineteenth-century Siam, the appearance of European missionaries and journalists and an influx of Chinese immigrants became integral to the growth of the press and contributed to the emergence of a critical public sphere in Bangkok, as it did in colonial cities.[25] From the early nineteenth century, with the rise of an urban middle class, Bangkok witnessed a flourishing of vernacular, bourgeois Thai literature, one growing increasingly critical of a detached aristocracy.[26] This community of foreign scholars—particularly Mundie—would have interacted with Siamese and Sino-Thai journalists, civil servants and professionals in their everyday lives, and may have echoed and given leverage to critiques emanating from an emerging Siamese middle class.

The Siam Society finally came into being under royal patronage in 1904 during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. Apart from Mundie, who provided ample publicity for the society via the press, many of the original members of the Siam Society were recruited as foreign advisors to Chulalongkorn's government. Its membership reflected the cosmopolitan make-up of Bangkok's expatriate community, and included German diplomats, an Italian colonel, British officials (both born in India) and a Japanese legal advisor. German-born Oscar Frankfurter became its second president, appointed by Prince Damrong to be chief librarian of the new National Library in 1905. Other learned societies in the region lent their support—in 1906, the *Asiatic Quarterly Review* noted that it "rejoices to see that a Siam Society has been founded and hopes the Society will be liberally supported and highly successful."[27] "Siam" thus emerged as a new field of enquiry within a scholarly network of Asian studies.

Rather than the culmination of a long battle by the foreign community, the founding of the Siam Society was a strategic move on the part of the Siamese aristocracy, informed by considerations of Siam's place within the region and

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Literati and the Throne in Burma's Last Dynasty, 1752–1885 (Ann Arbor, 2006); Alicia Turner, "Buddhism, Colonialism and the Boundaries of Religion: Theravada Buddhism in Burma 1885–1920", unpublished thesis, University of Chicago, 2009; Patrick Jory, "Thai and Western Buddhist Scholarship in the Age of Colonialism: King Chulalongkorn Redefines the Jatakas", *Journal of Asian Studies* 61/3 (2002), 891–918; Peter Jackson, *Buddhism, Legitimation, and Conflict: The Political Functions of Urban Thai Buddhism* (Singapore, 1989); and Anne Hansen, *How to Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia 1860–1930* (Honolulu, 2011).

25 See Thanapol Limapichart, "The Emergence of the Siamese Public Sphere: Colonial Modernity, Print Culture and the Practice of Criticism (1860s—1910s)", *South East Asia Research* 17/3 (2009), 361–99; Su Lin Lewis, "Asian Urbanites and Cosmopolitan Cultures in Bangkok, Penang, and Rangoon, 1910–1940", unpublished thesis, Cambridge University, 2010.

26 See Nidhi Eoseewong, *Pen and Sail: Literature and History in Early Bangkok*, trans. Chris Baker *et al.*, ed. Chris Baker and Benedict Anderson (Bangkok, 1982).

27 As quoted in Davis, *The Siam Society under Five Reigns*, 36.

the world. The timing is important: the society was formed in 1905, three years after the founding of the Ecole français d'extrème orient (EFEO) in Hanoi, an event upon which the king would have looked with significance. Particularly following a visit to Europe in 1897, King Chulalongkorn sought to project an image of Siam as a "civilized" nation on the world stage, on par with European nation states.[28] The patron saint of the society was Chulalongkorn's half-brother, Prince Damrong, who was intimately connected with Siam's modernization. As minister of the interior, Damrong's forays into Siam's hinterland allowed him to engage in numerous archaeological and sociological expeditions that shaped his scholarly work and understanding of the country, mirroring the archaeological work of the EFEO in Indochina that portrayed Angkor as a once magnificent civilization. As Penny Edwards has shown, through the excavations and subsequent portrayal (in texts, museums and world fairs) of Angkor, French scholars working for the EFEO created a homogenizing, national narrative that radically altered Cambodian perceptions of the temple complex and their own "authentic" past.[29] Through his work in the Siam Society as well as the Society of Archaeological Investigation, Damrong was "filling up" the boundaries of the map with authentic ruins that testified to Thai possession of the new, imperial Siam.[30] Just as history and archaeology were used in the French colonial context to form national narratives, so too did these disciplines help a modernizing, independent Siam draw its boundaries, know its territory, and centralize power into a modern administration.

The creation of new national narratives about Siam was often elite-driven, teleological and homogeneous, yet such projects also formed the building blocks of intellectual inquiry into the nation's past. To Erik Seidenfaden, a contemporary who wrote Damrong's obituary in the *Journal of the Siam Society* in 1944, Damrong was the first real Thai historian "who went to the sources and understood how to sift critically his material in a true modern spirit".[31] Chris Baker has observed that at the time

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[28] See Thongchai Winichakul, "The Quest for 'Siwilai': A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam", *Journal of Asian Studies* 59/3 (2000), 528–49.

[29] Penny Edwards, *Cambodge : The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860–1945* (Honolulu, 2007). For a contrasting, intimate look at the EFEO scholars see Singaravelou, *L'Ecole française d'extreme-orient.*

[30] Craig Reynolds and Tony Day, "Cosmologies, Truth Regimes and the State", *Modern Asian Studies* 34/1 (2000), 1–55.

[31] Erik Seidenfaden, "In Memoriam", *Journal of the Thailand Research Society* 35/1 (Feb. 1944), ii.

there was nothing that could be called a history of the country in English, or even in Thai. The foundation of the Siam Society, the Antiquarian Society three years later, and the Capital Library (later the national library) were all motivated to some extent by a feeling that Siam needed a proper history as part of being a proper nation.[32]

Damrong was inspired by Western knowledge and interactions with Europeans via his own Western education and involvement in the Siam Society. With his Rankean pursuit of facts, it is likely that he, in turn, lent a veneer of austerity to the society, whose rigorous—and rather dry—academic content can be seen in contrast to articles in the *Journal of the Burma Research Society* which often took the form of lively personal and literary essays.

Unlike the *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, discussed below, there were few articles in the Siam Society's journal that engaged with the emerging, vernacular bourgeois literary cultures of the city. The Siam Society remained, for a long time, a venue for expatriate foreigners and Western-educated Thai aristocrats. Nonetheless, the Siam Society reached out to wider networks in the 1920s. Subscribers to the journal included elite schools, hotels, embassies, companies, missionary societies and various government ministries. National and private libraries testify to an unknown readership by the public, and young scholars were encouraged to contribute to the journal.[33] After the coup in 1932, which brought an end to the absolute monarchy, Prince Damrong moved to Penang in self-imposed exile. The departure of Damrong—who often denounced the company of "commoners"—opened up the space for "commoner intellectuals" to join the learned society, such as Phya Anuman Rajadhon, who had little formal education but became a leading scholar, and the brilliant economist Puey Ungpakorn, who joined as a Thammasat University student in the 1930s.[34] Anuman later headed the Department of Fine Arts, which began publishing its own journal, *Silpakorn*, which aimed to support national literature, archaeology, arts and culture.[35]

The founding of the Siam Society solidified intellectual links outside Bangkok in a transimperial, transnational space. Corresponding members included Taw Sein Ko in Burma; the British ethnographer Sir James George Scott; L. Finot,

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32 Chris Baker, "Introduction", in Baker, ed., *The Society of Siam: Selected Articles for the Siam Society's Centenary* (Bangkok, 2004), ix.

33 "Report of an Initial Meeting for Associate Membership", *Journal of the Siam Society* 31/1 (1939), 103–7.

34 On examples of anxieties of the Thai elite towards educated commoners see Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead, *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism* (Abingdon, 2004), 81–85. On "commoner intellectuals" see Chris Baker, *History of Thailand* (Cambridge, 2005), 74–5. On Phya Anuman Rajhanon see William Warren, *The Siam Society: A Century* (Bangkok, 2004), 5.

35 "Publications of Interest in Other Journals", *Journal of the Siam Society* 30/2 (1938), 401–4.

the director of the EFEO in Hanoi; and other scholars in Paris, Berlin, Peking and Alexandria. The journal published mostly in English, though there were articles in Thai as well as French. By the 1930s, the Siam Society was exchanging publications with museums, universities and libraries from Europe, America and Asia. These included established European societies such as the Asiatic Society and its branches in Singapore, Ceylon, Bombay, China and Japan; the EFEO; and Italian, Dutch, German and American institutes for Asian studies. They also included new societies, libraries and museums within the region that published journals such as the *Philippine Journal of Science* and the little-known *Bulletin des amis du Laos*, heralded as a new periodical providing an "admirable step in the right direction."[36] The trajectory of the learned society continued; just as the Siam Society was inspired by learned-society models in India, the Straits and East Asia, it was a chance reading of the Siam Society's journal that led to the founding of the Burma Research Society.

SOCIAL HISTORY AND THE BURMA RESEARCH SOCIETY

The evolution of high intellectual culture under royal patronage might have continued in Burma, as it did in Siam, had the former not suffered one of the most violent acts of imperialism in Asian history. After the fall of Mandalay, the royal palace was turned into a British club as British soldiers trampled in boots through sacred Buddhist temples. The dismantling of the court severely weakened the power and authority of a Burmese gentry class, which King Mindon had set up throughout the country under the same modernizing impulse as his fellow royals in Siam.[37] The king's library was burned to ashes and the authority of the Buddhist *sangha*—the monkhood and traditional interlocutor between the court and the people—severely diminished. The centre of the state moved to the port city of Rangoon, which became a monument to the power of global capitalism. Foreign capitalists and Indian commercial firms infiltrated the city, while Burma became, to the colonial administration, another province of British India.

The first groups of students exposed to English education were those sent to mission schools, including Chinese and Karen Christians, and Arakanese colonized after the First Anglo-Burmese war in 1823. An early achiever who rose quickly within the colonial public sphere was the Arakanese intellectual U May Oung, a London-trained high-court judge, leading Burmese intellectual and also devout Buddhist. He was a man about town, a leading public figure who took

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[36] *Journal of the Siam Society* 30/2 (1938).

[37] See Thant Myint-U. *The Making of Modern Burma* (Cambridge, 2001). On the engagement of Mindon and Buddhist monks with Western missionaries and print culture see Charney, *Powerful Learning*.

a keen interest in the work of the society, never failing to attend a meeting. According to his obituary, he was critical of other scholars proclaiming to be authorities on their own subjects, mired in the narrow perspective of the expert; Taw Sein Ko came under fire for "seeing everything through Chinese spectacles".[38] U May Oung fraternized with various communities in Rangoon; S. Chatterjee, an Indian journalist, described him as "popular with all the races".[39] U May Oung's cosmopolitanism never undermined his patriotism. In 1908, he gave a public lecture in Rangoon on "The Modern Burman", who had received the "not unmixed blessing of a Western education".[40] U May Oung argued that it was on these educated Burmans that the "future of their race" depended:

> on all sides they saw the ceaseless, ebbless tide of foreign civilization and learning steadily creeping over the land, and it seemed to him that unless they prepared themselves to meet it, to overcome it, and to apply it to their own needs, their national character, their institutions, their very existence as a distinct nationality would be swept away, submerged, irretrievably lost.[41]

For Furnivall, the lecture represented "the dawn of nationalism in Burma" and provided the impetus to rescue the national character of Burma via scholarly endeavour; at the time, he argued, "there was a spirit of reform in the air (and) a gradually increasing demand for improvement".[42] Soon afterwards, Furnivall was given a copy of the *Journal of the Siam Society* by the government translator U Tun Nyein, which inspired him to form a similar society in Burma to "bring together Burmans and Europeans with a common interest in the welfare of the country".[43] The society was founded in 1910 by Furnivall, U May Oung, the French archaeologist Charles Duroiselle and Pe Maung Tin, a brilliant Pali scholar and librarian of the only free library in Rangoon at the time. Duroiselle was an affiliate and correspondent of the EFEO, based in Hanoi. Pe Maung Tin, who studied with Duroiselle, was a prodigy, raised a Christian but taught basic Buddhist texts at a local school. At the young age of eight he entered the first standard of the Rangoon government, and by age fourteen had won a scholarship to attend Rangoon College. At the age of twenty-four, he became professor of Pali studies at Rangoon University after his teacher, Duroiselle, became superintendent of archaeology.

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38 Pe Maung Tin, "The Late U May Oung", *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, 16 (1926), 158.

39 S. Chatterjee, *Meeting the Personalities: Burma Series* (Rangoon, 1956).

40 J. S. Furnivall, "The Dawn of Nationalism in Burma", *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, 30 (1950), 2.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

Though the society gained the governor's approval, Furnivall was warned to avoid economic issues or both Burmese and European civil servants would be called on to resign. Burma's financial commissioner withdrew his signature on the ground that the movement was "political". Furnivall relayed later,

> in this, of course, he was right. For we were attempting something new. It was the first attempt to provide Europeans and Burmans with a common meeting ground other than the market place or race course, where they met to make money out of one another; it was the first time that Europeans had been encouraged to express sympathy with Burmese culture or that Burmans had been encouraged to express an interest in Burmese life; and it was the first attempt, except by the government, to promote cultural interests in Burma. It was, on a very modest scale, an event of political significance; morally, and potentially, of great significance.[44]

Though officials suggested that the organization tie itself to the Royal Asiatic Society, and thus into a markedly imperial project centred in Calcutta, Burmans and many Europeans rejected the proposal, seeking to focus the project on Burma itself. From the point of view of the Raj, Burma was merely a province of British India, a perception that scholars in Burma were determined to contest. This, in turn, negatively affected the intellectual trajectory of the Burma Research Society itself—there were no prominent Indian scholars in the society and few articles on India, despite attempts to encourage the study of Burma's relations with neighbours.

Within the Burma Research Society, new intellectual hierarchies emerged which criticized other Westerners for their lack of knowledge about local culture. An article in the first issue by Maung Tin deplored the Burmese language skills of American missionaries. Western scholars were judged on their grasp of the language and the length of time spent in the country. In such circles, having a Burmese wife, as Furnivall and G. H. Luce did, was a great asset, even if it allegedly ostracized them from the eight-thousand-strong white population.[45] Luce was told by the governor that he was "pro-Burman", which according to his contemporary Maurice Collis "meant that you had for the Burmese a greater feeling of sympathy and fellowship than was sanctioned by British opinion at that date".[46] Given the creative circles to which Luce belonged in England, it is unlikely that he would have minded such a statement. Luce was a member of the Cambridge Apostles and a close friend of E. M. Forster—who features in

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44 J. S. Furnivall, "Twenty Five Years: A Retrospect and Prospect", *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 25/1 (1935), 41–2.

45 Maung Tin, "Missionary Burmese", *Burma Research Society* 1/1 (1911), 87–91. Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain's Asian Empire and the War with Japan* (London, 2005), 87.

46 Maurice Collis, *Into Hidden Burma* (London, 1953).

Leela Gandhi's study of anti-colonial subcultures in late Victorian Britain—and likely saw himself as a radical intellectual.[47] Upon arriving in Burma, he soon married Pe Maung Tin's sister Tee Tee, a formidable figure in her own right, who introduced Luce to local networks of artists and literati.[48] Furnivall, Luce, Duroiselle, and Collis were exposed to degrees of intellectual stimulation from their Asian friends that they were unlikely to have experienced at the Gymkhana club. As Collis related in his memoirs,

> to see nobody but my own countrymen appeared to me a gross stupidity. The educated Burmese, Indian, and Chinese were very friendly, and an acquaintance with some of them enabled me quickly to form a picture of the Rangoon of the period and so, later on, to see things in perspective.[49]

The atmosphere of the society facilitated these sociable exchanges. Meetings were run like university seminars, with European and Asian literati commenting on papers and discussing their various merits. Bilingual versions of both journals allowed some participation by Asian scholars without a grasp of the English language.

Like the histories written by Prince Damrong in the journals of the Siam Society, early historical articles in the *Journal of the Burma Research Society* tended to focus on the histories of kings, at times comparing them to European contemporaries. Luce and Pe Maung Tin worked together under the auspices of the society to compile and translate the *Glass Palace Chronicles*, King Mindon's ambitious project, in 1829, to chronicle the rise of the Burmese kingdom by assembling a number of scholars, including learned monks, Brahmans, and ministers, to sift and prepare all credible records of Burmese kings, including historical ballads and literature of the *thamaing*, or the prose-history of a pagoda, monastery or town.[50] In doing so, Luce and Pe Maung Tin made the work accessible to a wider audience, restoring a legacy of Burmese historical writing endangered by the destruction of royal court culture.

Scholars also began to see the chronicles as one ethno-centred narrative within a pluralist, multi-ethnic narrative of Burmese history. Early articles were based on European and Burmese travel accounts, while others examined the migrations in Burma's early history that contributed to the diversity of races in Burma. Some articles tracked the disappearing cultures of hill tribes and minority

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47 See Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, 2006).

48 I am grateful to Pamela Gutman for sharing parts of her forthcoming biography on G. H. Luce.

49 Maurice Collis, *Trials in Burma* (London, 1938), 34–5.

50 U Pe Maung Tin, "Introduction", *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma* (London, 1923), ix–xxiii.

groups, pointing to the diversity of peoples within the region. J. A. Stewart, an ethnographer, photographer and Burmese and Mon linguist, reflected,

> The modern Burman is of exceedingly mixed descent. It is hardly possible to point to a single district even in Upper Burma whose inhabitants can claim to be of pure Burman race. It seems to me therefore wrong and unnatural that Burma of the present day should take the word of Ava for its history.[51]

Stewart called for a practice of social history: "So far we have spoken only or mainly of kings, and it is the fault of all the histories and chronicles that they say little of the state of the people and the country . . . The real heroes of Burmese history are the people themselves."[52] The article also advocated a history of Burma that compared multiple texts to gain multiple vantage points:

> it is necessary to read as widely as possible, to check one chronicle by another, to test Burman accounts by Chinese, Shan or Talaing, and to remember that much valuable information can be derived from the diaries of merchants and envoys who visited the country. It is often a difficult task to select the most probable story, but it is perhaps this difficulty which gives interest to the study at its present stage, and will continue to be the chief source of interest for many years to come. To accept any one book as a standard is to make the subject dull.[53]

The focus on historical practice, including the consultation of a variety of sources, influenced younger scholars such as Daw Mya Sein, U May Oung's daughter. She was a remarkable figure in both intellectual and public life, appointed delegate to the League of Nations and the Burma Round Table conference in London, and the head of two girls' schools in Rangoon in the 1930s. During this time she revised her thesis, written at Oxford—to which she had won a state scholarship in 1928—as the *Administration of Burma*, published in 1938. The book had an immense impact on scholars of the colonial period who grew to shape Southeast Asian studies after the Second World War, including D. G. E. Hall and John F. Cady. Joseph Silverstein praised it as an integral work that moved away from royal history and was based primarily upon original Burmese sources which few had seen or read.[54] It was within the circle of scholars brought together by her father that Daw Mya Sein was urged to study the neglected areas of Burma's history, to examine new sources such as testimonies given under oath as rich examples of the relationship between local officials and appointees of the crown.

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51 J. A. Stewart. "Notes on Some Authorities for the History of Burma", *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, 13 (1923), 75.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Joseph Silverstein, "Foreword", in Daw Mya Sein, *The Administration of Burma* (Kuala Lumpur, 1973), v–xviii.

Archival records indicate that permission was granted to Daw Mya Sein to use the government's files to write her thesis as a "serious historical scholar", where a similar request had been denied to a European woman novelist, indicating that professional standard rather than race dictated the politics of archival exclusion.[55]

Via the literary review and scholarly essay, the journal helped created a culture of critique rooted, at least in part, in a Buddhist intellectual tradition. The form of the journal, as a collection of multi-authored, pseudo-scholarly articles on subjects as wide-ranging as "Buddhism in Europe" and "Burmese Braille" or "Medieval Burmese Courtship" and the magical elements of hand-loom weaving made the journals a site of lively, pluralist interpretations of Burmese history and culture. One issue was devoted to Chinese history and literature in relation to Burma, though, as mentioned, there was little research on Indian influences apart from Collis's work on Arakan. Comparative ethnographic articles emphasized the universality of cultural traditions such as water worship and mysticism, combining scholarship of Burmese and Eastern culture with books in spirituality and religious experience from Europe. Buddhism underwent a resurgence in colonial Burma, partly due to the idea, influenced by the Theosophy movement, that the religion had much knowledge to impart to a Europe losing its spiritual basis in an age of mechanization.[56] The Burmese philosopher Shwe Zan Aung drew parallels between Burmese Buddhism, science, Darwinism and contemporary Western philosophy.[57] Prompted by accusations by Christian missionaries of the lack of scientific geography in Buddhism, he also sought to prove that the world was, indeed, conceived as round in original Buddhist texts.[58]

Just as the Siam Society changed its motto to "knowledge produces friendship" in 1926, rooted in a Pali verse, the aims of the Burma Research Society also changed in the 1920s to a wider vision of collaboration within Burma and the rest of the region. While its original aim in 1911 was a bilateral one, to "increase the good feeling and mutual respect between Briton and Burma", by 1922, the object had become more inclusive, to "promote sympathy between members of different communities".[59] At a proceeding of the Burma Research Society in 1924, to which invitations were sent to colleges, schools, teachers' associations, youth clubs, Chinese and Burmese chambers of commerce, the Rangoon literary club and

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55 "Permission Granted to Miss May Oung", Chief Secretary's Office, 1929, Political Department, 4834/169B29, Myanmar National Archives, Yangon.

56 See Turner, "Buddhism, Colonialism and the Boundaries of Religion".

57 Shwe Zan Aung, "Buddhism and Science", *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 8/2 (1918), 99–106.

58 Shwe Zan Aung, "The World is Round", *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 7/2 (1917), 184–6.

59 *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 1/1 (1911) and 12/1 (1922).

university fellows, Governor Harcourt Butler addressed the need for intellectual linkages with the rest of the region, with reference to U May Oung's inaugural speech:

> Our interest in Burma, as you, Mr. President, said 14 years ago, is not bounded by the geographical frontiers of our country. Within the Mongolian sphere of influence and especially Indo-China there is nothing human which is not our close concern. The influence of India, the struggle between Brahmanism and Buddhism, the influence of China and Cambodia, the later relations of Burma with European adventurers, Portuguese, Dutch, French and English, still await treatment. The relations between Siam and Burma are a very fertile field of enquiry. It is most desirable, it is absolutely essential that we should carry out our own research and be in close contact with the research of others in surrounding countries.[60]

Such networks facilitated new kinds of intimate interaction and friendship between Asian scholars in the region. Burmese and Thais, who in collective memory had been "others" and "enemies", began reading each other's history. From Penang, Prince Damrong wrote to a Burmese scholar, U Ba Dun, to source an English translation of Mon works published and obtainable in Burma. The Burmese scholar U Aung Thein translated Prince Damrong's work on the Sino-Burmese wars for the Burma Research Society; a copy of the essay can be found in Prince Damrong's private library with a 1938 inscription, in English, from U Aung Thein, given with the "grateful devotion of the translator".[61]

The global membership of the society grew, with a list of members including a number of retired colonial officials and scholars based in England, Scotland, Ireland, Singapore and Delhi. Publications were exchanged with institutions around the region and the wider world. Subscribers included an expanding Burmese middle class: merchants, tax collectors, survey officers, bankers, police officers and engineers. Although the initial membership stayed around two or three hundred, a wider readership is indicated by the presence of the journal in libraries, arts exhibitions, public lectures at the university and addresses to students encouraged to engage in the society's activities. The founding of modern universities in Asia, for which many of these new Asian literati campaigned—notably the University of Manila (1908), Chulalongkorn University (1917), Rangoon University (1920) and Thammasat University (1932)—played a major role in facilitating the exchange of journals, hosting meetings and acting as sites of translation and the promotion of scholarly endeavour.

At the heart of the original aim of the Burma Research Society was the education of the young. Largely due to Furnivall's efforts, the society actively

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60 "Proceedings of the Burma Research Society", *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, 14 (1924), 78–9.

61 Private collection, Damrong Rajanupab Library, Bangkok.

sought to encourage young scholars and many members gave public lectures. Offshoot projects of the Burma Research Society included the Pali Text Society, and the Burma Education Extension, which sought to promote the cause of literacy throughout Burma. The association published a literary monthly magazine, *World of Books*, published in both English and Burmese and critical of government policies. The Burma Book Club made countless English and other books available to a younger generation. Other book clubs, the most famous being the Nagani Book Club (modelled on the Left Book Club in England) were integral to the fostering of Burmese nationalism, serving as a platform for various students and others to come together and forge new visions for the nation.

Fully aware that he would disapprove of the flattery, Burmese students writing in the *Oway* student literary magazine called Furnivall an "idol" and the "architect of our destiny" due to his many educational endeavours in the 1930s.[62] Furnivall had predicted that the learned society would play a role in helping young Burmese, like students elsewhere in colonial Asia, to capitalize on new platforms of expression and celebrate Burmese national culture.[63] Many later became the leaders of the new, post-war Burma. By the time colonialism ended and the nation was born, Furnivall wrote of Burma in the first person plural, as one who belonged there. In a 1922 article extolling the birth of a new learned journal in Indochina, *Bulletin des amis du Vieux Hue*, he was inspired to write of an intellectual kinship with the French and Asian scholars he had never met:

> We might almost claim a relationship. We are working in different corners of the same field. For untold ages various people have wandered about Indo-China and, over the whole peninsula, the soil contains the dust of generations with a common ancestry. If that be true, even those who hail from Europe are children of the soil of Burma . . . quite possibly, our editor and the editor of the A.V.H. are cousin-brothers, tracing their relationship through some Khmer family of which nothing else survives except the dreams which inspired its temples and a few odd turns of speech in unfamiliar dialects.[64]

For Furnivall, scholarly inquiry into the cultures of Asia provided connective bonds, from Burman to Burman, Burman to Khmer, Southeast Asia to China, Asia to the West, within a world of letters. The learned society, in Furnivall's view, provided a "meeting place", a venue for scholars to engage jointly in the pursuit

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62 Editorial, "The Architect of Our Destiny", *Oway* (1938), 2–3.

63 See J. S. Furnivall "Sunlight and Soap", *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 8/3 (1918), 199. For a discussion on Furnivall's paternalism see Julie Pham, "Ghost Hunting in Colonial Burma: Nostalgia, Paternalism and the Thoughts of J. S. Furnivall", *South East Asia Research* 12/2 (2004), 237–68.

64 J. S. Furnivall, "Bulletin des amis du Vieux Hue", *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, 12/1 (1922), 55–7.

of knowledge of the societies in which they found themselves, whether by blood or by soil, and in so doing, belong to them in new ways.

CONCLUSION

In the long aftermath of the Second World War, teleological narratives of the "nation" emerged, focusing largely on anti-colonial and anti-Western struggles within new territorial boundaries. Most colonial civil servants returned home, which led to the emergence of Southeast Asian studies as, in the words of Benedict Anderson, "the province of a metropolitan professoriate".[65] Georges Coedès, once president of the Siam Society, and D. G. E. Hall, an active member of the Burma Research Society and professor of history at Rangoon University, wrote two key texts from Paris and London that were to pioneer Southeast Asian studies as a unified field: *Les états hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie* (1948) and *A History of Southeast Asia* (1955). Although these and other works by scholar–officials, including Furnivall, must be seen as achievements in their own right, by looking at the history of the learned-society networks in which they were entangled, we can come to appreciate the way in which such histories emerged out of intimate dialogues and outward connections within distinct Southeast Asian meeting places.

There were also, however, silences—in contrast to early twentieth-century Burma and Siam, Malaya lacked any independent, learned societies that sought to promote interest in Malay language and culture. This was noted in a public lecture at the Kuala Lumpur Rotary Club in 1938 by Haji Mohd. Eusoff, who drew upon an *Economist* article relating to the ignorance of colonial authorities of the societies in which they lived. He pointed to the lack of any societies that had as their aim the promotion of friendship and contact with the Malay peoples.[66] The Malays, he argued, had been forced to adjust to a foreign, cosmopolitan culture for too long, unable even to travel through their own country without speaking a language besides their own. He continued by addressing the very conditions in which he was allowed to speak: "Take this example: I am addressing you in English and my pronunciation may be grating to your ears; you may involuntarily shudder at my 'murdering' the English language. Now, suppose you take my place and speak in Malay."[67] Eusoff's statement is a reminder not only of the absences in intellectual inquiry in certain histories and cultures of both European and Asian scholars, but also of the awareness of the power dynamics inherent in "cosmopolitan" sites of association in colonial Southeast Asia, where European languages predominated. Articles in vernacular languages, and increased use of

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65 Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons*, 9.

66 *Straits Echo*, 15 Sept. 1938, 11.

67 *Straits Echo*, 15 Sept. 1938, 11.

vernacular sources were encouraged by both the Siam Society and the Burma Research Society from the late 1930s.[68] The brief transformation of the *Journal of the Siam Society* into the *Journal of the Thailand Society* in 1946 under Phibun Songkhram's militant nationalist government, with all articles in Thai, presents a backlash against the anglophone bias of such societies as well as a turn to ethnic nationalist visions of the nation.

The journals of learned societies from the Straits, Siam and Burma nonetheless indicate a means by which Southeast Asian literati contributed to global intellectual culture—where English was, and continues to be, the dominant lingua franca. Yet they also point to the learned societies as sites of translation and transculturation. The substance of the journals, as well as the record of meetings between the Asian intelligentsia and European scholar–administrators, are evidence of "forgotten conversations" which allowed an Asian voice in colonial knowledge formation and educational policy making, and in shaping the world views of the Western literati with which they engaged with socially and intellectually. They point to a hierarchy of local knowledge in the field, an "unofficial mind" which prized linguistic and scholarly expertise among expatriate Europeans, many of whom garnered local legitimacy due to their linguistic and cultural sensitivity. The endeavours they undertook with Asian scholars contributed, in the 1920s and 1930s, to the emergence of dynamic public spheres.

Although histories of "the nation" in Southeast Asia took different forms, they arose out of the intimacy of these connections, which formed the basis of understanding a region in global perspective, and a mode for scholars within emerging nations to begin speaking to each other. "Orientalism" was decentred from Europe to distinct and multiple centres in Asia, as amateur scholars and literati drew from and wrote for intricate and expanding webs of knowledge emanating from the new Asian metropoles of Calcutta, Batavia, Singapore, Hanoi, Bangkok and Rangoon. The celebration of these early, independent learned societies in Southeast Asia as sites of affective friendship within the racial hierarchies of the colonial public sphere, should not be seen as the primary sources of intellectual output by Southeast Asians, but rather as sites that brought together diverse "communities of interpretation".[69] They offer a mode of seeing Southeast Asian history in terms of the forgotten connections and networks between Asian and Western literati operating on common ground—one amenable, by their shared institutional form, to dialogues across borders.

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[68] See Than Tun, "An Estimation of Articles on Burmese History Published in the JBRS, 1910–70", *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 53 (1970), 53–66.

[69] Maitrii Aung-Thwin, "Introduction: Communities of Interpretation and the Construction of Modern Myanmar", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 39/2 (2008), 187–92.