

Southeast Asian Social Science Association

**SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

**Papers presented at the Second Academic Conference of the Association, December 18-23,
1972, Bangkok**

**Edited by Kasem Suwanagul
Jacques Amyot
Kramol Tonghamachar**

**THE RELEVANCE OF EXISTING THEORIES AND CONCEPTS FOR SOCIAL
SCIENCE
RESEARCH IN SOUTH EAST ASIA
BY
Dr. Ton That Thien¹**

I

Let me begin by making a confession: when I first accepted Dean Kasem Suwanagul's invitation to write a paper for this conference on the subject "The Relevance of Existing Theories and concepts for Social Science research in South East Asia", I was in a rather expansive mood and did not take the usual trouble of reading the title backwards to find out all its implications. As you can see of yourselves, the subject is very big and could not be dealt with adequately in a good size book, let alone in a paper of limited length. However, if we can trace the existing theories to their common sources, the job becomes more manageable. And those common sources are liberalism and marxism. In other words, the existing theories in theories in the social sciences can be considered essentially as variations on a liberal or a Marxist theme. This is the approach I have chosen. I am fully aware that is not perfect, but it is the only practical one open to me. I know of no other that can help me tackle a subject such as the one we have.

Now, when we speak of existing theories and concepts, i.e. theories and concepts in the social sciences, we immediately encounter two major problems: one has pitted the other scientists against the social scientists, and the other has been a cause of endless arguments among social scientists as well as among people interested in social affairs. The first is the old problem faced by all new sciences: that of qualification for status; more specially, it has to do with the question: on what ground can a social science be called "science!" The second problem is that of what theory or whose theory is best, and what is "best?" The first seems rather academic, and the second almost insoluble. Both are, however, very important to South East Asian scientists. So, let me try to shed some light on them.

We are familiar with the notion that science is systematic and objective knowledge, and that one of the main aims of scientific investigation is the discovery of "law" leading to accurate prediction. We are also familiar with the broad classification of sciences into natural sciences, questioning of the other sciences' claim to call their fields "sciences" because the latter cannot conduct systematic experimentation and be in a position to establish "laws", i.e. to say with unruffled confidence: "if Athen B". It is this inability to resort to systematic experimentation and the failure so far to make their sciences fully experimental which differentiate the social scientists - sociologists, anthropologists, social psychologists, historians, and even economists-rom the natural scientists.

The social scientists are at a relative disadvantage compared with the natural scientists for two main reasons:

¹ Vice-President of the Vietnamese Studies Center, Saigon.

1. As an isolated individual or as a group, a man is an intelligent being who can learn from experience, or who may let his emotions carry him away. In either case, he may, and usually does, behave differently when faced again with the same situation.
2. We can experiment as much as we like with inert matter, and repeated experiments may be costly, especially with expensive material, but the problem is essentially one of finance; we cannot, however, experiment with people, unless we have the right to play with their consent. Of course, there are people – fanatic revolutionaries or mad politicians –who think they have that right, and if they happen to wield power, they will not hesitate to conduct such experiments. If they succeed – which is not very often – they are called geniuses, national saviors and what not: if they fail they will be exiled, jailed executed, or put into an asylum, but meantime they will have turned the world into shambles – which is a much more frequent occurrence. The social scientists do not usually belong to either category: they do not usually possess power, at least, not so much of it for world shattering experiments, nor are they usually totally devoid of caution, humility, and moral sense. They know, too, the frontiers of politics and of sciences are fairly well defined. Max Weber has shed a flood of light on this problem in two well known essays: “Politics as a vocation” and “Science as a vocation”². There is a point of “thus far and no further” beyond which a scientist, as a scientist, cannot and will not proceed if he wishes to remain a scientist instead of becoming a politician. Some have crossed that Rubicon, and others will no doubt follow their trail, and with good reason when we consider the matter from the vantage point of southeast Asian with its dearth of clear headed and well-informed people. This is a very important problem, but I wish to leave it aside for the time being to proceed with the discussion of the question of science and experimentation.

If we cannot experiment with the same degrees of freedom as the natural scientists, if the social sciences be fully experimental and quantitative, we are still bound to observe the canons of science: thorough and methodical observation, careful analysis, rigorous and consistent reasoning, rational explanation, objective and logical conclusion, and elegance of presentation. I personally do not think that a science need be one hundred per cent experiment, or quantitative, to be entitled to be called science. (History is a case in point). So long as we observe the canons listed above, we need not worry about what the natural scientists will say or think of us; nor should we take too seriously their claim that their sciences are objective, “value free”, whereas ours are not. (I wonder whether the fabrication of nuclear or laser weapons and the culture of mass exterminating germs on command are really “value free”). What we should worry about is rather the insistence by the social scientists themselves that the social sciences should be “value free”, and especially their claim that their works are “value free”. This is a fundamental problem for us, South East Asian social scientists, especially in discussing the existing theories of social sciences which, as stated above, can be traced back to their common sources—liberalism and marxism.

II

I am probably correct in saying that all or almost all of us holding professorial positions, especially senior ones, have been trained in the best universities and schools of Europe and America, at a time when the social sciences and indeed much else, were still under the strong dominance of liberalism. The majority of the professors we had, of the lecturers we heard, of the books we read, indeed the whole social milieu in which we lived, bore the imprint liberalism, in its deep XIX century hues or in its lighter colours of the first half of the XX century. Our intellectual background is trivium, quadrivium,³ and at the university level, humanism - - either literary or scientific. We were taught, like the educated of the West, to prize mental agility and articulation, individual freedom, parliamentary democracy, faith in progress and in science as the instrument of progress and of the liberation of man etc..... This educational background is very well analyzed by Georges Gusdorf in *Pourquoi des Professeurs*⁴, and more recently by two

² H.H Gerth and C. Wright Mills: *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, third impression, 1927 (first 1948), Chapters IV and V

³ Trivium: grammar, rhetoric and dialectic. Quadrivium: arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy

⁴ Georges Gusdorf: *pourquoi des Professeurs*, Paris, Payot, 1963

young French authors, Frederic Bon and Michel Antoine Burnier in *Les Nouveaux Intellectuels*⁵, a penetrating study of the end of the liberal intellectuals, against the background of the rise of the technocratic intellectuals and the rebellion of the technician intellectuals.

I do not wish to give the impression that I think liberalism was the only philosophy to which we were exposed during our student day in the Western world. Marxism, too was thrust upon our attention in many ways, and whether we were attracted by it or not, we could not ignore its existence or growing influence. Whether we read politics, history, sociology, or economics, - marxism in its manifold forms - - British, Soviet, French, Chinese - - becomes a subject of interest, or was unavoidably prescribed study for our degrees.

For most of us, college is now some twenty years in the past. This means that we were exposed to marxism at a time when it was triumphant in a number of countries and stirring hard in others. It was the time when the shadow of the Soviet Union was hanging over Europe and its voice could be heard loudly all over the world; it was the time of the triumph of the Chinese communists and the Sino-Soviet alliance, of communist success in Indochina and communist-inspired turbulence in Malaya. The post-war period was a period of economic planning and social equalization were the accepted policies of many nations, and one could not ignore the experience of the pioneer or the militant states in these fields: the Soviet Union and the East European people's Democracies. But marxism, like liberalism before it, or any other doctrine in history, is subject to erosion of time and changes.

Those of us who kept up their interest in marxism could watch those changes and find the best explanations for them from prominent communists themselves. These have provided us with a more readable literature than the vituperative denunciations of marxism and communism by those who had a vested interest in the maintenance of capitalism and imperialism. We have, for example, the very enlightened exposures of communism by communist militants and intellectuals like Milovan Djilas or Roger Garaudy. The first is well known through his widely read book *The New Class*⁶. The second is a member of the Central committee of the French Communist Party expelled because of his denunciations of Soviet and Chinese communism which he considered perversions of Marxism. His book *Le Grand Tournant du Socialisme* (*The Big Turning of Socialism*)⁷ throws a great deal of light on the dark side of communism. The big events of the past few years (invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet armed forces, the Sino-Soviet split, the internal turmoil in China leading to the demotion of Liu Shao Shi, the death of Lin Biao and the turnabout in China's relations with the Soviet Union and the United States) have unavoidably compelled us to revise our ideas about marxism and communism.

Marxism and liberalism were the answers to the problems of western society at two different stages of the history, more precisely in the first and the second phases of the Industrial revolution. Now, in the post-industrial era, marked by fast technological development, affluence, and globalism, both liberalism and marxism have become more inadequate to meet the challenge of new problems which have arisen,⁸ and the western nations are searching for new, more relevant and effective concepts, theories and techniques, especially techniques of social organization, to ensure continued progress or to avoid break down. It is now realized that the West's social skills are lagging behind its technological skills, as Elton Mayo has said:

*"We have failed to train students in the study of social situations; we have thought that first class technical training was sufficient in a modern and mechanical age. We are technically competent as no other age in history has been; and we combine this with social incompetence."*⁹

L.F. Urwick, from whose book the above passage was quoted, adds that the West's "social skills" have failed to keep up with its technical skills, and this has led to another European war.

⁵ Francois Bon and Michel – Antoine Burnier, *Les Nouveaux intellectuels*, Paris, Seuil, 1971 (1966), in particular chapter II This book can be considered an up-to-date complement to Harold Laski's *The Rise of European liberalism*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1962 (1936)

⁶ Milovan Djilas, *The New Class*, New York, Praeger, 1957

⁷ Roger Garaudy, *Le Grand Tournant du Socialisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969

⁸ On this, see Redoven Richta *La Civilisation au Carrefour*, Paris, Anthropus, 1961

⁹ Elton Mayo, *The Social Problems of an Industrial Civilisation*, London Routledge and Kegan Paul; 1949 p. 120, cited by L.F. Urwick in *Leadership in the Twentieth Century*, London, Pitman, 1965 (1957), p.24.

Because the West dominated the world for so long, its concepts, theories, techniques - - old and new, liberal and marxist - - have spread to the rest of the world and become predominant there also. This is true of South East Asia, as of other parts, and it may have occurred to some of us the students of social sciences, whether university graduates or self-taught western-returned or locally educated, have been, too a greater or lesser extent, the agents of this spread, because most of the existing literature in the social sciences is dominated by western thinking or is of western origin. It surely has occurred to some of us also that if people in the West have found their concepts, theories and techniques - - liberal or marxist - - irrelevant or inadequate in helping them cope with their present day problems, we may suspect that they are also irrelevant to the study and solution of the problems of South East Asia, because they have been devised for the study and solution of the problems of western society whose geographical, historical, cultural and psychological backgrounds are very different from those of South East Asia.

We cannot blame western teachers or writers for this irrelevance because, for after all, it is the business of the western universities to spend time, money and energy on researches aimed primarily at the understanding and solution of the problems of western society, and not to those of South East Asia. If South East Asian problems were studied, they were studied only incidentally, as offshoots of the problems of the west. The focus always remained the interests of the Western peoples, and if South East Asian problems came under study, it was essentially in the furtherance of the interests of the western peoples. There is nothing cynical or malicious about it, and we should feel neither shocked nor surprised by it.

It is natural that the kinds of problems studied in western universities, the contents of those problems, the angles of approach, the methodologies adopted, the conclusions arrived at were essentially tailored to suit the needs, desired, or biases of the West. The basic assumptions were western. Often, these assumptions were unstated, but we are now aware of it. Thanks to the works of Max Weber, Gunnar Myrdal, and more recently Alvin W. Gouldner, the ideological traps hidden in the works of the dominant figures in the social sciences have become a great deal more detectable¹⁰. Of course, there was Marx, too. In his radical way, he was one of the first who had drawn attention to the existence of this problem in his analysis of ideologies.

In the field of social sciences, the danger of following the wrong trail, because of our unawareness of the ideological assumptions hidden in the so-called “value-free” works, is great. Gouldner has called them (domain assumptions” (“back ground assumptions....which are the metaphysics of a domain....”) in Myrdal’s simpler language, they are the “value premises” (“value-loaded concepts”) underlying social theory. (Myrdal refers to economics whereas Gouldner to sociology). Weber calls them “value axioms”. Two examples will show us how the value assumptions in fact operate.

In economics, the doctrine of the perfect market - - one of the main pillars of liberalism - - represents, says Myrdal, “more than a theoretical tool for economic analysis, namely a valuation of how society ought to operate. From this political angle the significant characteristics of the classical construction refer naturally more to the beneficial effects expected to the participants in an economy that adhered to the doctrine.....”¹¹ Those who benefited from the free markets are naturally the fittest, as is very clear from the illuminating work of John Kenneth Galbraith. The New Industrial Estate,¹² are those who actually control the big corporations and manipulate the market on a national and international scale to increase profits in order to maintain their status and power. On this latter point, we have a very penetrating book by Louis Turner, *Invisible Empires* (of which unfortunately only a French translation has been available to me under the title *Le Capital International: Les Societies Multinationals*)¹³

¹⁰ Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, (translated by Edward Shils and Henry A Finch), Glencoe, Illinois, the Free Press, 1994. Gunnar Myrdal, *Value in Social theory: A selection of Essays on Methodology*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958. Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, London, Heineman Paperbacks, 1971 (1970)

¹¹ Myrdal, op. cit., p.4

¹² John Kenneth Galbraith, *The new Industrial Estate*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1967

¹³ Louis Turner, *Le Capital International*, Paris, Arthaud, 1971 (original edition: *Invisible Empires*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1970.)

In sociology we encounter functionalism which is linked with the name of Talcott Parsons and Gouldner. This study is highly enlightening because for so long Parsons has dominated American sociology¹⁴. Functionalism, Gouldner points out, dodged the problem of “exploitation”. “Functionalism thus served to defined existing social arrangements on non traditional grounds, against the criticism that they were based on power of force”. In anthropology, that seemingly innocuous science, functionalism largely chose to ignore the modern problems such as the development of modern socialism, industrialism, the class struggle, and above all, the problems of imperialism and of the conditions underlying the native struggles for national independence. The functionalist anthropologists, says Gouldner, shied away from those problems not because of lack of opportunity, but rather because “this anthropology operated within the context of an imperialism and colonialism that were under increasing pressure” ... Anthropological Functionalism based itself on the study of dominated cultures, many of which were still far from national independence and industrialization, a goal which their colonial administrators did not want them to approach.”¹⁵

Another sociologist who takes issue with functionalism is C. Wright Mills. He cautions us against concerning ourselves with the small changes needed to maintain the equilibrium of a social system instead of changing the structure of the system itself. This is what he calls the connection between biography and history. He points out that “many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues- - and in terms of the problems of history making’, that “the problems of social science, when adequately formulated, must include both troubles and issues, both biography and history...”¹⁶ Mills mercilessly assaults the “grand theory” which Parsons expounded in *The Social System*. He says that:

The Social System is “50 per cent verbiage: 40 per cent is well-known textbook sociology...the remaining 10 per cent is possible - - although rather vague - - ideological use”¹⁷. Let it be said in passing that Mills never reached, or was never allowed to reach, full professorship status, just like Thorsten Veblen before him, for challenging the views of what we might call “The establishment” in *Sociology in America*, which focused its attention on the problems of integration and the maintenance of equilibrium rather than the problems of conflict and change- - especially of structural or revolutionary change. This last mentioned problem should be a major concern of us, South East Asian social scientists, because we live in an age and a region which call for change. But change of what, into what, and for whose benefit? Here we touch upon the fundamental concept of social purpose.

All of us surely remember how, during our college years, it was impressed upon us that science is science and that as scientists we must stick to judgments of facts and avoid judgments of value. Science, we were told, should be “value free”. If this means that we should not allow our personal feelings and preferences to interfere without work, I fully agree. But I cease to agree when we are told that we should not concern ourselves with what kind of work we do, or what is done with the results of work i.e. we should not concern ourselves with the problem of purpose, that as social scientists, we should do the work we are commanded or paid to do, deliver the results of our researches, and wash out our hands of the rest. This concept of “value free” science, and especially of “value free” social science, is unacceptable to us, South East Asian Scientists because, as stated above, our region needs change, and as social scientists, we are in the forefront of the agents of change..

The most important changes needed by our peoples lie in the social field. For this reason, social concepts, social theories, social structures, social techniques require thorough reexamination, modification, or complete replacement. As social scientist, we more than scientists form other fields, play a vital role in the process of change, because we are supposed to be better equipped than they to provide the guiding ideas. We can be of great service, or of great disservice, to our peoples, depending on whether we can produce relevant and practical solutions. This means that we must apply the tools which we have acquired in the West or from the West - - scientific

¹⁴ A survey conducted by Gouldner reveals that eighty per cent of the American sociologists are Parsonian. Thus, when South East Asian students come to the United States of study sociology, it is mostly Parsonian sociology - - functionalism - - that they study

¹⁵ – Ibid -, pp.130 – 31

¹⁶ C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological imagination*, London, Oxford University Press, 1959, p.224

¹⁷ – Ibid -, p.49

analysis - to the study of South East Asian problems, in the national and regional contexts of South East Asia. The kind of problems we choose to study, the definition and delimitation of those problems, the methodology we adopt for the analysis of those problems, the solutions we propose, must be dictated by the needs and aspirations of our peoples. We cannot have science just for the sake of science. Our science must be for the sake of our peoples. The concept of “value free” science should have no place in a South East Asian social scientist’s mind. Strangely enough; these realities seem to have received insufficient emphasis in our universities. The concepts, theories, models, methodologies developed by western social scientists - - whether liberal or marxist - - the syllabuses, textbooks and other material intended for the western students, continue to be used without reservation or discrimination, although the central concerns of the West - - overaffluence, overtechnology, overquality, and overleisure - - are not the central concerns of South East Asia, which are more food, more technology, more equality and more employment.

We would follow the wrong trail if we adopted western sciences, and especially the western social sciences wholesale. What we should do is to develop our own social sciences with our own concepts, theories, models, methodologies terminologies and especially purposes. We have been taught to manipulate concepts, theories, methodologies, and terminologies relative to our fields, all with a western content or coloration, guided consciously or unconsciously by western – liberal or marxist - “value assumption”. We should adopt or devise new concepts, theories, methodologies, and terminologies with South East Asian” value assumptions”. We should feel no shame or qualms about it. To work scientifically does not mean to work without a sense of purpose, and our purpose must be the service of the peoples of South East Asia, their liberation from misery, oppression, whether foreign or home made. But work scientifically we must, because this is a condition of the relevance of what we do.

III

We are all familiar with the dichotomy science-philosophy. Science deals with means. Philosophy deals with ends. As John MacMurray puts it, “science is instrumental knowledge¹⁸”, it cannot tell us what to do only how to do it * footnote. But if science is an instrument, then the instrument must be shaped to serve the purpose intended. Thus, the social sciences in South East Asia must serve definite South East Asian social purposes - - the liberation and advancement of the peoples of South East Asia. The researches of South East Asian social scientists and the concepts, theories and techniques devised by them must serve the above ends. Social philosophy must precede social researches and guide them throughout¹⁹. But the social purposes sought are best served when our social researches fully respect the rules of scientific work L.T. Hobhouse has said:

“Grave confusions arise when issues of fact are coloured by judgment of value; but when facts are completely and accurately stated it is reasonable to essay their evaluation, and this is the proper task of philosophy social.

Thus the whole field of society can and should be treated scientifically, and when scientifically understood, can and should be reviews philosophically. There is no objection to either method itself, but only to a confusion of the two”²⁰

There should be constant review of the interplay of means and ends. If the means shape the ends, there are cases when the ends themselves are shaped by the means. Not all ends are attainable, because the non-availability, insufficiency, or inappropriateness of the means required do not allow us to pursue certain ends, at least temporarily. This aspect of the problem is very well stated by Weber:

“The question of the appropriateness of the means for achieving a given end is undoubtedly accessible to scientific analysis. In as much as we are able to determine (within the present limits

¹⁸ On science as an instrument to serve our purposes see John MacMurray short but penetrating book Religion, Art and science, Liverpool, Liverpool, University Press, 1961, p.16

¹⁹ On this, see T.S. Simey, Social Science and Social Purpose, London, Constable, 1969

²⁰ L.T. Hobhouse, Sociology and Philosophy, London, London school of Economics, 1966, p.30

of knowledge) which means for the achievement of a proposed end are appropriate or inappropriate, we can in this way estimate the chances of attaining a certain end by available means. In this way we can indirectly criticize the setting of itself as practically meaningful (on the basis of existing historical conditions) or as meaningless with reference to existing conditions.”²¹

We can propose policies and programs to our governments and publics, but these policies and programs must be feasible (considering the resources available to the nations of our region), acceptable to our peoples (in terms of the costs - - physical and moral- - they have to bear), and truly serving their needs and aspirations.

It is with the above in mind that I have adopted a very caution, even suspicious attitude towards liberalism and marxism. Each in its way has its attractive, even fascinating and alluring aspects, but if adopted in its totality, it may not be the real answer to the problems of our region; it may even lead to disaster, not only because, as I have said earlier, liberalism and marxism were devised primarily to meet the problems of western society, but also because they have been overtaken by new developments and are no longer suitable as answers to the new problems which are besetting the world today. As Mills has said, liberalism and marxism “have virtually collapsed as adequate explanations of the world and of ourselves.... Marxism has become a dreary rhetoric of bureaucratic defense and abuse; and liberalism, a trivial and irrelevant way of masking social reality.”²²

Yet, the liberal and Marxist philosophies are still the existing predominant philosophies. Most of the concept, theories, terminologies prevalent in the social sciences are built on liberal or marxist “domain assumptions”, and many people, and not the least intelligent or least intelligent or least educated, absorb them without being aware of it, or worse, without being aware of the dangers they bring down on their countries by espousing liberal or Marxist ideas wholesale.

Let me give you an example I know really well, that of my own country. Vietnam has been blown to bits, its population decimated, its internal and external affairs dominated by foreign powers, because one section of the Vietnamese believes one hundred per cent in the virtues of marxism, while another one believes one hundred per cent also in the virtues of liberalism. To achieve the liberal or marxist ends - - individual freedom, private profit and free enterprise on the one hand, and social good and state control on the other - - they have restored to a war in which everything, liberal or marxist, is buried under vast heaps of burning ruins.

The intelligentsia of my country bears a large share of responsibility for what happened because its members had adopted and preached either liberalism or marxism - - with their concepts, theories, techniques and terminologies - - without a thorough investigation of those doctrines and their relevance to Vietnam. Neither of those doctrines is bad in itself or on its entirety; the two are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. This is what has led to the compromise settlement resulting from the Paris talks. Without a recognition that neither liberalism nor Marxism can secure a monopoly in Vietnam because neither fully meets the needs and the aspirations of the Vietnamese, such a settlement would have been impossible.

You will surely agree with me that it would have been far better to Vietnam if the Vietnamese intellectuals had reversed their process of thought and action, and had been aware of the irrelevance of some, or of much of what they had learned in western universities or books, and adopted an attitude of caution in regard to both liberalism and marxism before advocating any of them, or fighting because of them. But not all intellectuals are social scientists. Any way, there are not enough social scientists in Vietnam, and not all have been taken the trouble of looking at the problem in the perspective I described above.

In this connection, is I should mention another mistake committed by many in this part of the world: the total rejection of the so-called traditions, that is the wisdom of our ancestors, especially in political and social matters. Centuries of thought, toil, and suffering on the South East Asian soil had led our ancestors to evolve certain patterns of political and social

²¹ Weber, The methodology of the Social Sciences pp.52-53

²² Mills, op, Cit. pp. 166-67

organization. Those patterns survived for long because they were well suited to the local conditions. True, those patterns have been broken since the invasion of the West. But their value should now be reassessed because since South East Asia started embracing western ideas and methods of political and social organization, it has known no real peace and stability.

I am not saying that everything done by our fathers is perfect, and I am not advocating a full return to the pre-European days. That would be foolish. I simply want to suggest that before throwing the concepts, theories, and technique of social and political organization devised by our ancestors resolutely into the so-called “dustbin of history”, we should take a second, hard look at them. Unless this is done, we may discover one day that the greatest treasures of South East Asia, what can really sustain us in times of need, lie in the dustbin where we have thrown them.

I admit that I do not yet know the full answer to the question whether we should preserve our traditions, or which of them, or how much of each. But when I look at the stability of Thai society and the prosperity of Thai people, or the serenity of the Laotians and Cambodians (before it was shattered by the North Vietnamese and American massive interference there in the name of democracy or communism - - for which they do not really care- -), or the restoration of what is in fact an imperial government in China under the label of communism (not the decadent imperial government of the late Manchu years which is so well known to Europeans, but that of the Yao and Shun pattern by Confucius), I feel that somehow Western concepts, theories, and patterns of political and social organization are not what South East Asia really needs. Yet, we are urged to ‘modernize’- i.e. to westernize – there is something missing in the explanation of Asia through western concepts, theories and terminologies. The rise of (Maoist) China to the position of a real big power, and the ability of little North Vietnam to checkmate a giant like the United States, or example, have clearly demonstrated that it is not “oriental despotism” or lack of “democracy” which have been the fundamental causes of the weakness of Asia in the in the XIX century, as we are told. (It was lack of military technology, but this does not concern us here). Nor can the massive infusion of “know how” and capital, of technical and economic assistance, by itself make the South East Asian Nations strong, as the example of South Vietnam simply proves. Nor can communism alone ensure the peace, prosperity and progress of a people, as North Vietnam has now demonstrated.

Somehow, the real answer to the problems of South East Asia seems to me to lie in the spiritual and moral revival of the South East Asian peoples themselves. For this they need really good leadership. And it is within South East Asia, within the souls and hearts of the South East Asians themselves that we should search for the secrets of this spiritual and moral revival and making of leadership.

We need a great deal of research into our past to find out how our ancestors had solved the problems of their days, especially in situations of crisis. Considering the means at their disposal in their own time, the magnitude of their problems was surely not less than ours today

I think that finding out how our ancestors reacted when faced with difficult problems, how real leaders emerged in times of national crisis, how they ensured the survival and progress of their societies is much more instructive than looking towards the West, or taking the advice of western “advisers” who have no real stake in the fate of our countries, and especially no real understanding of our realities because of the ignorance of the psychology of our peoples. This is because even if they possessed empathy they would always lack the most powerful tool for this kind of analysis. That powerful tool is introspection.

We have, therefore, in addition to the scientific method borrowed from the West, a powerful tool at our command. We should use them to work for the advancement of our peoples. Our first step in carrying out this very important undertaking would be to fashion new effective and relevant concepts, theories and techniques for our research work. I do not advocate discarding western concepts, theories, methodologies and terminologies in total. That would be foolish, just as it would be foolish of us to discard the motorcar and the refrigerator because they are made by the West. What I advocate is the functioning of better, and if need be, new tools of research not only for our own use, but also for use by those in the West who are interested in really understanding South East Asia. In this way, we shall not only serve the interests of the peoples of our own region better, but we shall also contribute to the advancement of the social sciences in general.