



Session 2: Commentary

Yoshiko Nagano
(Kanagawa University)

First of all, I would like to congratulate the illuminating paper of Professor lleto on “Autonomous History and Nationalist Discontents.” I appreciate very much the perspective work of Professor lleto that shows us clearly the scene of making Southeast Asian studies in the golden age of Cornell in the 1960s from his own viewpoint as one of its contemporaries. While I was reading the paper of Professor lleto, what I remembered were the recollections or retrospect of two prominent Japanese scholars on Asian studies who witnessed or shared the golden age of Cornell or the Southeast Asian studies in the United States in the early 1960s.

The first scholar is Professor Emeritus Yoichi Itagaki (born in 1908) of Hitotsubashi University who spent a year for Asian studies, visited major universities and met prominent scholars like John Smail. The outcome of Professor Itagaki’s research in the United States was the prize-winning book entitled: *Asian Nationalism and Economic Development* (in Japanese). Professor Itagaki led Asian Studies in Japan in the 1960s and 1970s as one of its pillars and later he published a series of books for his recollections of Asian studies entitled: *Dialogue with Asia* (in Japanese). Our chairperson, Professor Oki is at much better position than myself for talking about Professor Itagaki, because Itagaki-sensei is Oki-san’s guru, though I had some occasions to talk with him and exchanged letters in the early 1980s.

The other professor I immediately remembered is the late Professor Akira Nagazumi of the University of Tokyo. He was prominent scholar of Indonesian modern history who earned his Ph.D. from Cornell, came back to Japan and headed the academic circle of Southeast Asian history here throughout the 1970s and late 1980s. The collection of his essays was

published in 1987 entitled: *The Moon Rises from the East, While the Sun Sets in the West* (in Japanese). In this book, what late Professor Nagazumi wished to address to us, younger generations of Southeast Asian studies here is that in the 1980s Japan was a rising star in Asia, while the United States was declining and this trend also seemed to be applicable to the Southeast Asian studies; however, he implied that it was during the time of Japan's appreciation in the world that we had to be careful for what we were doing. Indeed, I understand that this was the early warning of the late Professor Nagazumi who might have already foreseen the later dominant trends and problems of Southeast Asian studies in the 1990s and its onward.

The issue that Professor Ito has discussed today, that is, "autonomous history," has been the major agenda in Southeast Asian historiography in various countries since the famous two papers of Harry Benda and John Smail appeared in 1960–61, because, as Professor Ito clearly mentioned, it kicked off the "new trends" of Southeast Asian studies after WWII. In fact, at the mid-1990s when *the Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* had a special issue for the historical review of Southeast Asian studies after WWII, if I correctly remember, Ruth McVey stated that in spite of its proliferation over several decades, we have discussed almost the same issues within the framework of "autonomous history."

How has the concept of "autonomous history" been received in Southeast Asian historiography in Japan? The papers of Benda and Smail in the early 1960s have served as its bible and they have been considered as the starting point of the research and still the centering issue for Southeast Asian historiography here. For example, in the 11 volume-series of *Southeast Asian Studies*, compiled by Kyoto University Center for Southeast Asian Studies in 1991, Professor Yoneo Ishii edited the volume on *History of Southeast Asia*. A lengthy review on this volume by Professor Toshikatsu Ito appeared in *Southeast Asia: History and Culture* (the journal of Japan Society for Southeast Asian History, in Japanese) in 1993 (vol. 22). In the English summary of his review, Ito says:

The main focus of this review will survey how far an autonomous

Southeast Asian history has been established in Japan...

In his introduction, Ishii clearly traces the trend from heterogeneous to autonomous historical studies in the search on Southeast Asia. While he does not refer to the effects of cultural background on the historical viewpoints of scholars, he does argue that heterogeneous view of Southeast Asian history are formed not only from the nature of the source materials, but also from the individual scholar's personal values. (pp. 149–150)

Reflecting on the pervasive influence of “autonomous history” framework in major Southeast Asian historiography here and abroad, we, all of us here, might now be aware of the degree of the impact of Professor Iletto's paper on the dominant streams of Southeast Asian historiography. Because it has disclosed the hidden meaning of “autonomous history,” as a brilliant solution of dichotomy between “Eurocentric history” and “Asia-centric,” the later often taking nationalist forms in the 1950s, for the purpose of “naturaliz[ing] the evils of nationalist historiography” (Iletto, p. 5).

Here I would like to call your attention that with this understanding of “autonomous history approach” or alienation from it, I wonder, Professor Iletto's groundbreaking work of *Pasyon and Revolution* was conceived. In this context, Professor Iletto's paper today has disclosed by himself a part of the myth of making *Pasyon and Revolution* that I assume many scholars and students have looked forward to knowing for a longer time.

Professor Iletto seems to be a modest scholar. He ended his paper today with the following words: “Thus did *Pasyon and Revolution* appear in print at about the same time as *Philippine Social History*.” On the other hand, *Pasyon and Revolution* came out much earlier than *Philippine Social History* in my view. *Pasyon and Revolution* appeared in 1979, while *Philippine Social History* was off the press in 1982. If *Philippine Social History* represents “the best of post-1970 Philippine historical writing,” *Pasyon and Revolution* has been received as the single most important book in Philippine modern history. *Pasyon* was celebrated by the prestigious Harry Benda Prize in 1985, the best prize in Southeast Asian studies in AAS, the Association of Asian Studies in

the United States. And it used to be the single Benda prize won from the field of Philippine studies until last year.

Since so many reviews or commentaries on *Pasyon* came out over twenty years, I am afraid if Professor Iletto might be fed up with my very brief review of *Pasyon*. However, let me allow to point out the uniqueness of *Pasyon* in relation to the main theme of this workshop. I would like to address two points among various uniqueness that I have so far found and at the same time taking this opportunity I would like to ask two questions to Professor Iletto.

First one is the pioneering presentation of the perspective of “A History from Below.” Indeed, from the 1980s the framework of “social history from below” or “history from below” has widely been acknowledged, as often cited as the concept introduced by E.P. Thompson’s work on labor class in England or now the famous Subaltern Studies of India. For a couple of years, I have been wondering if the category of “A History from Below” in *Pasyon and Revolution* is the own invention of Professor Iletto or Professor Iletto got certain idea from other studies that I have mentioned above. In either case, how did the perspective of “A History from Below” relate with your perception of the “autonomous history”? This is my first question.

Second point I would like to address today is above all the invaluable and unique “discovery” of the category of “kalayaan.” *Kalayaan* means liberty or independence in Tagalog language that was widely accepted among peasants during the time of the Philippine Revolution, the first independence movement in Southeast Asia at the end of the 19th century. Professor Iletto illuminatingly shows us that the profound meaning of “kalayaan” is different from that of the “independence” in Western nations. Hinted by Ben Anderson’s famous paper: “The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture,” Professor Iletto sees in the Philippines the different nature of power relations, different “mode of accumulating power,” that leads to the composition of different framework in notions or perceptions as well as human relations among peasants – that is qualitatively different from the so-called “patron–client” relations, the category that has been widely accepted in Southeast Asian studies. The “discovery” of the category of “kalayaan”

naturally leads to the different interpretation of Philippine nationhood (*Inang Bayan*) from the Western nations, thus, further leading to the discussion that Philippine nationalism should be understood in the different frame of reference from the understanding of Western nationalism.

I have not surveyed to what extent the discussions have been conducted on the different natures of nationalism in the 1990s, in the rise of criticism against nationalism with the opening age of “globalization.” For example, I learned a lot from the abridged Japanese translation of the Subaltern Studies that Takenaka-san did, but I could not find the discussion on nationhood or nationalism similar to Professor Iletto’s “kalayaan.” It was only less than a month ago that I came across the latest article of a noted scholar on Indian history, Nobuko Nagasaki, Professor Emeritus of the University of Tokyo, that appeared in *Azia Kenkyu* (the journal of Japan Association for Asian Studies, in Japanese), vol. 48, no. 1 (Jan. 2002). In her article entitled: “The Concept of Swaraj in Mahatma Gandhi: a Reappraisal of Nationalism in South Asia.” I found a very stimulating discussion similar to the “kalayaan” of Professor Iletto. In this workshop we have prominent Indian specialists, so I feel a bit awkward to summarize her paper, but, let me allow to point out as follows. In her paper Professor Nagasaki discusses that Gandhi chose the concept of “swaraj,” that meant “self-rule” or “self-restraint,” instead of “independence” in 1931. This suggests that Gandhi’s model of nation or nationalism was not based on the Western module, rather it was created from the critique of Western civilization. Professor Nagasaki further continues: The main theme of Ben Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* is that nationalism in Asia and Africa developed through anti-colonialism of Western countries, but Asian and African countries built their nations based on the Western (European) module. From the viewpoint of Professor Nagasaki, the argument of Anderson cannot explain the nationalism of Gandhi at all. She rather argues that “[p]erhaps reappraisal of nationalism in Asia needs to embrace Gandhi’s agenda.” So my second and last question to Professor Iletto is: “what is the prospective discussion on nationalism in history?”