

***Struggles on Colonial Policies in Southeast Asia, Focus on Land Policies:
Movements in Vietnam, the Malay Peninsula and the Philippines***

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The Asian Conference on Cultural Studies 2019
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This historical narrative is developed according to the concept of ethnosymbolism, the reason why a group of people live together for a length of time, why the community has a strong bond of identity and unity, a concept used to justify why the community of people stood and instinctively fought for their homeland. A historical comparative approach was used in this study to point out the similarities, parallels and trends on the historical and social developments of Vietnam, the Malay Peninsula and the Philippines during the western colonization. The objective of this research is to present the agricultural policies imposed by the French in Vietnam, the British in the Malay peninsula and the Spaniards in the Philippines. Likewise, the study narrates the activities of the native population in relation to these colonial policies. The standard historical narratives today are about the story of the colonizers and the justification of colonization in the Asian territories. The emphasis of this study is to address the need that historical narratives of a people must be told by them, whatever their actions, these are for the greater good of the Vietnamese, the Malays and the Filipinos.

Keywords: Ethnosymbolism, Colonization, Indigenous population

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Introduction

The European colonial experience was a common experience among the countries of Southeast Asia. (Pearn, 1963). Based on narratives, there were disputes between the colonizers and the colonized and the biggest was their relationship to the use of lands (Jacoby, 1961). The European claim to the lands and whatever legitimizing instrument they employed was a direct contrast to the concepts and traditions of Southeast Asians. The focus of this research is a comparative study of the agricultural policies imposed by the French in Vietnam, the British in the Malay Peninsula and the Spaniards in the Philippines. This also presented the various actions that the people of Vietnam, the Malay peninsula and the Philippines pursued.

The Concept of Ethnosymbolism

From the ancient times, the inhabitants of a particular territory interacted with their environment and in doing so, they created their myths and memories (Allan, 2005). They created meaningful symbols, they identified and claimed their historical homeland based on the accepted mythologies, they created their own language, their laws were accepted and observed by the members through the centuries, making their community unique from others. The members passed these created practices to their descendants. These traditions also dictated their interactions with different stimulus, those from within the communities and those coming from outside. This body of creations results to communities of people having deep ethical roots. (Anbarani, 2013). Adherence to these creations results to a continuous and strong sense of solidarity within their respective communities (Leoussi, 2007). These are the factors that explain why the people developed a strong sense of identity, unity and a deep sense of attachment to their homelands, instinctive defense of their homeland and the need for the preservation of their communities, called the ethnic heritage (Smith, 1999). These creations are constantly modified to suit the needs of the times, thus reinforcing the sense of membership to their community (Leoussi, 2007).

In this study, the identified groups of people are the Vietnamese, the Malays and the Filipinos. Their beliefs and traditions determined their interaction with stimulus, specifically the European colonization. For this study, the focus is on the changes resulting from the agricultural policies imposed by the Europeans.

Historical method provides the accuracy of the reconstruction of events, but it is the historical comparative method that explains these social events, trace its causes, discuss its relevance in the modern situation and find common trends among identified historical events (Barraclough, 1991). Primary data were already proven truthful and valid, hence the publication of the documents, therefore, historical comparative method may now use these published sources for analysis purposes to bring out important features of a specific topic (Barraclough, 1991). Comparisons highlight that which are similar, comparisons also explain the diversity and the complexity that leads to statements of generalizations and conclusions (Lange, 2013).

The focus of this study is the presentation of the collective activities of ordinary Vietnamese, the Malays and the Filipinos. To understand the actions of the community, historians must go as far back as to the ancient times, to their myths, legends, epics, the stories of their ancestors because these were tied to their ancient

pasts, and are continuously manifested through their values, their collective expressions, the kind of interactions with each other and towards foreign stimulus (Crossley, 1993).

The historical narratives of Southeast Asia are always the story of the activities of the colonizers and the few wealthy leaders who benefitted from colonization. The activities of majority of the indigenous population are barely mentioned, in most cases, these are absent (Roff, 1967). The ordinary must also be presented as the major actors of the historical events, not merely as recipients of colonial laws or followers of the national leaders or those who were out to cause “disturbances” to the government, labelled as *vagamundos*, the *remontados*, the *ladrones*, the *bandidos*, *tulisanes* (Dery 2006, iv-v). Colonization highlighted the differences of the Southeast Asians, but in using comparative historical analysis, this opens the opportunity to present the parallel developments of the different groups of people side by side each other. The colonized population can draw solidarity from each other since they were faced with the same colonial experiences (Burton, 2016). Hopefully, this study is a step towards cultivating a deeper sense of understanding among the Southeast Asian people since this study presents the view of the ordinary Vietnamese, Malays and Filipinos. There is a need that histories must be presented by the colonized, ordinary people and must be told by them (Kartodirdjo, 1963).

Preconquest Vietnam, the Malay Peninsula and the Philippines

The prevalence of mythological beginnings and archaeological excavations is common in Vietnam, the Malay peninsula and the Philippines thus provide evidences of early groups of people (Karnow, 1983; Le, 20011; 2003; Fox, 1970). The three countries experienced widespread Chinese influences that are deeply rooted in their culture. (McAlister, 1971; Andaya, 1982; Halili, 2010). These incipient communities were geographically apart, they developed separate, unique and independent cultures from each other, outside stimuli, like the Chinese influence, was, modified and integrated into their respective cultures.

Agriculture was an adaptation of the Southeast Asians to their environment. The monsoon rains from the Pacific Ocean provided water to grow rice in the extensive lowlands (Owen, 2005). Construction of irrigation canals, dams and dikes maximized the use of resources to meet the needs of the population. Villages developed, each one independent from each other. In the Malay Peninsula these were called *kampong* (Lok Foong seng, 1967). In the Philippines, these were called the *barangay* (Agoncillo, 1980).

In Vietnam, the Emperor lived in Hue, his office handled the political aspects, he was detached from the majority of the ordinary people, mostly peasants who lived in the villages. According to tradition, the Vietnamese Emperor had the eminent right to the lands (Pham, 1985). He leased land to the people in exchange for taxes and labor, land was periodically redistributed according to the needs of the people (Jacoby, 1961). Lands were assigned to families, but there were communal lands, lands used as payment to peasants who served as soldiers, widow rice fields, orphan rice fields, rice fields for those who desire to study and rice fields for religious purposes (Pham, 1985). Vietnamese peasants worked on the construction and maintenance of irrigation canals, dams and other infrastructures (Nguyen, 2007). He also encouraged them to

move out of their villages, clear forested areas and cultivate these cleared lands, increasing the Vietnamese territories southwards and eastwards to the Mekong delta (Nguyen, 2007). In the Malay peninsula, society was divided into two classes which was acquired according to birth. One was the aristocratic class or the ruling class (*orang kaya* or the rich man) and the rest of the population (Roff, 1967). The ruler of a village was called *Yang di Partuan* (he who is made lord, or he was called a *Sultan*). He was the symbol of peace, unity, integrity and he was answerable only to the Almighty, therefore, he was a benevolent ruler who takes care of the welfare of his people (Roff, 1967).

Rice was produced by the *kampong*, the peasants were allowed to keep livestock, they planted vegetables, fruits and other edibles ensure that their daily needs were met (Drabble, 2000). Peasants had rights to the land because he and his family occupied and cultivated the lands. According to the Malay traditions, he was secure in the village, even the Sultan cannot take his land, but the peasant can move away or transfer to another location (Emerson, 1964). In the Philippines, villages were called *barangay* and each one was headed by *Datu*. In Muslim areas, the head of their government was called *Sultan*, but it was the *Datu*, who assigned plots of lands to the people. Peasants cultivated the lands, and they paid taxes (Molina, 1960). There were communal lands like the woodlands, the forest areas, fishing areas, coastal areas and mangroves where anybody from the *barangay* may use these lands to meet and augment their daily needs (Corpuz, 1997).

Lands did not have a commercial value, but this was an abundant resource that may be used by the peasants and passed on to their children. Distribution was equitably done in accordance to the needs of the family. This was the foundation of the Vietnamese, Malay and Filipino societies.

Preconquest developments in Vietnam, the Malay peninsula and the Philippines have parallels and similarities. The form of governance was a kind of monarchy because the head of government and his right to rule was absolute and legitimized by the idea of a higher being. Usually, the leaders were benevolent and upright because of the origins and expectations of the office. The form of livelihood was agriculture and the primary crop was rice, but the ordinary people of the villages were encouraged to raise animals and plants to supplement their needs. There were lands designated for common use.

Conquest of Southeast Asian Peoples

French Revolution ended feudalism in Europe, but it also formalized the practice of owning tracts of lands and giving these personal and commercial values (Perry, 1983). Nobilities and wealthy individuals owned lands while the serfs were deprived of the communal spaces which they used. Industrial revolution required volumes of raw materials needed to feed the growing factories so European governments looked for steady and cheap sources of raw materials. France, the Netherlands, and Great Britain found that cash crop and unlimited bodies of cheap labor to extract the cash crops in Asia (Furnival, 1956).

This was initially undertaken by Portugal and Spain, later the Dutch followed, lastly the British and French (Alweis, 1969). In the Philippines, it was first conquered by the

Spaniards in 1565, their objective was the spread of the Catholic faith not only in the Philippines but also in the non-Christian parts of Asia (Agoncillo, 1980). In 1861, Cochin China, referring to the southern part of Vietnam, was conquered. Eventually Hue and Tonkin followed (Tarling, 2001). In Saigon, lands were planted with rubber, coffee and rice. Tin and coal were mined in abundance in Tonkin (Godemont, 1997). In 1874, through the signing of the Pangkor Agreement, the British administration was officially established in the entire Malay Peninsula (Andaya, 1982). From the peninsula, they exported forest and ocean products, tin, pepper and gambier (Andaya, 1982). These were later replaced by tin, coffee, sugar and cotton. In 1905, there was a great demand for rubber and tin (Andaya, 1982).

For the Spaniards in the Philippines, tobacco was successfully cultivated in the Cagayan Valley area (McCoy, 1982). Sugar cane plantations in Pampanga were established and sugar was processed for export (Larkin, 1972). In Iloilo and Negros, sugar also proved lucrative (Gonzaga, 1991). In the Bicol region, abaca was cultivated for cordage, which was then sent to ports in Manila, hence the name “manila hemp” (Owen, 1984).

For Vietnam and the Malay Peninsula, the objective of the colonizers was to acquire as much land as possible to establish plantations where cash crops were produced in huge volumes and sold in Europe, where new technology aided in more efficient processing of the crops (Beeson, 2009). European colonization created a huge unexpected demand not only for crops and minerals, but also for peasants to work on the lands and plantations, industries and commercial establishments in newly created urban centers.

Impositions of Colonial Rule. French colonial rule resulted in peace and order along the China, Vietnam border, piratical attacks ceased, roads, bridges and forms of infrastructures were constructed and reconstructions undertaken while in Hue, the Vietnamese Emperor was deposed and a twelve year old boy was installed (Godemont, 1997). Local administrators down to the village level were retained by the colonial governor. The eminent right of the Vietnamese Emperor to the lands was taken by the French, they imposed taxes on conquered areas, while the preservation and observance of rites and rituals of the courts were retained by the Vietnamese administration (Woodside, 1976).

In the Malay Peninsula, Melaka (present day Malacca) was first captured by the Portuguese in 1511, then by the Dutch and finally, the English (Andaya, 1982). A British Resident was assigned to the Malay Peninsula, but the office and powers of the Malay Sultan were recognized. He was the symbol of unity in specific geographic areas, he held court and observed the social hierarchy. Rules on social relations, ceremonial rites, rituals and practices, colors and styles of dresses were strictly observed (Triantafillou, 2004). Islam dictated the political, economic and social actions of the Malays (Osborne, 1979). Management of government down to village level was left to the local heads. The British Residents asked for advice and consulted with the sultans on the matters of the state through letters, treatises, ceremonies and rituals except in the aspect of taxation (Harper, 1999). Even during the British colonization, the Sultan and his administrators were still the legitimate rulers of the Malay Peninsula (Weiss, 2014).

The population of the *barangays* that submitted to the Catholic doctrines lived closer to each other at a designated place where the Catholic Church was constructed, this place is known as the *reduccion* (Agoncillo, 1980). Baptism of the natives differentiated the local people who submitted to colonization as opposed to those who refused. Missionaries were the symbols of colonization because they were the only Spaniards in areas far from the cities (De Jesus, 1980). The *barangays* were headed by the *Datu*, now called *Cabeza de barangay*. *Barangays* put together made up a town, headed by a *gobernadorcillo* (Corpuz, 1997). All lands surrounding the Church were apportioned according to the number of Catholic taxpayers while the *Cabeza de barangay* collected taxes and retained part of the tax collection. The peasants paid taxes to support the local leaders and the colonizers (Le Roy, 1968).

Colonization of Vietnam, the Malay Peninsula and the Philippines was made more efficient, durable and peaceful through the recruitment and collaboration of the native ruling class. Traditional practices were observed, their offices provided the maintenance of the traditional ways beneficial both to the local people and to the western colonizers. For the maximum exploitation of the natural resources, cheap labor of the Vietnamese and Filipinos were used while for Malay Peninsula, the British Resident used migrant Chinese and Indian labors.

These colonial experiences added to the bank of shared memories, the continued observance of common traditions and hopes reinforced their sense of identity and the peoples' attempts to maintain community unity. These elements ensured the continued survival of a group of people as they related to other groups of people, for instance, the European colonizers.

Loss of Dignity in their Homeland. In Vietnam, the separate, independent and self-sufficient Vietnamese villages lost their lands when the French undertook massive and very repressive military campaigns starting from Cochin China (lands around the Mekong Delta), to the surrender of the imperial capital, Hue and the conquest of Tonkin (McAlister, 1971). Lands were confiscated from the peasants, these were divided and rented out from five to twenty five years (Pham, 1985). Peasants were not aware of this situation, if they were, they had no cash to pay for acquisition of lands. There were wealthy Vietnamese who were able to pay and allowed to purchase a maximum of fifty hectares, while Europeans and other foreigners were allowed to acquire as much as three thousand hectares (Pham, 1985). Vietnamese peasants were uprooted from their villages and moved to forest areas where they were tasked to clear. Once cultivated, these lands were confiscated and sold to those who desired to establish plantations. The cultivation of rice was replaced by more profitable crops like poppy (for the production of opium, which was sold to China), jute, coffee, tobacco, pepper and tea (Pham, 1985). Mining permits were granted for the extraction tin and coal (Nguyen, 2007).

Vietnamese peasants legally lost their lands because they did not understand the French concepts of land ownership and did not know about French laws which were used in all government transactions. Colonization totally disregarded the traditions and customs of the Vietnamese. Like the French, the British administration constructed irrigation systems, roads, bridges and railroads from the coastal areas towards the interior parts of the peninsula (Andaya, 1982). As respect for the Malay traditions and their desire to maintain their subsistent form of agriculture, the British

administrators identified and classified lands reserved for the native Malays, otherwise, all other lands were sold and used for agricultural, commercial and mining purposes. These were sold to Europeans and Asians like the Chinese who paid for the lands (Loh Fook-seng, 1967). The Malay Reservation Enactment, legislated in 1913, set aside rice lands exclusively for Malay peasants. These lands cannot be leased, sold, mortgaged or used as payment to non-Malays (Roff, 1967). This was to ensure sufficient rice production to feed the increasing population in the Peninsula and that the Malays will not lose their lands (Loh Fook-seng, 1967). The Land Regulation for Negri Sembilan 1889, provided that Malay lands must be permanently owned only by identified Malay persons though lands may be inherited and occupied by his descendants (Loh Fook-seng, 1967). The Code of General Relations guaranteed that the cultivation of lands not identified as part of the Malay Reservations, were used for the cultivation of coffee, tea, sugar and later, rubber. These were granted to individuals or corporations who had the capacity to buy or rent land (Loh Fook-seng, 1967). The native Malays retained their rights to own and manage their lands, but there were few laborers to work on the lands. To answer this need, migration was encouraged to provide workers for rubber plantations (Indian laborers from Sri Lanka and southern part of India) and mining (Chinese laborers).

The Philippines was already occupied for more than a century by the Spaniards, but it was after the opening of the port of Manila (1834) to international trade when there was significant increase in economic activities in the islands (Corpuz, 1997). The Spanish concept that lands are privately owned was in direct contrast with the indigenous practice of lands for communal use. It was the old native families, using Spanish laws, who took for themselves the communal lands of the barangays (De Jesus, 1980). The friars were responsible for the successful conversion of the native population. Conversion to Catholicism caused the lands of the Philippine archipelago to become a possession of the King of Spain (Agoncillo, 1980). *Haciendas* were lands given to Orders as their reward. Provinces were subdivided among the friars for catechism purposes (Phelan, 1959). To have an income, parts of the *hacienda* were parceled and rented out as much as 400 hectares. Those who rented parcels of the *hacienda* were called *inquilino* (Schumacher, 1991). In turn, they hired *kasama* or farm workers. This situation produced a group of native population who did not own lands due to lack of resources, so they entered a contractual relationship with the *inquilino* to cultivate lands (Corpuz, 1997). As modern machineries were brought to the country, more lands were opened for cultivation for cash crops (Corpuz, 1997). As a reward for his successful conquest of lands, the Spanish soldier was awarded an *encomienda* or the right to manage the land of the King of Spain. In return, he was authorized to collect tributes from the natives (Halili, 2010). The native Filipinos lost their lands to the Spanish soldiers who caused their defeat and claimed the lands of the Philippines, thus legitimizing colonization. With the opening of the ports of Manila, the cultivation of cotton, indigo, spices, coffee, cocoa and tobacco was encouraged. It was the Americans, British and foreign traders who received the benefits of economic prosperity (Fast, 1979).

Lands in Southeast Asia became private properties with European colonization, it became a commodity that may be owned, leased or sold, but it was the majority population who lost their rights to use and enjoy the benefits of their land. The fundamental issue in the struggles against the western colonizers was to regain their historical homeland.

Participation of the People

The Vietnamese movements on the arrival of French colonizers were in various forms of resistance and cooperation. In the early years, heads of villages and others loyal to the Vietnamese Emperor refused to surrender, they refused to recognize the French installed emperor (Christie, 1998). When Hue finally surrendered, many Mandarins escaped and several they refused to cooperate with the French. They issued decrees in the name of the Vietnamese Emperor, they called for resistance against the foreigners and encouraged the people to rise in arms against the invaders. In Hanoi, it was mostly the peasants who heeded their call. Their opposition was fierce, their instinct to resist foreign invasion justified their actions. Every village had a leader sympathetic to actions against the colonizer, but sadly, there was no organized, national plan during these years (Truong, 1967). What the Vietnamese fought for was the concept of an ideal Confucian Emperor. Through their actions, the Emperor must prove to the people that they were worthy of the title (Marr, 1971). Peasants from all regions of Vietnam unceasingly fought against the French from 1887 through 1913 (Woodside, 1976). From the start of French colonization, it was mostly the peasants who lost their lands and the promise of reclaiming these as a reward was a strong motivation for their intense resistance. The peasants attacked the Vietnamese Catholics, burned their villages, destroyed their properties. The Catholic Vietnamese and those who cooperated with the French were branded as traitors (Pham Ngoc Mien, 1969). The French seized the Vietnamese lands, they imposed taxes on the lands, on their produce and even on the native crafts made by the peasants. The lands that the Vietnamese peasants cleared were also taken from them and sold to able individuals/corporations. Every step of the agricultural process was monetized, so the peasants lost their little money, too. To pay for the obligations imposed, they borrowed from creditors with high rates. The peasants fell very deep into the trap of unending debts without any means of extracting himself and his family. (Nguyen, 2007).

By 1900, resistance have weakened because their leaders were betrayed and executed (Pham Ngoc Mien, 1969). Through their unceasing uprisings, it was the peasants who showed their intense love for their historic homeland, for their fellow Vietnamese, they struggled to uphold their cultures, traditions and customs. The persistent peasant uprisings across Vietnam were expressions of their grievances and their means of coping with the changes imposed by colonization because it was the peasants who experienced the misery and poverty resulting from the destruction of the villages and the loss of their livelihood (Woodside, 1976).

The construction of infrastructures enabled the people to move to cities as they were recruited to work or they moved to cities for work. Miners were needed, plantation workers were needed, construction workers were in high demand. These Vietnamese made up a new sector – the urban workers. The creation of cities and industries did not improve the living conditions of the Vietnamese because working conditions were not fit for human condition (Nguyen, 2007). In 1919 and the years before the Great Depression, the profits of plantations and mining companies soared, but the Vietnamese remained in their impoverished state (Nguyen, 2007). The loss of their lands and the monetization of every step in the process of agriculture resulted in the destruction of villages, totally changing the lives of the Vietnamese peasants.

The Malays, on the other hand, channeled their efforts less on uprisings but on literary works. Love stories, poems, essays and others were published. From 1900-1940, there were more than forty newspapers in the Malay language (Harper, 1999). The discussion of love in the lonely hearts column eventually turned to discussions of different kinds of love, particularly the love for their homeland (Harper, 1999). Malays verbalized their feeling of having the least opportunities in their own homeland, they struggled for equal opportunities and shares in the resources of Malaya side by side with migrant foreigners like the Chinese and Indians (Emerson, 1964). There were few violent uprisings like the anti-British uprising in 1875-1876 in Perak, the Pahang War of 1891-1895, the Kelantan uprising of 1915 and the Kreta Ayer riot of 1927 (Harper, 1999). The *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (KMM) was established, an organization of the young Malays whose objective was to free Malaya from colonization and provide equal opportunities for the Malays (Andaya, 1982).

The intensity of resistance of the native Filipinos against the Spaniards was manifested by continuous uprisings, participated by those who lost their lands due to the acquisition of the Orders (Jacoby, 1961). There were lands donated by the *principalia* to the Orders and when these lands were donated, there were existing communities living and working on the lands. In spite of strong resistance, the natives became part of the donation. From the people of Cagayan Valley, the Mountain Province and the Visayas islands the native population strongly resisted the *reduccion*. The use of military force and the attempts of the friars to convert the native population were often met with virulent hostility (Phelan, 1959). At the friars' *hacienda*, there were widespread, intense resentment against excessive rents (Roth, 1977). When the peasants refused to pay rent, their lands were declared vacant and offered to others who can pay rent. Common lands were claimed by the Orders, even water areas were ordered closed (Roth, 1977). In Cagayan Valley, the *gobernadorcillos* and *Cabeza de barangays* were dragged to the plazas and were whipped in public "in the manner they used to whip the commoners" (De Jesus 1980, 121). In some places, the native Filipino commandant was flogged by the natives and the population who refused to pay taxes (Foreman, 1980). In many instances, the natives refused to face the incoming Spaniards by retreating to the mountains and forests (Phelan, 1959). In some wealthy provinces like Bulacan and Pampanga, high quota of rice was imposed, but farmers were forced to sell to the government at very low prices, but the government failed to pay anything at all (Roth 1977). There was a huge demand for sugar, tobacco, cotton, indigo, coffee, spices and cocoa. It was the Chinese mestizos who bought harvests from native cultivators, they constructed refineries and sold the processed products to European and American traders. For the natives, they invested hours in planting, nurture and harvest, but they were paid very low price (Fast, 1979). Another source of grievance was the native Filipinos who worked with the Spaniards in the military. They received accolades from the colonizers because of superior bravery and valor in military pursuits. Spanish military forces in the Philippines were composed of native Filipinos with a person or two Spanish commanders but they treated their fellow Filipinos harshly causing deep distrust (Phelan, 1959). Though there were places which submitted to colonization like Manila, Ilocos region, Pangasinan, Cavite, even as far as Surigao in 1629, the natives bitterly fought against the foreigners (Foreman 1980).

The continuous uprisings by the majority the people in the provinces in the Philippines was a manifestation of their desire to ease the inhuman burden of agrarian impositions.

Findings and Conclusion

This study presented the common colonial experiences of Vietnam, the Malay Peninsula and the Philippines. They created their myths, symbols, and cultures acknowledged and practiced by the inhabitants of their historic homeland. They created their concepts of a leader who were generally benevolent, upright and virtuous because of the origins of their office. These leaders ensured that the lands were equitably distributed for the use of their people. All these traditional ways of living in a village were interrupted by western European colonization. The agricultural policies imposed by the French in Vietnam, the British in the Malay Peninsula and the Spaniards in the Philippines caused the loss of their lands. The colonizers stripped the leaders of their right to manage their own lands using European legal instruments. Lands of Vietnam, the Malay Peninsula and the Philippines were sold to other foreigners. The native population lost their lands in their own homelands. Industrialization caused strong demand for cash crop which were grown in the soils of Southeast Asia. The monetization of every step of cultivation posed difficulties and eventually shackled the peasants into endless debts. The French, British and Spaniards profited from colonization while the collaboration of the native aristocratic class hastened colonization by maintaining the traditional social system. On the other hand, extreme poverty and misery of the majority of the peasant population resulted in continuous resistance in different forms like evasions, non-cooperation and outright violent uprisings throughout the colonized territories, manifesting their outright rejection. Colonization distinguished between the colonized population who were the native population who had a language, cultures, and symbols opposite to the Europeans who did not have any of their ways of life. Colonization heightened the differences among the Southeast Asians.

In this endeavor, in using published materials, this study came up with an alternative historical narrative with a focus on the activities of the ordinary people. European centered colonial literatures place a great challenge to this endeavor, but using the historical comparative analysis this allowed the writer to pick out common aspects and establish trends that are similar among the Vietnamese, Malays and Filipinos. Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines have similarities in their colonial experiences which can be incorporated and become an intrinsic part of their collective ethnic heritage. They can be flexible, they identify and borrow cultural items and adapt these to their own. Integration may be successful such that the enriched cultural heritage is passed on to the next generation.

In Vietnam, Ho Chih Minh declared independence from the French on September 02, 1945. The Malays refused the suggestion of the British administration so they marched through the streets of Kuala Lumpur and declared their independence on August 31, 1957. Philippines declared its independence from the Spaniards on June 12, 1898. These independence dates are not merely numbers, these reflect the struggles of the people, their sacrifices for their struggles to succeed, their assertion that they were the major participants in improving the condition of their life and the realization of their objectives.

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