

# Freedom WRITERS

**Young Asians' Call to Freedom**



# FREEDOM WRITERS

## Young Asians' Call to Freedom

*Celebrating the Fifth Anniversary of the  
Young Liberals and Democrats of Asia*

Published by:  
Young Liberals and Democrats of Asia (YLDA)

With the support of:  
Taiwan Foundation For Democracy (TFD)  
Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty (FNF)

December 2008

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*This publication was made possible through funding support from the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD) and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty (FNF).*

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*Published exclusively by Young Liberals and Democrats of Asia (YLDA), 7B Amorsolo St., San Lorenzo Village, Makati City, Philippines. December 2008. [www.yldasia.org](http://www.yldasia.org)*

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# Acknowledgements

The project team of *Freedom Writers 2008* would like to thank

- The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD) and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty (FNF), without whose aid this work would not be published
- The Executive Committee of the Young Liberals and Democrats of Asia (YLDA) for their enthusiastic encouragement and support
- Mr. Siegfried 'Siggi' Herzog, Resident Representative of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty-Manila (FNF-Manila), for the wisdom and guidance bestowed upon the Young Liberals and Democrats of Asia in Manila (YLDA-Manila)
- The secretariat staff of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats in Manila (CALD-Manila), for their unwavering encouragement and support
- Ms. Amy Hsieh of the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy and the members of the Taiwan Youth Democratic Union for their stalwart assistance in promoting liberal democratic ideals among the youth in Taiwan
- The International Federation of Liberal Youth (IFLRY) and Liberal Youth of South Asia (LYSA) for representing the liberal youth to the world and South Asia
- And finally, all our contributors without whom this book would not have been possible.

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# MESSAGE

December 8, 2008

In 2002, the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats held its first Young Leaders Workshop in Manila, Philippines. It was here that the idea for a federation of liberal youth organizations and individuals in Asia began. A year later in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, the Young Liberals and Democrats of Asia was formally founded. Since YLDA began, we have been working towards creating a strong network of young liberals in Asia and have been committed to developing liberal ideas and democratic principles in their respective countries. Our efforts have been focused on promoting a holistic and progressive education policy, a commitment to human rights and peace, a vibrant and open environment for dialogue and expression, and empowering the youth and encouraging participation. We are interested in fashioning excellent young leaders who will actualize freedom in Asia.

It is with great pleasure and excitement that the Young Liberals and Democrats of Asia present *Freedom Writers*, a book which commemorates our 5th Year Anniversary. It is a collection of essays written by the youth which serve as a benchmark for the progress we have made, and as a reminder of the progress we have yet to achieve. On behalf of YLDA's Executive Committee, we would like to thank all those who have made this publication possible: the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty, the project team, and of course the book's contributors. It is our hope that the thoughts of our young people engaged in the struggle for freedom will in turn inspire our own efforts and fuel our own passions to secure a better future for the Asian continent.

Jan-Argy Tolentino  
Secretary General  
Executive Committee  
Young Liberals and Democrats of Asia (YLDA)

# FOREWORD

YLDA is celebrating its 5th anniversary in a befitting style: by giving young liberals a voice. Its new book, *Freedom Writers: Young Asians' Call to Freedom* offers an interesting take on how young Asians look at the political world around them, at the current challenges, and at new paths to action.

The first part of this book deals with the topic of education and freedom. For young people, education is obviously a crucial topic that affects them in their daily life and in their opportunities to build a career. But education has a twin role: it is supposed to equip us with marketable skills that form the basis of economic and social opportunity. If it achieves this, education is the most potent form of social mobility. Education is also supposed to help us grow as human beings, to nurture values, and to aid towards the development of a well-rounded personality. This implies nurturing the distinctive voice of young people, which in turn requires freedom of expression. In a region where young people are often supposed to defer to their elders and keep their opinions to themselves, this is an aspect of education that remains a challenge.

The topic of "Asian Values and Human Rights" forms the second part of the book. Institutions that give shape to democracy and human rights in each country are shaped by culture, and hence take on a different hue. Some have argued that these concepts are so intrinsically Western that they are wholly unsuited to Asia. Others see in this argument a self-serving ploy of rulers to continue their dominance, unchallenged by restraints. The authors are trying to steer a path between these poles, stressing that the challenge remains to build institutions that draw strength from culture, while acknowledging that culture does change, and that sometimes it changes for the better.

Lastly, the book looks at "Youth Empowerment and Political Participation." Youth participation in politics has, throughout history, been an important ingredient in political change. Yet very often, drastic changes like the democratic revolutions that swept Asia in the late 1980's and early 1990's have turned out to be much more limited; the ills afflicting society have proven to be more durable, and the enthusiasm of the youth for change has been stymied by the forces of inertia and of entrenched power elites. How to build a credible commitment of young people to push for reforms with a sense of both passion

and patience is the central challenge of youth politics in the region. This book provides a few ideas on how to achieve it.

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty has been partnering with YLDA through these last five years. We share the dream to give young Asian liberals more opportunities to shape the future destiny of their countries based on the values of freedom and responsibility. We humbly hope that this book will provide some inspiration to all those who share these aspirations.

Siegfried 'Siggi' Herzog

Resident Representative

Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty - Manila

# INTRODUCTION: THE CALLING

Asia has always been a continent of and for the young. It is not by any accident that many of the leaders leading the modern struggles for freedom and democracy saw both the birth and culmination of their struggles in the region. From Benigno Aquino and Corazon Aquino in the Philippines, to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma and Dr. Chee Soon Juan of Singapore, great Asian freedom fighters have been helping swing the pendulum of freedom from dictatorships and authoritarian regimes towards democracy and freedom. Some have succeeded, and some have failed.

While this may be the case, the youth of Asia continue their march and their quest for freedom. It is against this backdrop of idealism and activism that the Young Liberals and Democrats of Asia (YLDA) was conceived. Now in its fifth year, the pan-Asian federation of liberal youth gives recognition to the thoughts and efforts of young Asian liberals by publishing a collection of essays on regional issues which directly affect them.

The goals of this book commemorating the birth of YLDA are:

- 1) To preserve, promote and shape the current Asian youth's political thought
- 2) To encourage greater youth involvement through writing, which in turn provokes thought and action
- 3) To stimulate critical discussion on the issues facing the youth of Asia

This work deviates from the usual practice of commemorative publications which tend to highlight past achievements. Instead, what you have before you is a compilation of thought-provoking essays that stresses challenges over successes, dissonance over harmony, and differentiation over unity. In sum, the book plays host to the competing ethos of Asian youth.

The first chapter on education and freedom of expression details the experiences and thoughts of our youth on education. The essays tackle head-on the assumption that education brings about knowledge, and with knowledge comes greater understanding. Using different analytical lenses derived from their distinct experiences, the three writers narrate both the struggles faced by Asian youth in acquiring education, and the difficulties they encounter in interpreting knowledge.

Renu Pokharna's observations from India belie the claim that education is a liberating

process that gives the young both the ultimate and proximate causes for development and freedom. Wendi Boxx however begs to differ from this observation, as her own story tells a completely different narrative for the students of Pardada Pardadi Educational Society (PPES).

While Pokharna describes an educational system that retards rather than develops critical thinking, Boxx recounts the liberation of PPES scholars from absolute poverty, ignorance, and the constricting impositions of traditional culture on women in India. Taking a different perspective, Arvin Ello's article on the power of creativity unleashed through art-education accentuates the power of education to bring forth greater desire for sharing and expression.

The second chapter shifts the discussion from education to the role of values in promoting democracy and human rights. Asians have always been known to nurture a strong bond with their respective families and communities. A few scholars however, see this communal attachment as an antithesis to the Western notion of individual liberty.

The first essay of the chapter discusses this issue at length. As Patrick Alcantara argues, "democracy requires a cultural aspect that could only be the result of continuously building a national identity." He further posits that "a democratic culture requires an active citizenry, and this can only be achieved by leaders and fellow citizens who are confident with their own identity and values."

While Alcantara identifies the cultural ingredients in Asia that are amenable to the dictates of Western democracy, Khang Woon Ong relates the discussion to the concept of civil society. His arguments speak of allowing Asian societies to take shape in the midst of globalizing forces and to let these societies decide their democratic fate without presupposing that their development should follow that of Western societies.

Dashell C. Yancha meanwhile, sees the youth as heirs to a cultural value that puts utmost importance on family ties and communal harmony. As such, Yancha argues that Asian youth can either revere or disapprove their culture as a conduit of and for democracy. She believes that Asian youth need to continuously rediscover their culture and allow some spaces for their values to be reshaped, since global changes require ideas to be constantly reworked.

Collectively, the essays in this section confront the main dilemma Asian youth face in the changing political and cultural landscape of Asia: how to strike a balance between individual values and community values.

The final chapter of the book explores the nexus between youth empowerment and political participation. As today's world looks more and more to its young people for direction towards the future, the youth find themselves in a quagmire as demonstrated by their inability to find meaning in the cacophony of voices calling for change. The varying

responses given by the three contributors of this chapter exemplify this divergence in opinions.

Pokpong Lawansiri traces the history and contributions of the student movement to democratization in Thailand. He asserts that if the student movement were to remain weak and their message incoherent, organizations with questionable fidelity to democratic values, such as the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), would inevitably capture the public space for dissent, and impose their own brand of democracy on the country.

Since the wave of democratic transitions that began in 1986, Filipino youth have played a crucial role in bringing forth political changes in the country. Their contribution in tilting the balance of democratic power however, did not always translate to expansion and the deepening of political participation by the youth in governance.

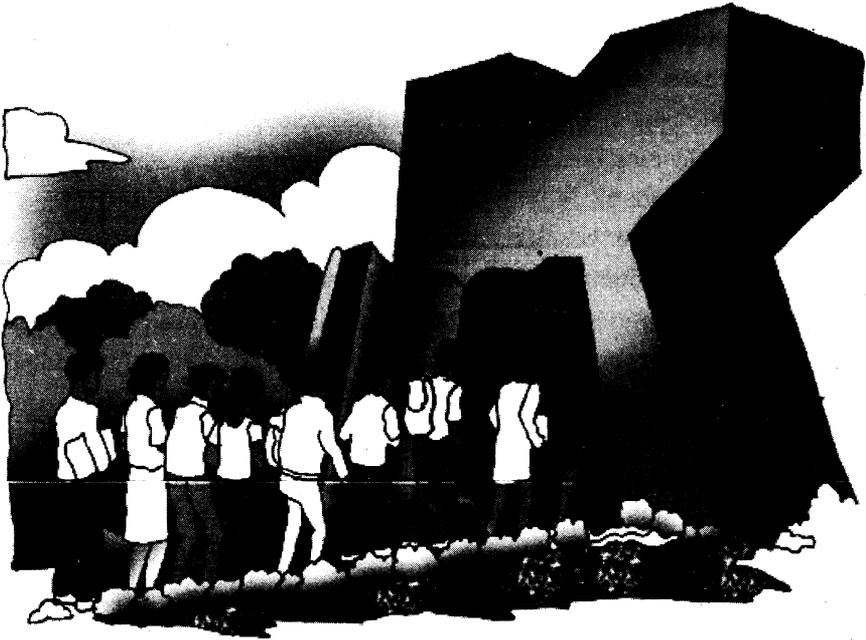
Vanessa Remoquillo and Mark Visda lament the sad fact that Filipino and Asian youth in general have yet to make serious inroads into their political institutions – institutions which are manned by political vanguards belonging to previous generations. While this may be the case, these two articles are far from painting a gloomy picture for the Philippines and its youth.

While both agree with the oft-cited reasons as to why many Filipinos want to leave the country, they assert that hope is found in the irrepressible activism and idealism of Filipino youth. Visda captures this belief, as he declares that many Filipino youth such as him choose to stay and continue to fight out of love for their country. In so doing, they continue to earn their scars. Yet, their faith and their loyalty to their nation remain intact and inviolable.

In sum, it is this message of hope and change delivered – and written – in the midst of the ever-changing political and social landscape of Asia, that this publication wishes to communicate. Indeed, despite an atmosphere of despair and surrender in many parts of Asia where the pendulum of governance swings back to authoritarianism, the call for change continues to reverberate, and the message of hope continues to ignite flames of idealism.

We have chosen the message. We have selected the essays. It is up to you now, the reader, to judge for yourself if you will heed the call of our youth for freedom, hope, and change.

# CHAPTER ONE



"The Knowledge Book"

# PREFACE: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, EXPRESSION OF FREEDOM

Neric Acosta  
Philippines

The link between freedom of expression and education cannot be more stark and evident. Education – beyond the teaching of basic skills and the attainment of literacy – is about the development of critical, creative thinking, which is deepened and sharpened in an atmosphere of freedom.

In a world of dizzying changes and real-time exchanges of ideas, carried on jet streams of new media and the internet, expression increasingly becomes an integral part of our modern lives. My twelve year-old son's generation is now growing up on technological digital staples such as YouTube, blogospheres, Ipods, online gaming, and Google. His generation takes it for granted that they can have, at their fingertips, not only a universe of information and knowledge on the web, but also the capacity to find expression for their talents and inclinations. It only takes the cursory uploading of a video clip on YouTube, or the creation of a new website or blog, to be connected with the world, and to have quite literally a voice in the world.

This is why it is the paramount responsibility of parents and teachers to ensure that their children and the youth of today are able to hone and channel their analytical thinking and creative energies towards productive, meaningful, and community-building pursuits. The power of the tools at their disposal is vast and far-reaching; at no other time in human history has there been such an exponential, democratic explosion of human ingenuity and expression, along with the freedoms to ensure spaces for these to flourish.

But it behooves us as well to protect those spaces through the promotion of democratic values and institutions. In authoritarian settings, governments still attempt to stifle expression and free speech, afraid of the potent reach and influence of new media. Yet nothing is more powerful, it is said, than an idea whose time has come. Freedom of expression in a democratic globalized milieu has unleashed a flowering of boundless innovations and the demands for greater democratization.

It is auspicious that this book goes to press as we mark December 10, 2008, the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – a document which recognizes and upholds freedom of speech and expression as a human right. This freedom finds greater fruition and meaning when combined with the right of every man, woman, and child to education.

It is said that democracy is strengthened and sustained in a society that puts a premium on a people's education. An educated populace means a free, enlightened, and informed electorate, who in turn put a high premium on the right to information and transparent government, on the capacity of leaders to address pressing issues and problems, and on the educative deliberation of issues and programs.

Freedom of expression, as such, is a cornerstone of democratic rights and freedoms, and is essential to the functioning of democracy and greater public participation in decision-making. This freedom is not just about verbal expression, as it is often understood, but more importantly it is about seeking, receiving, and imparting information and ideas—which is, along with free media and cyberspace, largely the domain of education.

The more we are educated, the more we gather or embrace a wealth of information and ideas which have to be shared, discussed, or debated within the spaces of free media and academia – in order to mobilize and inspire as many people as we can, and to ensure the accountability of our leaders and the sound functioning of our institutions. Given the liberating force of education, freedom of expression allows in turn, a fuller expression of freedom and democracy.

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*Dr. J.R. Nereus Acosta is the former Secretary General of the Liberal Party of the Philippines and has served as a representative of Bukidnon province in Northern Mindanao to the House of Representatives for three consecutive terms (1998-2007). Apart from his sponsorship of major environmental legislation on clean water, solid waste management, and biodiversity protection, he was the principal author of the groundbreaking Clean Air Act that has become a model of environmental legislation in Asia. An academic and civil society stalwart, he earned his PhD in Political Science from the University of Hawaii as an East West Center Scholar. Dr. Acosta is now Associate Professor at the Asian Institute of Management and the Ateneo de Manila University. He continues to be active in microfinance, rural development, and environmental protection projects in his native Bukidnon.*

# EDUCATION FOR CHANGE

Wendi Boxx

American

Location: Munich, Germany

## INTRODUCTION

Late in the autumn of 2006 and early into my stay and volunteer commitment in India, I was asked to go with the education scout of Pardada Pardadi Educational Society (PPES) into one of the numerous villages deep in Uttar Pradesh. This was a world away from the rapid modernization that had been overtaking India in recent years. We were there to scout for girls, and more importantly, to convince their fathers to let them come to school. I was asked to ride along for two reasons: as a white woman in a rural Indian village, the “spectacle” would help spread the word faster, and secondly, people would come to hear the message of Sam Singh, the industrialist-turned-idealist who returned to his village with the goal of educating rural Indian girls. Through this mission to educate girls in the countryside, Pardada Pardadi had started a movement that was positively transforming the poor rural Anupshara district, and was giving young talent the opportunity to shine. Most importantly, these gifted young women were being given a voice to declare defiantly: “I am not a burden.”

Pardada Pardadi translates into English as “grand parents.” The school name is used as a metaphor for the ancient Indian wisdom of knowledge and education, which can only blossom fully through the support of the entire community. The basis of the school’s ideology includes the tenets of equality, hard work, and opportunity for education for the poorest and most marginalized segments of rural Indian society. The PPES foundation not only

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encourages the idea of gender empowerment, but also supports inclusion and equality for female children in rural Indian society, in order for them to achieve social and economic strength. I thought about these concepts the first day I was taken to the village. I sat gazing into the face of a woman they told me was 27 years old, yet who looked many decades older. This woman had known no other life than that of poverty, she had never been given the chance to escape her predicament, and she had never had the opportunity to receive a formal education. Yet she, like many gathering around Sam, wanted a better life for their children.

On the way to this first village, I saw so much beauty, color, and tranquility in the rural countryside. I did not want to notice the crushing poverty. In the villages that dotted the landscape, women were making dung patties or carrying wood, tending animals or boiling milk. There was no electricity and the sewers were flooding the streets. At this first meeting, my focus was interrupted by children who had come to gawk at me, a few brave enough to touch this large white woman who was so conspicuous in their midst. They poked my feet as I sat cross-legged on the only piece of furniture in the family's house. When I did not stop their poking, they got braver and rubbed my foot. This made me ask why they were so interested in rubbing my skin. A woman from PPES responded: "They think you are painted, painted white." And so I started to see why they brought me along – a painted white woman was good for a turnout. A lot more people soon arrived and stood in the courtyard of the only house in the village where a girl goes to the PPES school. When they told me she was the only one, I had not yet realized what that meant, but surrounded by so many children, I started to see the tragedy of the situation. Only one among the many girls here had the chance to go to school.

Sam talked to the village elders in Hindi. Over the past six years, through these relentless and direct conversations, Sam has so far enrolled around 200 girls into his school. It was clear from the booming voices and expressions on the men's faces that there was still strong resistance to educate girls. Many thought it was a crazy idea, even dangerous to the future of the family. I heard comments like: "Educating a girl? But who will tend the cattle, make the dung patties, or watch the small children? We need her at

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home. Educate my son instead." I was struck by the reality that in 2006, women still have so far to go in this world. Here in the village, the basic right to education was closed to so many. This is the reality that Pardada Pardadi is fighting to overcome.

## ONE VISION CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Pardada Pardadi Educational Society (PPES) was founded in Anupshahr, Uttar Pradesh (UP), the boyhood home of Virendera Sam Singh, a retired top US manager of the Dupont Group. True to his community and cultural heritage, Sam feels a strong responsibility to his family's birthplace. As the father of two daughters, he also feels the need to address the issue of gender bias that is so clearly a problem in India. UP is one of the most populous states in India, yet it is also one of the least developed. Tragically, UP has an extremely low sex ratio of 898:1000 for females to males as compared to the national average of 933:1000. The main reason for this is due to female feticide, which is tragically the most common "cure" for an unwanted female child. Additionally, nutritional and economic disparities exist within family structures. It is not uncommon for male children to be given the larger share of food, and for female children to go entirely without food for days. Female children frequently experience violence both inside and outside the home as they are viewed and treated as burdens.

UP's entire state literacy rate is only 57%. Considering half of the population is illiterate, males outnumber females 2:1 in literacy. Drop-out rates for girls are as high as 58% in primary and upper primary schools. Young girls face various kinds of family neglect and gender discrimination on a daily basis. Sam Singh started PPES to improve their quality of life under the philosophy that if you teach the female child, you will educate the whole family. He started by focusing his efforts on the weakest and most impoverished sections of the region. Fundamentally, PPES is an effort to liberate female children. This is because without a chance to receive an education, female children will always be dependent on male family members for their livelihoods.

PPES initially started with 45 girls from the poorest families of Sam Singh's boyhood community. With the support of Sam, the girls received free education and vocational training

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to socially empower them, making them self-supporting members of their families. In just eight short years, the PPES model has proven successful. In 2008, PPES has grown to include more than 700 girls, and is planning to start a vocational and technical training school for boys in 2009 as well. The program has become invaluable to the students and their families. This has inspired PPES to expand their existing program throughout the country to those interested in learning from their struggles and successes.

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### THE MODEL

PPES offers free education, school uniforms, books, shoes, three meals a day, and a bicycle to every student. The school grants these rewards based on merit and seniority. Both the family and the student gain benefits the longer the student stays in school. At PPES, mornings are spent in academic classes, specifically: Hindi, Arithmetic, Hygiene, Social Studies, and English. Other subjects taught at the school are: Music, Dance, Computers, Sports, and Yoga. Following the academic program, the afternoon consists of vocational training in home furnishing textile work. What is important about the PPES model is that the girls are not just given academic knowledge, but are also trained in highly marketable skills in fine textile work. Through the afternoon vocational training, PPES produces high-end home furnishings that are sold in several shops in India and through the PPES website.<sup>1</sup> If trends stay on track with strong sales and positive growth, the sale of textile work by PPES students

will soon cover the entire running cost of the school.

PPES also opens a bank account for each student when she enrolls at the school. For every day the family allows the girl child to attend the school, 10 Rupees (\$0.30 US) are deposited into her bank account. If the girl completes her education and graduates after 12th grade, the student will have earned approximately 30,000 Rupees (around \$650.00 US). Ideally, after the first four years of textile training, the products produced by each

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fromvillagetoworld.com>

student earn 50 Rupees (\$1.25 US) a day. Of that, 10 Rupees go into the student's account and 40 Rupees go back into sustaining the school and the continued progress of the PPES educational model. To encourage the completion of the entire program, the students can only access their savings after graduation or on the day of their marriage, whichever comes first. However PPES will not provide the money until a girl is at least 18 years old, in order to overcome the custom of child marriage which is commonly practiced in the area.

In Anupshahr, arranged marriage is the norm, and upsettingly many girls are forced into arranged marriage at ages as early as 11 or 13 years. The hope is that educating girls will help in fighting this contemptible custom. After a student graduates, PPES can help her family find a suitable spouse for her. This is also one of the reasons PPES has decided to expand its educational model to include boys. As an unintended consequence of educating the girls, there developed a reluctance on their part to marry uneducated and illiterate men. The hope is that PPES students will gain intellectual strength and have enough economic opportunities to resist arranged child marriages. Of the original 24 graduates, not a single one married following graduation. Instead, most wanted to study more or work for awhile before marrying. All of the girls that graduated were at least 17 years old and wanted to marry only when they decided that they were ready. Given their cultural environment, this was an amazing achievement.

## IMPROVING A COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE

While it is not possible to change centuries of tradition overnight, PPES is making a colossal impact in a community where education was previously a luxury for males and not extended to the female sex, the poor, or the lowest caste. At the end of the PPES program, the girls graduate with:

- A degree for having completed senior secondary school (class XII)
- Highly marketable skills in textile work
- Savings of approximately 30,000 Rupees (\$650.00 US)
- Academic knowledge and empowerment based skills, including health, hygiene, food preparation, family planning, and legal skills

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- The knowledge of self-sustainable systems (i.e. being able to support themselves through textile work)
- Training to work for their development as well as the development of their families

Furthermore, PPES guarantees its graduates a job in their own community, and also gives them the opportunity for further education in any one of the following ways:

- The graduate can continue working full-time at the school and get paid for her work
- The graduate can produce products from home and get paid weekly for the pieces she completes
- The graduate can open a "Mini-PPES" of 4-6 girls at her home, train them, and get paid for the work on a weekly basis
- The graduate can be selected as a teacher for the ever-expanding PPES concept of education
- The graduate can continue her education or professional training

Besides the academic indicators that track the progress of the girls like in any other educational institution, what struck me most about the girls was the difference in their physical appearance. Spending a large part of my time in the villages, I was always shocked by the small size of the girls due to malnourishment. But with the free meals that PPES provided, the girls were taller, better proportioned, and more active irregardless of age, than their community counterparts. The transformation was as much physical as it

was mental. Their confidence in their position at the school was clear as they walked me through their villages. They walked with a sense of pride, wearing their PPES uniforms proudly and confident with their heads held up high. They were going to school and were keenly aware that they might be the first woman in their community to express such pride.

It should go without saying that the school has taken on its own type of social and economic empowerment initiatives. These initiatives have enjoyed stunning success by improving the economic and social situations of the entire community through the achievements of the female students. For example, families that supported their girls became eligible in the last

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What is important about the PPES model is that the girls are not just given academic knowledge, but are also trained in highly marketable skills in fine textile work.

year to have a toilet installed by PPES in their homes. A toilet is a luxury most villages have never dreamed of, let alone seen. In India, open defecation is the norm, not the exception. Tragically, only men are allowed to defecate during the day and may do so where they wish. Cultural norms of the village dictate that women are obligated to do so only before sunrise and after sunset at a specified place close to their homes. The hygiene and sanitary repercussions of this practice in the village are extreme. Viral or bacterial diseases that could normally be avoided through proper hygiene spread quickly and often cause sickness within the entire family on a continual basis.

PPES builds on a World Bank Toilet Model, which was featured at the World Toilet Summit, and which can be easily build under hardship conditions. This toilet is low maintenance, only needing to be emptied every two years. It is inexpensive to build and is fabricated from local materials. It collects and composts waste to be used as fertilizer for fields. Information on the toilet design, including its blueprint, is publicly available and can be easily retrieved over the internet.

The hope is that  
PPES students will  
gain intellectual  
strength and have  
enough economic  
opportunities to  
resist arranged child  
marriages.

The toilet idea embodies the philosophy of PPES, which is not only to teach good hygiene practices, but also to apply that knowledge on a grassroots level to the village. By implementing what has been learned, PPES is making a positive, tangible impact on the standard of living of individual families and the entire community.

When the socio-economic situation of a PPES family improves, it demonstrates to the entire village the importance of young female education. This is one of the reasons the school works so closely with the village. Each toilet that PPES has built so far stands as a testimony to the importance of the lessons PPES is teaching.

Another interesting side project of PPES is their "www.ragstopads.com" initiative. The most common health problem of village women and girls is to suffer from constant vaginal infections after reaching puberty. The main reasons for these infections are the lack of hygienic sanitary napkins which lead most women to use dirty and non-sanitized cloth during their menstrual cycles. This unfortunate practice commonly leads to urinary tract infections, infertility, and even incontinence later in life. PPES has decided to take on the challenge of producing affordable and hygienic sanitary napkins. This new business venture will not only provide additional jobs for its graduates, but will also train

students about health and hygiene issues related to menstruation. This right of women to take care of themselves during menstruation is a basic educational right that has long been denied. But PPES understands that without tackling these very basic problems, a holistic female empowerment cannot be achieved.

### CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

My time in India and my time in Asia did not feel long enough, but somehow I have become inseparably linked to PPES and their mission of female child education. As a researcher of human trafficking for the past five years, my experience with the topic has stretched over three continents and encompassed various facets of the topic. Why was I drawn to PPES? It is not an anti-human trafficking program to be sure. However, its accomplishments for this community of UP are better than numerous other high-profile commercial campaigns. The simple reason for this is: PPES stops the exploitation of women before it happens. A human trafficker cannot tempt families with false promises of a better life for their daughters, if it is possible to create that better life at home. The PPES model is one that needs to be propagated more, especially in rural India. PPES with its educational program makes a stand against centuries old traditions which make it acceptable to sell, marry, or marginalize female children. Anyone that has spent time in India can see that exploitation exists on a grand scale. From child brick makers to the brothels of Delhi, I was sickened by what I saw. As the problem of human trafficking continues to grow, programs like PPES are part of the solution. I would hope that as we search for a resonant cure to human trafficking, we continue to pursue education for the world's youth, and specifically, education for the world's female children.

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These initiatives have enjoyed stunning success by improving the economic and social situations of the entire community through the achievements of the female students.

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*Ms. Wendi Boxx has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from the University of Iowa, USA and she received her Master of Arts in Public Administration from ICU (International Christian University) Tokyo, Japan in June 2006 where she served as a Rotary World Peace Fellow. Her international experiences began as a Rotary Youth*

*Exchange Student to Brazil (1995-1996) where she first became interested in development issues concerning women, and ironically Asia, owing to her beloved Japanese-Brazilian host family. While still in University, she spent a summer in China (1999) working for the American Embassy in Beijing. Upon graduation, she worked as a Student Assistant to the Deputy of the President and Director of Oval Office Operations for the Clinton White House. Following that, she served almost four years as a US Peace Corps Volunteer. After moving to Japan to attend ICU, she had the opportunity to work for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Bucharest, Romania, and also as a Senior Fellow for the Polaris Project, a local Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) aiding Asian women and children trafficked within Japan. Following graduation, her research interest in women's issues and anti-trafficking initiatives lead her to work for the Pardada Pardadi Educational Society (PPES). Her ongoing relationship with the NGO lead to her implementing, founding, and coordinating a volunteer program that has brought more than eight talented volunteers to PPES in the same spirit as the UN Development Volunteer program. Wendi has most recently been awarded the Alexander von Humboldt German Chancellor Fellowship. The Fellowship made available by the German Federal Foreign Office is awarded annually to 10 prospective leaders from the USA in the academic, economic, and political fields. She is currently living and working in Munich where she is overseeing a project regarding legalized sex work, public policy, and anti-human trafficking initiatives in Germany.*

# CREATIVE PROCESS UNLEASHED IN THE ART ROOM

Arvin Tiong Ello

Filipino

Location: Manila, Philippines

Creativity is our species' natural response  
to the challenges of human experience.

- Adriana Diaz -

## THE GENERAL EXISTENTIALIST APPROACH

*Only when we have something to value, will we have something to evaluate...  
and we cannot value something that we cannot share, exchange and examine.*

*- Lee Shulman -*

My idea of education is that it must foster independence and freedom. We should let our students develop critical thinking in all subject areas. To use an analogy, we should not tell our students what food to eat. Rather, we should endeavor to give our students ample choices and let them decide for themselves which food, or ideas, to consume.

I always tell my students that even in art, we also have to think. Some students believe that art is simply an intuitive pursuit. This is why they become lazy when they have to draw concepts related to the topics or themes given to them for illustration. Sometimes though, it does not matter how talented a student may be in art; rather, it matters how talented they are in perceiving the world around them and in giving form to their work.

An ideal education for me is one that is rich and well-rounded in different disciplines and skills, combining everything into one package. Whether it is a major academic subject or a minor elective, there is no reason why we cannot incorporate various knowledge and skill-based subjects in our respective curriculums. Students do not remember everything we 'feed' them per se. Usually they concentrate on developing the basic skills that help them cope with the challenges of the world. Students discard what they consider superfluous

What students truly need to develop is discipline – the discipline to think for themselves. Teachers are there to guide, not to enforce a norm or belief.

and retain only beneficial details. However, what students truly need to develop is discipline – the discipline to think for themselves. Teachers are there to guide, not to enforce a norm or belief. Teachers should use their students' experiences and instincts as a determinant in order to direct them to a particular decision-making process. Ultimately, this will influence judgment, reason, and beliefs.

From a personal point of view, I myself prefer teachers who share their experiences with their classes because they wish to impart what they know about life in general. They wish to turn their own experiences over to their students, and let the students benefit from such experiences. They recognize that these experiences can be more valuable than if a student simply relies on

the knowledge gleaned from their textbooks. We tend to enjoy our classes more if we learn from what is conveyed by the teacher: We discover more about ourselves. It is for this reason that teachers must also be good listeners, not mere talkers. I myself, go out of my way to connect with my students. As an educator, I believe we learn more about our students when we interact with them, especially beyond the classroom.

## THE CREATIVE LIFE IN THE ART ROOM

*Any activity becomes creative when the doer cares about doing it right, or doing it better.*

*- John Updike -*

The art room is not a regular classroom. It is a place where unconventionality supersedes normal laws – from the physical plane of the room, to the interconnections of each person who partakes in the act of learning. Art discussions never end. But the discoveries my students gain from me extend possibilities, as they nourish themselves with passionate thinking. They re-evaluate their own thoughts and feelings and try to come up with ideas that will represent their beliefs and longings for affirmation. Their ideas reveal not only what life is but how life should be.

Children are spontaneous in terms of expression and exposition. They say and do what they feel and think. Their ideas are always fresh and pure. When one asks them to do

something based on actual objectives, various unexpected meanings and interpretations are often derived. Whenever they deviate from the given set of rules, oftentimes, it is not their intention to do so. But the end result is no less meaningful or valuable. In my view, that is the essence of creativity.

The success of the art room is not tested by time, but by the student's output and the creative process itself. The path to creativity must be established from the beginning so that each student will know how to travel along that path. Each creative act carries the

potential success of an artist, not just via visual representation, but also by verbal expression and introspective thinking. It is for this reason that the success of the budding artist is also the success of the art room.

It is not easy to be an art educator, much less any sort of educator. There are huge responsibilities that must be shouldered. One must uplift a student's confidence in his or her efforts as he or she progresses. One must be resolute in the belief that each piece of artwork has intrinsic merit. And yet, how is it possible to determine the significance of a budding artist's humble drawing, if one can barely infer its significance on one's self?

This is a large responsibility, and not surprisingly,

this is also a common event in the art room. Success is attainable if students dedicate themselves to be "artists" in their own ways and aspire to their own unique callings inside and outside the art room. The freedom given to each student is vast. There are specific guidelines for specific objectives, but ultimately, unique choices of expression, technique, and approach are at the individual disposal of each artist.

The ironic reward that comes from teaching younger students is that as an educator, one discovers a great deal from the students' discoveries. When we look at art and make aesthetic judgments, it is surprising to note the point of view of the child as a young artist. There is a delightful story in their art if we just simply try to talk to them and hear them speak. Most will share their stories. Some will even approach us to show us their work as they develop their art in the process of discovery.

There are various emotions that students convey, and endless pleasures they gain from working in the art room. There is laughter and there is also pain. When students encounter difficulties in their work, they may become discouraged. When their work is derided or insulted by their peers, they may start crying. At the end of the day however, we learn from each other's company - teacher and student alike. It is in the art room

that knowledge, observations, and experiences are put to use towards producing art. It is where possibilities are open, leaving students flexible enough in their thinking to accept potential connections among objects, ideas, and symbols. It is where all efforts are understood and appreciated.

## FREEDOM & THE POWER OF THE IMAGINATION

*To imagine the unimaginable is the highest use of the imagination.*

*- Cynthia Ozick -*

Our ability to imagine is one of the finest traits of humans. In letting our students share in this undertaking, we are serving their needs and at the same living up to our mission and commitment as art teachers. When we restrict our students to express his/her creative side, we curtail their freedom as humans. The younger the students experience restraint in their imagination, the deeper the wounds are formed.

Freedom in the art room has its own limits. The art teacher must give certain guidelines to challenge the students release those creative juices. This includes the theme and the choice of media to be used. Creativity can sometimes be suppressed and undeveloped and therefore needs to be stimulated. Teachers must be able to give art activities in varying degrees so that creativity can be harnessed and that learning can always takes place. So that students can avoid repeating the same old habits or previous successful work patterns. Art is indeed endless. Creativity from the teacher is the stimuli while the creativity from the student becomes now the response to that stimuli. The instructions given by the teacher is very vital because the students understand the requirements and what the expected output could be after seeing examples of works from books, slides, posters and actual works of past students. But behind all these, the teacher must be able to explain the rationale of the project because teaching art is certainly verbal. Fostering creativity is problematic unless the teacher understands aesthetics and the creative process that goes with it to be articulate about it. I still definitely think that not all artists can teach art. But teaching art can be learned.

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Our ability to imagine is  
one of the finest traits  
of humans.

Whenever I think of an activity, an exercise or a project – even in my classes that are non-art-related – students are curious asking me, “Sir, how did you think about that?” or “Where did you get that idea?” Oftentimes, my ideas come from my own intuition as I reflect about life and use the objects and symbols

in our surroundings to designing the concept. Sometimes though, I get an idea from an image that has caught my eye or a word/ text that has arrested my thought. Ideas develop through time – they need to be incubated. We need to be inspired if we want ideas to thrive. We help our students find beauty in things. Michael Kimmelman (2005) says in his book, *The Accidental Masterpiece: On the Art of Life and Vice Versa*, “Art becomes our entrée to the sublime. It illustrates that beauty is not something static and predictable and always there at the top of a mountain, but an organic, shifting, elusive, and therefore more desirable goal of our devotion, which we must make an effort to grasp.” Kimmelman affirms that beauty can be found when we aspire for it. There we shall find good ideas for our art.

Honesty and sincerity are key elements to maintaining good relationships with my students. I really tell them where my ideas are coming from because in turn, we help them tread in that path and perceive new ideas by themselves. As Jacob Bronowski believes, “A man becomes creative whether he is an artist or a scientist, when he finds a new unity in the variety of nature. He does so by finding a likeness between things which were not thought alike before. The creative mind is a mind that looks for unexpected likenesses.”

The essence of an art room is not the physical environment it occupies, but the experience of each individual and their personal contribution. The art room is not so much concerned with what the students have produced at the end of the day, but rather with the learning processes that they have discovered for themselves. Their artworks are but reminders for me that they once worked in the art room and learned from life.

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*Mr. Arvin Tiong Ello received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Humanities with a minor in Psychology from the De La Salle University in Manila, where he is also currently a candidate for a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing. His literary and journalistic works have appeared in the Sunday Inquirer Magazine, Philippine Panorama, Kabayan, The Daily Tribune, Tomas, Ani, Ang Pahayagang Plaridel, Malate, Oist, The Literary Apprentice, Abut-Tanaw, Ugong, and various other publications. His art works have appeared in AAP Annual Art Competition Art Catalogues (2003-2005, 2007), and he has won accolades in the National Essay Writing Competition of NCCA & SANGFIL (1st place, 2001), Gawad Surian sa Sanaysay-Gantimpalang Collantes (Honorable Mention, 2002), Essay Writing on the Emblems of Iranian Literature (1st place, 2005), and the 60th AAP Annual Art Competition (Honorable Mention in the Photography Category, 2007).*

# EDUCATION AND FREEDOM IN INDIA

Renu Pokharna

Indian

Location: Gujarat, India

“Education is a liberating process.” This was the statement that caught my attention when I started reading about the YLDA commemorative book. I found myself thinking what a misconception that was. This is because, unless education is defined clearly, it is impossible to judge whether it is a liberating process or not.

In India for example, the education that is provided by means of schools and colleges (the so-called formal education), actually imprisons the mind of the youth. Whatever openness or support exists today for liberal ideas has come more from the process of liberalization in the economic policies, open markets, and increased social freedoms, than from education.

Textual studies in schools and colleges unfortunately still have a curriculum that is strictly socialistically oriented. Numerous examples show this to be so.

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We need to change facets of the current education system so that youth of today do not have to go through a process of unlearning in order to absorb new ideas.

In the following paper, I intend to highlight how we need to change facets of the current education system so that youth of today do not have to go through a process of unlearning in order to absorb new ideas. The second part of my essay deals with liberal policies that India needs to adopt in order to spread education faster and in a more equitable way.

In sixty years of planning, only 64.84% of the Indian population is literate (ORGCC 2008), and most of the population is forced to go to government municipal schools for a sub-standard education. Therefore, the most pressing need is to have a decentralized system of education – a system with education vouchers and an open

market for schools. This is the only way to grant each individual a 'choice' of education.

Let me begin by narrating an experience I had when I visited the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi earlier this year. JNU as it is commonly referred to, is one of the most distinguished universities in the country, and is also a strong bastion of student activism. I happened to visit it to meet a friend at one of the campus' canteens.

The scene at the canteen presented a classic paradox: it had bold colourful posters pasted on its walls with slogans like "Down with capitalism" and "March against Globalization," and yet inside the canteen, everything from Coca Cola to Cadbury's chocolates were available. JNU also had a history of Marxist student parties winning elections every year on the very same slogans. Even today, JNU promotes the state as the soul saviour of the poor in the country.

I happened to flip across the curriculum of the so-called development studies and social work courses that are offered in the universities, and I was astounded to discover that most of these courses contain just one or two papers on basic Economics. As liberals, we know that poverty eradication is not just about short term action plans of helping the poor through charity and other government programmes. The greatest impact on poverty in nations as diverse as Sweden and Vietnam, has been due to easing government controls on markets within the country and due to free trade with other countries (Norberg 2008). Unless students understand this economic aspect of policy-making, no amount of development studies or similar courses can help.

Unfortunately, the psyche of students is shaped differently, which is why when events like the World Social Forum or the Asian Social Forum happen in India, they receive the maximum number of participants. The site of this forum which attracts youth from across the world says: "The youth are denouncing the capitalist system, accusing it of being responsible for the misery of mankind." Activities of the forum mainly include meetings, discussions, plays, and peaceful marches.

The impact of a flawed education system though, is not just restricted to peaceful marches and campus elections for communism; it also manifests itself in violent rebellions, such as the Naxalite Movement in India. The movement, spearheaded by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in the 1960's, started off as a peasant uprising. Then, following the ideals of Che Guevara and Mao Zedong, the movement launched a guerrilla war against the state itself. It subsequently affected law and order in as many as 160 out of India's 604 districts, and preyed upon the uneducated masses in India's poorest states by

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42 million children in the age-group of 6-14 years do not attend school in India."

converting them into violent Marxists (Singh 2008).

This trend showed how education could have shielded them against such propaganda. Initially, it was the romanticism of rebellion that made many educated youngsters join the movement. As H. Balakrishnan remarks: "Presidency College was the hub of student activism, the *jhola*<sup>1</sup> being a trademark. Beards a la Che Guevara had arrived." (Balakrishnan 2004).

Even today, the communists proudly support this Naxalite ideology, even though Naxalism today is no longer a movement for the poor and has become a serious internal security threat for India. A study in Bihar, the poorest state in India in terms of per capita income, has shown how the Naxals tried shutting down schools and also forced children to join their ranks (Singh 2008). It would be good to see the beret wore by Che Guevara going out of fashion in colleges along with the T-shirt that says 'Long live Mao'. It might also help if the students have a prescribed text of *Animal Farm* by George Orwell to offset the effects of the communist-driven syllabi that is fed to them.

Consider the following statement: "It (socialism) emerged as a reaction to the rise and development of capitalism. Laissez faire doctrine led to great difficulties in society... But at the end of the nineteenth century, the fallacies of the doctrine became evident."

This is an excerpt from a Grade 12 textbook of Political Science prescribed by the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) – the apex government body that designs the curriculum for schools all across India. The book which has chapters on both liberalism and socialism under the heading of 'Major Political Theories,' glorifies socialism against liberalism with sentences like: "It (socialism) protests against the harsh materialism and individualism of classical liberals. A capitalist society produces ugly conditions."

The chapter on liberalism also gives a very misconstrued idea of what being a liberal means. For example, liberals widely believe that "free people are not equal, and equal people are not free." But in the chapter, it is presented as: "They did not believe in economic equality. Certain sections indeed believed that economic inequality was not only inevitable, but positively good for all concerned."

The chapter on liberalism talks about liberalism as if it is a defunct ideology, and does not connect it to the high levels of growth enjoyed by economies around the world. To trace the history of liberalism in India, the chapter also refers to the concept of the welfare state and the numerous poverty eradication plans that were undertaken in India. The chapter concludes with statements like: "The concept of the market swallows up the concept of justice and equality."

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<sup>1</sup> *Jhola* means a cloth bag carried by most Marxist leaders and social workers in India signifying that they are not rich and just want to help the poor.

Even more shocking is the chapter on socialism which describes the origins of socialism in the absolute failure of capitalism. Blatant statements like: "The industrialist was busy serving his own interests; he didn't care much for the interest of the community" are included.

The rule of law, which is a pillar of liberalism, is never discussed. Ironically, the chapter on socialism concludes with a mention of the opening of economies in the 1990's,

and laments the loss of socialistic ideas. A student who is influenced by all of this would obviously be averse to the idea of a free market economy, and the idea of markets providing public goods.

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The remedy to these problems is education — through which the masses can be made more aware of opportunities, and can be empowered to deal with the challenges of poverty.

The issue here is not only of textbooks, it is also of the extent to which the teaching faculty at an institution influence the students. Take the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) for example. It is ironic that an educational institution funded by one of India's biggest corporate companies, the Tata group, should actually be anti-capitalism. Recently, when corporate interest was shown in the rural health care sector in India, a very senior faculty member at the institute commented in a newspaper that it was not a plausible idea, "as it depended on the business house's charity quotient rather than on a sustainable module." (Rajadhyaksha 2007)

Jina Joan, a friend who studies there, completely agreed with me when I mentioned how her university is churning out Marxists. She thanked the Centre for Civil Society's Liberty and Society Seminar (winner of the Templeton Foundation's Best Students Outreach Programme) for opening her eyes. She is just one example of the thousands of students who pass through Indian colleges which are still dominated by teachers who believe in the "Red Revolution."

People are entitled to their opinions of course, but when an institution is filled with the same kind of people espousing the same kind of ideology, then what I call "reverse brainwashing" becomes impossible (i.e. convincing the students about liberal ideas once they have been indoctrinated otherwise to such a great extent).

Post-independence India saw the adoption of mixed economic planning which leaned more towards socialism, mainly due to Nehru's allegiance to Soviet Russia. This explains why the higher education system emphasized the benefits of a socialized economy so much.

Thankfully, initiatives are being taken to dismantle these developments. Liberal Youth Forum India is one such groups founded last year to increase the presence of liberals in campus politics, and it has already started by organizing seminars and tying up with smaller liberal groups. We need more rays of hope like this for the sun of liberalism to shine fully on India some day.

“42 million children in the age-group of 6-14 years do not attend school in India.” (UNICEF). “Governments in cities across India spend an average Rs. 1000-1700 (\$22.00-\$37.00 US) per child per month on education.” (Centre for Civil Society). The two previous statements clearly express the dichotomy that exists in the education sector in India. India, like many other developing countries, faces problems of poverty, an income divide, hunger, unemployment, and disease.

The remedy to these problems is education – through which the masses can be made more aware of opportunities, and can be empowered to deal with the challenges of poverty. As Stefan Melnik mentions: “Progress as a liberal value is inconceivable without education.” (Melnik 2008).

In 1991, India adopted the policy of LPG: the Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization mantra which led to a subsequent increase in the growth rate of the economy. However, essential services remained as a “public good” in the hands of the government. This meant that the building of roads, provision of electricity, handling of education, etc. remained with the government, and thus could not get out of the “license raj.”<sup>2</sup> This had a two-fold effect: on the one hand, a lot of entrepreneurs wanting to enter into the field of education were deterred by the various certificates and licenses that they had to procure before setting up a school.

On the other hand, the rule which mentioned that those providing education could not make profits, also acted as a deterrent to potential players in the field of education. Consequently, the poor had no choice but to put their children in government schools. The government tried, and is even now still trying to “universalize education” with schemes, programs, and plans, but the results are certainly not universal education. Over 40% of

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This sorry state of education is mainly due to the dismal performance of the government run machinery system.

<sup>2</sup> ‘license-raj’ refers to the phase of Indian industrialization when companies needed licenses to operate and were often caught in the bureaucracy while trying to procure the licenses. The word ‘raj’ means rule in Hindi.

the children in Grade 2 in rural India cannot even read simple words, and about the same proportion of children in Grade 2 cannot recognize numbers beyond 10 (Pratham).

This sorry state of education is mainly due to the dismal performance of the government run system. From the ministry to the government run schools, there is corruption and slack. Public schools in India are plagued by teacher absenteeism, lack of infrastructure, and low quality of educational input. The government spends a large sum of money on public schools, but due to the bureaucracy, only a very small percentage actually reaches the municipal level.

At the same time, the absence of competition has allowed these public schools to enjoy a monopoly over the poor; thus there is little incentive for them to improve. The policy of school vouchers – an idea first advanced by the liberal economist Milton Friedman – can remedy

these discrepancies in education. A voucher is a coupon that the government issues to parents for educating their children. The amount can be equal to the money that the government spends, adjusted with the existing fee structure in schools in a particular area. This voucher is then deposited by the poor parents to the school of their choice, and the school in turn can encash it from the government.

The advantage of this system is firstly the choice it offers to the parents. Currently, poor parents have no choice but to send their children to government schools which are free or have a nominal fee. A voucher would empower the parents to select the school they think is most appropriate. Secondly, this would provide the public schools with increased competition from private schools. Competition would force the public schools to improve their standards in order to be able to compete with private schools.

The second part of this reform would be the opening up of the education sector to private parties. Currently, a slow revolution is taking place across the rural regions of India: that of private schools. Private schools immediately give an image of plush buildings and high fees that few can afford. But India has seen the mushrooming of a number of private schools in rural areas. These schools charge a small fee and operate in anything from a small room to a dilapidated building.

Studies have shown that half of all schoolchildren in rural India are privately enrolled (Tooley). Opening up the education sector to private parties, or removing the licensing system from it would convert education into a 'commodity', and the 'invisible hand' of market forces would ensure that the prices come down and the quality improves. A

market would also encourage entrepreneurship since most people would now be more willing to invest in the education sector due to the legality of profits.

The essence of this reform is of course, to give people choice and to apply the liberal principle of the free market. Implementation of this reform can be facilitated by decentralizing the administrative system so that vouchers are issued by state governments, and the government needs only to be a watchdog over the system in order to inspect the quality of schools and monitor the transfer process.

Nearly 300 million people in the age group of 7 years and above are still illiterate in India. A reform like this can ensure that they have a fair chance and a choice in their own education.

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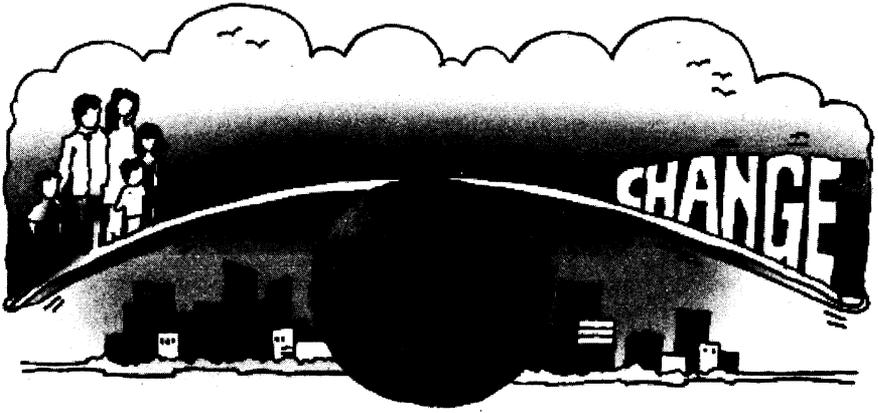
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# CHAPTER TWO



"Balancing Act"

# PREFACE: OUR RIGHTS, OUR FREEDOM, OUR FUTURE

Mu Sochua  
Cambodia

Human rights are essential to building peace and democracy in the 21st century. In Asia however, peace and human rights are constantly in grave danger. Asians continue to ask: what are the inalienable rights guaranteed to all citizens? Why are these rights continuously abused or denied by governments? How can young liberals and democrats affect change in their countries?

The charter of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), ratified by all member countries, assures basic liberties to all Asian citizens. The charter mandates the formation of an Asian Human Rights Body in Article 14. This group supports and advances human rights in its member states.

In addition, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights authored and ratified by the United Nations, guarantees basic human rights and democratic liberties to all citizens worldwide. This document lays the foundations of fair and just policies that should be enacted by all governments.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights decrees in article 26:

- 1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
- 2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

It is particularly notable that primary education is “free” and “compulsory,” and that further education is “equally accessible.” All children deserve basic education opportunities to continue their life-long learning and development. For this to be achieved, education based on merit – regardless of race, socio-economic status, or gender—must be pursued.

Education itself plays a vital role in supporting and strengthening human rights and peace-building, and in emphasizing tolerance and friendship. Educated citizens can lead their countries, promote fair governance, and act as advocates for democratic policies. Educated youth translate to empowered citizens.

The right to employment is also guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 23:

- 1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work, and to protection against unemployment.
- 2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
- 3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection

All citizens possess not only the right to work, but also the right to humane and fairly compensated labor. A worker's salary should cover basic living expenses, assuring his family "an existence worthy of human dignity," regardless of his background.

It may also be supplemented by "other means of social protection," so that no hardworking family lives in poverty. Such measures ensuring employment and fair pay will engage citizens in their communities; helping them to lead productive lives. In turn, they will build the fabric of a stable society and generate economic growth.

Just as important as the rights to education and employment are the rights to free thought, free speech, and a free press. Articles 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration state:

- 1) Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion ...  
Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Citizens may hold any opinion they wish and share this opinion freely, even if it is critical of the government. Governments should not persecute citizens for expressing their thoughts in the media. Dialogue leads to change, improvement, and innovation in government systems. Free speech is the cornerstone of democracy.

While these rights are guaranteed in theory, they are not upheld in practice in many parts of Asia. In Cambodia, there remain a number of challenges to human rights, including land-grabbing and unfair evictions, intimidation of the media, and withholding of rights for minority parties.

Land-grabbing is a major issue throughout Cambodia, particularly in the Kampot province. Governmental officials and rich landowners are stealing land from citizens, which is illegal according to the 2001 Land Law. Unfortunately, there is little recourse for

citizens, whose formal complaints are often ignored.

Compounding the problem is the judicial system, which is corrupt and does not uphold the law. Citizens rely on land they have occupied for generations for their livelihood and identity. However, it has been a regular occurrence where soldiers burn the houses of citizens in order to claim the land, leaving residents utterly destitute and homeless. Citizens who tried to protect their belongings and exercise their human rights were physically attacked.

Given violent events like these, it is not surprising that Cambodians are fearful to exercise their rights. Citizens were particularly unsettled prior to the 2008 election. Just before the election, a journalist, Kim Sambo, and his 21-year-old son were murdered. Kim Sambo had written many articles criticizing governmental policies for opposition newspapers, including an article on the illegal arrest of a casino owner by a disgruntled policeman.

The murder of Kim Sambo was widely regarded as a means of intimidation prior to the election. This intimidation occurs not only on the national level, but also in many localities around the country. Corrupt village chiefs prevent citizens from forming civic groups and denounce their participation in political activities.

Minority parties, such as the Sam Rainsy party, play a vital role in securing a democratic society and reforming governmental systems. Throughout Asia, opposition parties must continue to work for more just and fair societies. The future of Cambodia and Asia as a whole depends on the implementation of peace-building policies, including the safeguarding of human rights and opportunities for civic engagement and youth leadership.

Successful democratic reform would lead to a better standard of living for the poorest citizens, as well as overall economic growth, prosperity, and international confidence and investment. The protection and promotion of human rights are essential to good governance and stability in Cambodia, as well as to global leadership in the 21st century. This is the task that lies before Asia's liberal youth today.



*A member of parliament and a mother of three, Mu Sochua has played a crucial role in the empowerment of women and has worked tirelessly to lead the fight against gender-based violence for more than 25 years. After 18 years in exile, she returned to Cambodia in 1989 and served as adviser on women's affairs to the prime minister, was elected to the national assembly, and was minister of women's and veterans' affairs from 1998 to 2000 – a position she relinquished to join the Sam Rainsy party. She was one of 1,000 women nominated for the Nobel peace prize in 2005 and has received many awards for her human rights work. She was awarded an honorary PhD in law from Guelph University, Canada, in recognition of her justice and human rights work.*

# BUILDING AN "ASIAN MODEL" OF DEMOCRACY

Patrick R. Alcantara

Filipino

Location: Manila, Philippines

## DEMOCRACY AND THE EAST

Democracy, with its promise of government for the people, has been idealized in today's modern world. With current cultural trends favoring diversity and critical thought, democracy has been seen as a way towards safeguarding individual liberties and assuring social justice. In fact, there are established findings about democracy having "real and substantive important effects" on the well being of its citizens (Lake and Baum 2001).

Nonetheless, democracy is not always an ideal that can be legislated on paper. The success of democracy depends on painstakingly building structures and institutions that address the common good of citizens. Democracy must also be able to facilitate and honor collective decision-making, wherein the wills of individual citizens are congruent with that of the state (Schwartz and Fayer 2006). In short, democracy requires trust and acceptance from its citizens in order to flourish.

Still, some critics often assail democracy as incongruous with regional values, since democracy remains fundamentally a Western import. Critics often argue from history that democracy is a by-product of Western hegemony and imperialism (Meyer 2007). Throughout history, critics claim, Western-style democracy has been a way for Westerners to impose their own values and to advance their own interests in the region, like in the case of Central Asian republics in the 1990's (Yadzhani 2007).

Moreover, democracy of the Western brand,

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Democracy of the Western brand, with its emphasis on individual choice, has been seen as contrary to the Eastern values of preserving communal harmony and acquiring social consensus.

with its emphasis on individual choice, has been seen as contrary to the Eastern values of preserving communal harmony and acquiring social consensus. This has led some Asian countries to do away with democracy, citing its "free-wheeling" tendencies, often to the disregard of human rights and individual liberties.

This ongoing debate about democracy in the Asian region, with an emphasis on Asian values and temperaments, raises a fundamental question on the matter: does democracy sit well with Asian values? Or, is it more correct to assume, that democracy is indeed so incompatible with our values that the two could never co-exist?

## UNDERSTANDING ASIAN VALUES THROUGH AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE

In order to shed light on this question, it is important to revisit how Asians think about their own values. Overlooking or ignoring this fundamental prerequisite oftentimes leads to mistaken assumptions about Asian people and their values. For a long time, even among academic circles, scholars have often tried to understand Asian values from foreign perspectives, and have unwittingly perpetuated misconceptions and fallacies about Asian culture.

In employing foreign perspectives, many have fallen into the trap of generalizing Asians (Enriquez 1978 and 1999). A familiar example would be the often-cited Filipino value of *utang na loob* (loosely translated as "debt of gratitude") wherein an individual places a great value on an act of kindness done to him by others. This value often leads to political patronage and a disregard for the common good, which in turn undermines democracy.

Psychologists and scholars like Virgilio Enriquez of the Philippines, or India's Ahsis Nandy and Girishwar Misra among others (Staeuble in Brock et al 2004), have tried to introduce a more universal understanding of human psychology. Revisiting the example of the Filipino psyche, it is frequently distorted by judging its surface values, rather than by examining the core values from which it is derived (Enriquez 1978).

Elaborating on the earlier value of *utang na loob*, this surface value cannot be understood fully unless one looks at it as a derivative of the core value of *kapwa*, or shared identity. *Kapwa* is not merely an expression for referring to "others," but it is an innate ability to connect one's well being with others (Enriquez 1978). It is a common Filipino trait to see one's well being as interconnected with others.

A Filipino or an Asian cannot feel truly happy if only his individual needs are met, and while those of his family or fellow men are neglected. In fact, this leads to a basic solidarity among Filipino and Asian peoples, which is reflected in the Philippines for example, as values of *pakikisama* (good relations with others) and *bayanihan* (pulling together in order to achieve a common purpose).

In extending this argument to Asian values and the practice of democracy in the

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region, it can be said that many Westerners, and even some Asians, often overlook the indigenous perspective in judging democratic governance. In concluding that Asian values are incompatible with democracy, one falls short in appreciating the nuances of the indigenous perspective. In judging that Asian values are roadblocks to the practice of democracy due to its premium on family ties, communal harmony, and societal consensus, one overlooks how values must interact with institutions in order to produce governance that is reflective of its people.

In fact, the supposed failures of Western-style democracy in Asia could not be blamed entirely on Asian values, but rather on a blind appraisal that ignores indigenous contexts. Democracy requires a cultural aspect that could only be the result of continuously building a national identity. Adopting Western practices, which are themselves derived from decades of nation building in the West, cannot be done wholesale in Asian societies. Since many of these Asian societies still grapple with the process of identity-building following decades or centuries of colonial rule, one cannot expect these societies to adopt Western-style democracy in its entirety.

Moreover, as Western-style democracy often carries with it Western values and perspectives, it cannot be merely used as a "perfect" model for Asian societies. Asian societies would have to understand their own values, and transplant these into their structures and institutions of democratic governance, in order to create a democracy that reflects the life and will of its people. While democracy, with its commitment to ensuring liberty and social justice, could be thought of as a desired end, the fundamental challenge of building socially and culturally responsive structures remains.

## **BUILDING AN ASIAN MODEL OF DEMOCRACY**

The discussion above reveals the essential conditions needed for building a democracy that is relevant to Asian values: (1) a keen understanding of Asian values, (2) a clever compromise along the values and mindsets of Asians, and (3) an embedding of Asian values and interests in democratic institutions.

It is clear that for democracy to work, it requires the cooperation of its people. The only feasible way of ensuring maximum cooperation and participation in democratic governance is to understand the values that define its people, and to act accordingly within these parameters. A democratic culture requires an active citizenry, and this can

only be achieved by leaders and fellow citizens who are confident with their own identity and values.

While compromise has commonly been seen as an undermining force in democratic governance, it is actually a prerequisite for a working democracy. In a diverse society, with citizens belonging to different sectors and occasionally having clashing interests, clever compromises are seen as a balancing force that would create win-win solutions for contending parties (Meyer 2007). True enough, the practice of democracy is not necessarily limited to a simple "majority wins" mentality, wherein minority rights are swept under the rug. Practicing democracy is also not necessarily equivalent with merely holding elections, as using electoral exercises for mere consent-gathering further alienates the citizenry.

The primary aim of democracy lies in aligning the individual wills of citizens with the will of the institutions of the state (Schwartz and Fayer 2006), which in turn entails building clever compromises (Mayer 2007). If a democracy needs to build compromises among its citizens, the application of democracy would also need to engender compromises in accordance with the values of the people it seeks to influence.

Of course, this is easier said than done. Reaching a creative compromise on democracy would require a rethinking of social structures and institutions. Asian values and interests must be embedded in the popular functions of a democracy, and must be coupled with a continuous commitment to identity and nation-building. In order to succeed, this would entail a mindset that fosters a commitment to recognizing one's shared identity with others, encouraging compromise, and working towards a basic trust for the process and product of such an enterprise.

This mindset, which can be derived from the democratic tradition of the West, is in fact not incompatible with Asian values. Asian values, which actually place a great premium on shared identity, family ties, communal harmony, and preserving societal consensus, could be harnessed in developing democratic governance. In fact, it is aligned with one of the basic tenets of democracy, which is the application of social consensus and popular participation in advancing the interests of everyone.

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Democracy requires a cultural aspect that could only be the result of continuously building a national identity.

## **BUILDING SUCH A MODEL: A CHALLENGE TO ASIAN YOUTH**

Building such a model would ultimately depend on Asian societies themselves. Facilitating the growth and sustenance of democracy carries with it a natural burden

for citizens to participate in the mechanisms of governance. In the same light, instituting democracy, even adopting Western examples, and preserving Asian values need not be dichotomized. It is clear that as democracy produces the conditions that improve the well-being of its citizens, Asians can also harness democratic governance in order to advance liberty and prosperity.

Ultimately, this poses a great challenge to the youth, who, if only by default, would be inheriting the institutions of their societies.

Building an "Asian model" of democracy, rooted in the clear understanding of Asian values, requires the youth to be the masters of their own destinies. As a continued work in progress, Asian youth themselves must shape this "Asian model" of democracy. The status quo, which places false dichotomies about Asian and democratic values, must be discarded.

Asian youth must take part in the continuing discourse on democracy, and leave a bigger imprint through efforts that translate into concrete policies. This is a struggle that the youth must engage itself into, as they seek to make their institutions more relevant and responsive to their own interests.

In the end, this is the only way that a truly "Asian model" of democracy could emerge, a democracy firmly rooted in Asian values and interests, and a democracy that would harness the energies of Asians for continued prosperity.

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# CULTURAL VALUES AND CHANGING PERCEPTIONS: MOVING TOWARDS A CIVIL SOCIETY IN MALAYSIA

Khang Woon Ong

Malaysian

Location: Kelantan, Malaysia

As a developing third world country, Malaysia is often viewed as politically unstable, administratively incompetent, and economically depressed in the eyes of developed nations. It is frequently the Western controlled media that shapes how our country is perceived by the world. It is the media who decides what we see or hear or witness. Clearly the people in control of the media exercise tremendous power. People who control the media also control our minds and hearts. However the question remains: who controls the media? In developing countries, it is usually the government that controls the media. Bloggers represent the new era of boundless information-age freedom, but blogging may also be subject to abuse if used without a sense of responsibility towards peace and human rights.

Malaysia believes in press freedom, but these freedoms and rights must be accompanied with responsibility. Yet power without responsibility is the most corrupting development of all, especially when a government or ruling party controls the media. This may happen directly through ownership, or by indirectly imposing stringent requirements for the issuance of printing and publishing licenses.

Arguably, developed countries can still function with weak governments. But developing countries cannot function without strong authority in the form of governance. An unstable or weak

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Rights must be  
exercised not only with  
caution but also with  
accountability.

government will result in chaos, and chaos cannot contribute to the development and well-being of a country. A divisive politic can be disruptive to everyone, as is the case in Malaysia today.

A quantitative survey conducted in 1994 by the former Director of East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the US Information Agency asked respondents to choose six social values which they regarded as core and essential. The result was published in a publication called "Asian Values and the United States."

The survey found that the six societal values most valued by Asians were:

1. Having an orderly society
2. Societal harmony
3. Ensuring the accountability of public officials
4. Being open to new ideas
5. Freedom of expression
6. Respect for authority

On the other hand, the six most important societal values for the Americans were:

1. Freedom of expression
2. Personal freedom
3. The rights of the individual
4. Open debate
5. Thinking for one's self
6. Accountability of public officials

It does not matter if the government is elected democratically by the majority of the people. According to Liberal Democrats, a government must still respect the personal wishes of individuals and minorities within society. The result is perhaps not quite what the original Liberal Democrats expected. Individuals soon decided that they should break every rule and code governing their society.

Malaysians cannot enact their own values, since the country's constitution is systematically being abused by an elite hegemony. Malay politicians continue to seek Malay rights and 'bumiputera' rights because the very nature of our local political system is racially biased and protects those already in power. Many politicians only want to fight

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Developed countries can still function with weak governments.

But developing countries cannot function without strong authority in the form of governance.

for a cause without strategizing the true substance behind the cause. This will certainly put our country's future at risk, and retard our national development in every respect. In this day and age, a great nation is built upon joint success stories, meritocracy, and the combined hard work of its people – and not out of fear of racially biased politics.

Western nations have proscribed the standard for democracy, civil rights, and individual freedoms, and have essentially taken charge of the global agenda. Therefore, it is very important to see how faithful these countries have been towards their own proclaimed ideals, whether in their management of their own internal affairs or their dealings with other nations. There is a need to examine how relevant or applicable these ideals may be for countries that are vastly different in their social, political, and economic make-ups. At a more general level, there is the important question of how far we can go in advancing rights and freedoms without creating adverse consequences. Can the balance between public and personal welfare be the same for all societies and under all circumstances? We often overlook the fact that the interests of civil society can be harmed not only through the diminution of rights and freedoms, but also through the unrestrained expansion of these aforementioned rights and freedoms.

Regardless of one's political environment, people everywhere share a common interest in enhancing their rights as citizens and in influencing the policies of their governments. A growing interest in promoting civil society has also emerged. Prescriptions for civil society however will always be influenced by cultural differences and other differences, and we should look at the implications of some of these differences.

The term 'civil society' has sometimes been used to refer collectively to non-government organizations and interest groups which promote the welfare of citizens outside the formal framework of government. While the existence and activities of these groups are doubtlessly a part of making civil society tenable, the concept of a civil society encompasses a great deal more. At its most general, a civil society recognizes pluralism (such as within Malaysia). In other words, dissent is freely permitted, but conflict is

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resolved through non-violent and non-repressive means and within the confines of law.

A civil society also has to be a democratic society, but democracies and civil societies are not always the same thing. This is because democracies are too often spurred solely by their institutions, whereas civil society has to thrive at the grassroots level. A society may be democratic in the way in which its leaders are chosen and the manner in which its government functions. However, if discrimination based on race prejudice is a fact of life, if crime and violence cast a shadow over the daily lives of citizens, if corruption is widespread, then critical elements of civil society would be lacking.

Human rights and the rights of citizens are also not always the same things. For understandable reasons, countries may have no choice but to limit certain rights and privileges extended to their citizens. These include the right to employment benefits, the right to free or subsidized education and medical care, the right to join political parties, the right to vote in elections, and so on. It would be an entirely different matter however, if the system of justice were also allowed to discriminate on the basis of citizenship. This is a clear double-standard and is also an abuse of the constitution within a country.

All societies have problems, and no governments are perfect. Civil societies are no exception. There will always be transgressions of one kind or another, and even occasional crises of public confidence. The judiciary branch may sometimes err in its judgments, the police may have lapses in their treatment of suspects, a politician or civil servant may occasionally be guilty of corruption, and so forth. The elements of civil society would nevertheless remain in place if these elements do not undermine the norms of civility, accountability, and fairness.

In evaluating the efficacy of democracy, there is a tendency to focus on the extent to which those in power use their mandate responsibly. Patronage, the employment of government funds and institutions to promote party interests, and the placing of unfair restrictions on the activities of opposition parties, all undoubtedly diminish the value of a democracy. Bear in mind that the democratic ethos can also be harmed by irresponsible behavior on the part of opposition groups. The prospects of a democracy are ill-served when opposition parties, while concurrently participating in the democratic process, also advocate non-democratic options such as boycotting the parliament, marching in the streets, or embarking in subversive activities.

Among advocates of democracy, there is sometimes an undue emphasis on processes rather than outcomes: on procedures rather than

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A civil society also has to be democratic. But democracy and civil society do not always go hand-in-hand.

the democratic dividend. A flourishing democracy requires adherence to the cardinal rules of representative and accountable government, but the dividend we speak of has to comprise more than this. Stability, security, improved living standards, access to healthcare and education – all of these must accompany the freedoms of expression and assembly, the right to elect one's government, and a respect for minority interests.

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Unfortunately, some countries are not governed by accountable and benevolent institutions of democratic government, but are instead governed by 'money politics.' This has inevitably led to corruption, nepotism, and cronyism which all directly inhibit human rights and freedoms of speech. In Malaysia, where levels of corruption have increased enough to attract the attention of independent observers

and members of the opposition, the problem has been referred to as 'money politics.' Repeated appeals by top leaders to end this practice and threats of disciplinary actions against those convicted have yet to show any lasting effect. Unless this poisonous practice is removed from the political system, efforts to eradicate corruption in the corporate world and the public service sphere will continue to be severely hampered. One saving grace however, is that corruption in Malaysia is nowhere near as problematic as in some other less vigilant countries. There are sufficiently large areas of public life that are still free of corruption, and there is still a considerable public aversion to corrupt practices. The NEP / DEB is similar to a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it aims to eradicate disparities in wealth, but on the other hand, it has made Malays oblivious to the reality of their situation. Malay success can only be achieved through 'perceived political power' – a power which regrettably can still collapse in a brief time.

The emphasis on performance and on delivering goals should not be seen as an excuse to play fast and loose with the basic requirements of a democracy. It is no coincidence that most developed countries in the world have all advanced while being democratic. However, it is critical that we do not view the basic requirements of a democracy, namely accountable institutions of a government, as all being cast from the same mold. Variations are inevitable, but need not cause concern as long as they do not violate democratic principles.

A civil society also has to be a tolerant society, which means that it has to eschew dogmatism and public life. This is not to say that dogmatic individuals or groups have no right to exist in a civil society, for that would run contrary to the principles of pluralism. What is

important however, is that dogmatism does not become the basis of public policy.

The way that justice is administered is another important feature of a civil society. We know that systems of justice vary based on different traditions and jurisprudence. The important matter is that the judiciary acts impartially, independently, and with fairness. There will always be problems in the administration of justice. Judiciaries everywhere have been known to pass verdicts that are inconsistent, sentences may vary (sometimes significantly for the same crimes committed under similar circumstances), and so forth. The Internal Security Act now appears to be exercised as a hegemonic demonstration of power. Preventative detention has been used sporadically in Malaysia since colonial times. Its initial purpose was to combat communism and terrorism, but other threats to national security have also been used to justify the detention of individuals without trials for unspecified periods. It is easy to see why Malaysia's Internal Security Act has drawn strong criticism from civil libertarians, from opposition parties, and also from ruling coalition parties.

In the absence of laws permitting preventive detention, states which are vulnerable to subversive activities may find themselves unable to take preemptive actions to ward off emerging threats to security. This dilemma must be recognized for what it is. Where democratic oversights exist, public opinion and judicial reviews would have to be relied upon to prevent abuses.

Lastly, freedom of worship is an important feature of civil society. Like the other features, it is important that this freedom is protected not just constitutionally, but in actual practice. Regimes that officially curtail religious freedoms usually do so in response to social and political pressures. Freedom of worship in various forms has always had an immense impact on the ways in which societies function. Regrettably, a substantial portion of religious adherents consider their faiths to be superior to all other faiths. Once the idea of being a 'chosen people' takes root, other religions are invariably seen as being of lesser worth and its adherents as not living under God's grace. Sometimes this idea is even exploited for nationalistic ends.

Therefore, claims to being a civil society are sullied when discrimination based on race, religion, or gender is tolerated. Notable exceptions are well-conceived and rationally administered affirmative action policies, whose goals are to rectify rather than entrench

imbalances. Such policies however, would have to be dynamic and be subject to modification in the light of changing circumstances. If they remain unchanged even as their objectives are met, their original goal of eradicating ethnic imbalances would be reversed. It is precisely this rigidity within Malaysia's otherwise successful affirmative action policy that remains a problem.

In closing, a civil society cannot allow extreme poverty, homelessness, illiteracy, and substandard health care to exist. Even in democracies, the rights to free speech and free assembly had to come with limitations. It does not require an expert in comparative politics to recognize that some societies are less adept than others at handling certain forms of democratic dissent, such as rallies, marches, and demonstrations. The vulnerabilities are exacerbated by having to cope with ethnic, religious, and territorial strife which may not be as amenable to democratic reconciliation. Human rights need to be continually discussed, defined, refined, and propagated. In the final analysis, no one has the right to claim that they have a patent on the truth, or a monopoly on human rights.

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Claims to being a civil society are sullied when discrimination based on race, religion, or gender is tolerated.

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*Mr. Ong Khang Woon has been active in Malaysian politics, beginning with his position as the National Gerakan Youth Vice Chairman. He went on to hold positions with the Kelantan State as part of the Youth State Working Committee, followed by positions as the Youth Political Bureau Chairman, and Press and Media Bureau Chairman, respectively. He has also been active in civil society within the Advisory Panel for the Kubang Kerian Village Clinic, within the Board of Managers for the Kelantan State Sports Council, as a member of Associate Financial Planners Malaysia, as a member of the International Association of Registered Financial Consultants (USA), as a life member of the Kelantan Hainanese Association, as a life member of the Kiew Ong Tai Tay Temple, and as a committee member of the Kelantan State Youth Chinese Chamber of Commerce.*

# THE FILIPINO RELATIONAL VALUE AS CONSTRICTING OR LIBERATING: LESSONS FOR THE FILIPINO YOUTH

Dashell C. Yancha

Filipino

Location: Gothenburg, Sweden

Theologian Charles E. Curran developed the relationality-responsibility approach which “sees the human person in terms of multiple relationships with God, neighbour, world and self.” (Walter et al 2001). It sees the person against a backdrop of various relational contexts – for which he or she exercises responsibility – or what Curran describes as “response-ability” or the interactive engagement with a dynamic environment.

Filipinos are a relational people. This is quite often depicted in the boarding lounges of airports where a group of Filipinos are huddled together, exchanging stories – after ten seconds of brief introduction. Such encounters often lead to future meetings and meaningful associations. Filipinos tend to stick together, particularly so when they are outside the Philippines. Hence, Filipino communities abound abroad, clinging next to the categories of Chinatowns and aligned Indian restaurants. Another manifestation of “Filipino relationality” is illustrated in the balikbayan box (*which literally means, return to one’s homeland box*) where an “imported” soap would find its way to the house of a Filipino “relative” five degrees of consanguinity away from the returnee.

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This relational value rooted in the Filipino’s strong sense of family is deeply entrenched not only in the country’s legal systems and state policies but also in the very psyche of the Filipino.

It is easy to trace this relational value to the first institution which every single Filipino is born into: the family. No less than the Philippine Constitution recognizes the "sanctity of family life and the family as the foundation of the nation" (Philippine

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As much as relationality can lead to the narrow construction of collectivism, it can nonetheless be a liberating experience for an individual.

Constitution 1986) and declares as state policy, the protection and strengthening of the family as a basic autonomous social institution. This relational value rooted in the Filipino's strong sense of family is deeply entrenched not only in the country's legal systems and state policies but also in the very psyche of the Filipino. Hence it is common to live with one's parents even past one's prime, common to live with them even past one's son or daughter's prime, and common to find a "one surname compound" – with neighbours bound by the same family name and a certain degree of consanguinity or affinity.

Relationality may also be seen beyond the lens of familial and biological ties to a broader sociological perspective. It may mean a strong sense of affinity with someone who shares one's set of values, interests, and goals.

Filipinos have somehow stretched Curran's relationality-responsibility approach too far from a manageable spectrum. On the one hand, the value may be tied to empathy and compassion; yet, on the other hand, it may also feed into parasitism, dependency, and division.

This paper will examine the concept of "relationality" – which may be seen as either a liberating or constricting Filipino value – and how such a value could pose a challenge to the Filipino youth's struggle in achieving his full potential as a global citizen.

### **"RELATIONALITY" AS CONSTRICTING**

The Filipino youth who lives within the context of a typical Filipino society knows the value of strong family and relational ties. This is often manifested in the way he structures his life. After graduation, he is expected to help his family send his other siblings to school. All too often, this goes on until the last of his siblings has finished college. Only then will he think of settling down – that is, if he is lucky to have conscientious siblings. If not, he finds himself supporting the niece or nephew borne out of his teenage sibling's pregnancy – while tending his own family. This is a typical story of a middle-class Filipino in his or her late 20's. There is nothing morally reprehensible to this, for more often than not, the act of helping one's family is a personal choice. Yet, this choice is often dictated by cultural influences deeply tied to relational value, and doing otherwise falls within the

realm of "kawalan ng utang na loob" (or ingratitude).

Personal choices are often dictated by relational values. A youth often takes up a college course not on account of their own interests and choices but because their parents are in such professional fields. Most youth in the provinces are often told to take up "Commerce" instead of "Information Technology" by their parents because the daughter of their neighbour is taking the same course. Choices and personal decisions are thus limited because relational values come into play.

The value of relationality becomes dangerous when it leaves the enclave of the family and finds its way to the societal and political realm. This is reflected in block voting patterns: in voting on account of the candidate's religious, social, or educational background rather than the candidate's political platform or agenda. In the workplace, employers are drawn to hire individuals who share relational patterns, be it in terms of fraternity or sorority affiliations, or in terms of having gone to the same university or college. In this respect, relationality as a value leads to discrimination against those who are not within the same relational realm. Relationality has also been used in the business world: media advertisements generally revolve around family contexts since it is easy to advertise products that are closest to "home." If left unchecked, relationality may lead to division. The two largest television networks in the Philippines have somehow succeeded in this respect: dividing the viewers into either the "kapuso" ("*of the same heart*") or "kapamilya" ("*of the same family*") relational tags.

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The Filipino culture is a celebration of a shared identity, of openness, and of tolerance not only with other people but ultimately with all other beings in the universe

### RELATIONALITY AS LIBERATING

As much as relationality can lead to the narrow construction of collectivism, it can nonetheless be a liberating experience for an individual. This occurs when the said value transcends the personal level of selfish affinity to a holistic way of thinking that emphasizes compassion and empathy towards one's neighbour. In this respect, relationality is not constrained to a particular grouping but rather towards affinity with humanity as a whole. Taken in this context, such a value liberates and empowers the individual to think in terms of universal affinity. Hence, he begins to consider each individual as a neighbour and thus enhances his connection with humanity. Perhaps, it is in using this similar line of thought that Curran noted that "some type of relationality-responsibility approach seems to be the best way to avoid tribalism and chaos in the midst of the particularity and

diversity of our global existence today.” (Curran 1999).

It is in this very sense that the Filipino worker is arguably considered to be among the most trustworthy and dependable workers in the world. As a case in point, Filipino caregivers abroad have the ability to use such relational values to see beyond the constraints of nationality and territorial boundaries and treat their patients in the context of familial relations. Hence, the care that they give their clients is heartfelt, sincere, and honest. In the realm of business, the most successful employers are those who treat their employees in the manner by which they would treat their own family members.

It is not unusual to have domestic helpers staying and serving in the same family for generations – a testament to the Filipino’s relational resilience. In a global social context, Filipinos are frequently perceived as one of the friendliest people in the world. One indicator is the sheer number of Filipinos who are members of social networking services such as Friendster, Facebook, Multiply, Tagged, Flixter, Perfspot, My Space, and so on. Filipinos use these networking services in order to transcend geographical boundaries and connect with the people they care about, demonstrating how Filipinos abroad have taken advantage of technological and globalization processes to fuel their strong sense of relational values. Yet, it is from a cultural perspective that Filipino relationality as a liberating value, is at its zenith.

The Filipino culture is a celebration of a shared identity, of openness, and of tolerance not only with other people but ultimately with all other beings in the universe (De Leon). It is perhaps this openness to both the divine and the mundane which allows the Filipino to smile amidst adversity, to hope amidst desperation, and to trust amidst betrayal. Taken to the extreme, this liberating aspect of relationality may lead to blind acceptance, and even to gullibility. This is frequently manifested in the political sphere, where analysts note the electorate’s lack of judiciousness and its inability to learn from mistakes throughout the country’s political history.

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### THE CHALLENGE: FINDING BALANCE

This paper has examined both the liberating and constricting aspects of the Filipino’s value for relationality, which is firmly rooted in his respect for familial bonds and in his reverence for humanity. Arguably the finest aspect of Filipino relationality is its link with compassion, justice, and human rights. It is therefore not surprising that the Philippines is home to some of the most vibrant civil society organizations (CSO) in the world. Amidst personal concerns of security

Arguably the finest aspect of Filipino relationality is its link with compassion, justice, and human rights.

Filipino youth should be able transcend the stifling effects of relationality in order to allow room for personal growth and advancement.

and safety, CSO members passionately toil to resolve social problems through their collective strength.

The most notable aspect of the constricting aspect of relationality is the “grounding” of the Filipino. This “grounding” enables him to put things in proper perspective, and allows for judiciousness decisions and mental clarity. However, there is always a risk that the strict application of the relationality value may eventually lead to suffocation, dependence, and self-loathing. Hence, the Filipino who has worked all his life to support his family may ironically feel as if no future awaits him beyond the familial

sphere. This limits him from achieving his full potential as an independent human being.

Subsequently, a critical challenge for the Filipino youth is to be able to strike a balance between the constricting and liberating aspects of relationality. While the Filipino youth relates to the rest of the world with hospitality, compassion, and kindness, he should also be able to exercise restraint, prudence, and responsibility when balancing relations with himself, other people, and the global society in general. In particular, this means being able to say “no” to peer-pressure and restrictive familial demands. Filipino youth should be able transcend the stifling effects of relationality in order to allow room for personal growth and advancement. Ultimately, the value of relationality has the potential to mend internal divisions and unite the country, within the context of pure familial love that is uniquely Filipino.

In a globalized era filled with opportunities for growth and teeming with unlimited potential for advancement, the challenge for the Filipino youth is in finding the steadiness to “plug and play” (Friedman 2005) with the rest of the world without losing sight of what awaits him back home.<sup>1</sup> He must be able to stretch his vision as far as his imagination would allow him to, but not at the expense of being divorced from the daily demands of reality. He must be able to allow his soul to take flight, and yet remain grounded by the promise that a dependable “nest” always awaits him. In this way, he can strive to be a conscientious global citizen and a responsible Filipino at the same time.

<sup>1</sup> Used in the context of Thomas Friedman's statement, “Globalization 3.0 makes it possible for so many more people to ‘plug and play,’ and you are going to see every colour of the human rainbow take part.”

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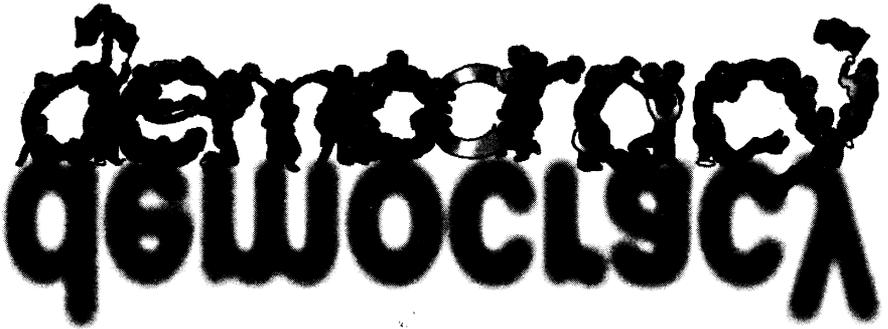
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# CHAPTER THREE



"People Make Democracy"

# PREFACE: SECURING THE PRESENT FOR THE FUTURE OF ASIA

Yim Sovann  
Cambodia

Like in other parts of Asia, many young people in Cambodia lack the resources and power to lobby and influence government. Lack of access to media and courts of justice, concerns for the security and future of their families, and insufficient associations such as trade unions (which can negotiate on their behalf) continue to confound the spirit of activism for our youth in Asia.

The challenges facing our youth today greatly affect their participation in governance, and hinder their attempts at social transformation. With these problems staring at them day in and day out, our youth feel invisible, powerless, and alienated – disconnected from their community and lacking the motivation to participate in social development.

As a former youth leader, I cannot help but surmise that because of this, the economic growth of Asian nations lags behind other countries that consider their youth as partners and the backbone of social development. In my own way, I have continually strived to encourage youth participation and promote the inclusion of youth as development partners of government. Simply put, governments must make sure that all strategies, programs, and projects to reform their nations must include the youth as both planners and beneficiaries.

To achieve this, we must foster an environment where the youth can conduct their democratic explorations, especially in countries undergoing democratic transitions and political and military conflicts. Recognizing the voice of youth, and giving them opportunities to influence decision-making and execute their own ideas, enables them to be active agents for development and change. Youth empowerment and youth participation is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority, and agency to make decisions and implement change not only in their own lives, but in the lives of other people. But how can governments and societies involve the young? What are the incentives for the government and the youth to increase the latter's involvement in nation building?

Let us enumerate some options:

1. When the youth are involved, an understanding and a commitment to human

- rights and a steadfast belief in democracy increases. It is through the youth – who experience and experiment with democracy in their homes, in their schools, in their communities, and in their workplaces – that the understanding of democratic rights and responsibilities are refined, and societal participation is made more meaningful.
2. The youth must look after their own and those with no voices: the uneducated and underprivileged. In a region where human smuggling, drug addiction, prostitution, HIV/AIDS infections, and corruption are ubiquitous, a populace of well-informed and passionate young people can engage in peer activities that are central to solving these societal diseases. Most valuable is the role and contribution of the young in healing the wounds inflicted by these injustices upon the victims.
  3. It is the youth, the acknowledged bearers of the torch promoting the well-being and development of all, who pit the powerful and the influential against each other through incessant questioning and the expression of their idealism. It is when societies recognize and take seriously the thoughts of the youth, that a virtuous circle of development is created. The young, with their firebrand activism, encourage the development of skills, the improvement in talents, the acquisition of competencies, the sharing of experiences, the building of confidence, and the envisioning of a more equitable development – all of which are ingredients for progress.
  4. Young people have a body of experience unique to their situation that demands innovation and improvement. They are social actors with skills and capacities to bring about constructive resolutions to their own problems and that of their society. They seek to alleviate difficulties by finding novel solutions and experimenting with new methods, and in the process create their own mark of success.
  5. With their friendly and outgoing attitude, young people encourage participation. They seek associations wherein they are able to contribute to society and influence people. If the state and society can create a lively atmosphere for youth organizations to prosper – such as a political party or political movements for the young – the youth will be able to influence decision-making. It is also in these groups that they find a larger stage and purpose from which to exercise their citizenship, leadership, rights, and responsibilities as members of a modern society.
  6. Finally, in leading by example, youth leaders are able to earn a loyal following. When they do this, they come to realize that they are not as invisible as they had originally thought. Empowered youth participate in decision-making and

the implementation of social activities such as inter-generational equity, civic engagement, building democracy through improved access to elections, and student-centered education. With their aptitude in using modern technology and media, the youth are able to spread their messages of youth empowerment, youth voice, youth community involvement, and leadership programs far more effectively than traditional politicians and organizers.

Drawing upon my own rich experience with the youth, I am certain that if we have the will to do so, there are various ways to empower the youth and encourage their participation. There are two basic, yet important elements to consider. First, we must develop the critical faculties of the youth by encouraging them to develop and promote their own political and economic views. Second, we must satisfy the diverse needs of leaders and find ways to promote the youth in nation building. Doing so is tantamount to addressing both sides of youth empowerment and participation; the youth need their elders, just as much as the elders need their youth.

The multitude of people already involved in programs promoting youth empowerment and participation solidifies the affirmation that social growth is not possible without the help of the youth. If youth participation and empowerment are crucial for societal growth, they are even more important in sustaining and making these developments substantial and beneficial to all.

In a region where the youth hold sway in terms of demographic distribution, we should not let distance become an impediment to collective action. We must work together to promote youth involvement and empowerment in all aspects of society. This is not the best way to ensure a brighter future for Asia. It is the only way.

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# THAI STUDENT MOVEMENT UNDER POLITICAL CRISIS: PAST, PRESENT, AND THE WAY FORWARD<sup>1</sup>

Pokpong Lawansiri  
Cambodian

Location: Bangkok, Thailand

"To banish the trace of tear from your eye, a thousand deaths would I gladly die,  
if one more life were granted me, I'd spend that life in serving thee."  
(Awetik Issaakjan, the Peoples' Poet of Armenia)<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

In the political development in Thailand, youth and students have always been recognized as playing an important role in bringing about positive changes away from the status quo. The Seri Thai (Free Thai movement) against the Japanese occupation of Thailand during the Second World War was also led by youth and students who were studying inside and outside the country. In addition, the revolution on June 24, 1932, which transformed the country from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy, was also driven by mostly young Thai students studying in Europe, who at the time had been exposed to ideas of change and reform.

The major change which occurred in Thailand on October 14, 1973 was an uprising which ended years of military dictatorship. This was also driven by student groups under the leadership of the now-defunct Student Coordinating Center, which was set up in 1970. However, the role of the students had faded after the October 6, 1976 massacre at Thammasat University,<sup>3</sup> which saw the return of a second military dictatorship to the

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<sup>1</sup> Some key points of this article are taken with permission from the article, "Thai Student Movement," by Jaruwat Keyunwan, which appears in *New Social Movement in Thailand*, Workers Democracy Press, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> This quote was translated by Jit Pumisak, one of the most prominent student activists, artists, and writers in the 1950's. This quote was one of the most influential quotes in the 1970's student movement.

<sup>3</sup> The 1976 massacre was also known as the "Black October" event. On October 6, 1976, thousands

The student movement since the 1990s onward was considered weak and lacking unity.

country. The student activist groups were under constant surveillance by the government, and university administrators were also employed by the government to keep watch.

### THE STUDENT MOVEMENT: 1990'S ONWARD

The student movement from the 1990's onward was considered weak and lacking unity. This was due to the emergence of non-governmental organizations in the 1990's which took over the roles of student activists. This was also due to government attempts to end the student movement after the 1976 massacre. However, one key organization which had been continuing to play an important role in working with those being affected by large multinational projects was the Student Federation of Thailand (SFT).<sup>4</sup> The SFT was a network of student unions and student activist groups across the country who had been working on human rights, democracy, and equality. However, the SFT which was set up in 1984, was not as powerful in terms of its ability to mobilize student activists as the now-defunct SCC, which had been the driving force in the October 1973 uprising.

### ANTI-THAKSIN: THE RETURN OF STUDENT MOVEMENT?

During the administration of Thaksin Shinawatra from 2001 to 2006, the country was ruled with a 'hard-fist policy' which led to more than 2,500 alleged drug-traffickers being extra-judicially executed, and which also led to a hardening of policies in the Southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat against militants. This resulted in thousands of deaths and injuries after several years of Mr. Shinawatra's administration. Furthermore, he also implemented further policies which pushed for the privatization of basic amenities such as water, electricity, and so on.

The period of Thaksin Shinawatra's rule however, saw an increasing role for student groups. During the 1970's, the student unions were the main groups which mobilized

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of students protested inside Thammasat University in Bangkok, Thailand against the return of the military dictator, Field Marshall Thanom Kittikajorn, who had been forced into exile by mass demonstrations three years earlier. The students were attacked by right-wing mob and border-patrol police. It was initially estimated that about 50 students and protesters were killed in gruesome fashions, such as through lynching and conflagration. Unofficial reports estimated nearly 500 deaths and injuries.

<sup>4</sup> SFT also worked on international human rights issues such as the campaigns for democracy in Burma. Please see "Burmese Students Call Hunger Strike," June 25, 1997, at <http://www.burmalibrary.org/reg.burma/archives/199706/msg00442.html>

students or held political events. During the post-1976 era however, student unions were largely controlled by the universities, and subsequently the unions now tended to be more conservative and attended to issues such as student welfare instead of social justice issues.

There were some exceptions however. For instance, the student union at Burapha University in Northeast Thailand was able to mobilize several thousand student activists who demonstrated in the country's capital against Mr. Shinnawatra's policy of university privatization. Student federations such as SFT, Southern Universities Student Federation (SUSF), and Northeast Universities Student Federation (NUSF) were able to mobilize significant numbers respectively during their gatherings. There were also trends after Thaksin Shinnawatra's rule with respect to the emergence of independent student groups, such as the Workers Democracy Group, which was a group of socialist youth and young trade unionists who campaigned against Mr. Shinnawatra's free-trade policy, his support of the US-led War in Iraq, and his tough policy on Southern Thailand.

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The period of Thaksin Shinnawatra's rule saw the increasing role of student groups.

## THE ROLE OF STUDENT AND YOUTH WITH THE EMERGENCE OF PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE FOR DEMOCRACY

The People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) emerged in 2006 in response to Thaksin Shinnawatra's policies. Initially, it was not established as the PAD, but rather as a weekly forum held on Sundays by Sondhi Limthongkul, a media mogul who had been a friend of Mr. Shinnawatra until his TV show was taken off the air. When more civil society groups came together, the forum later changed its name to the PAD and broadened its movement against Mr. Shinnawatra by attacking his policies in Southern Thailand, his War on Drugs, and his policies in support of free-trade privatization. Another prominent student group that joined the PAD included the Student Federation of Thailand. Other key NGO that joined the PAD included the Assembly of the Poor, the NGO Coordinating Committee<sup>5</sup> on Development, and FTA Watch. New student and youth groups (such as Rangkid from NIDA University) widely considered to be conservative groups, also gave their full support to the PAD. There was however, much skepticism of the PAD when it started to talk about the use of article 7 of the 1997 Constitution, which called for royal

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<sup>5</sup> This group was an ad-hoc group set up from the discussion among student unions around the country at Thammasat University for coordination in the attempt to pressure Thaksin to end his administration.

intervention from the King. Meanwhile, more progressive student groups such as the Student Coordinating Committee stayed away from the PAD. Groups that had been active in the past (such as Thammasat University Student Union) also refused to join the PAD. However, these groups decided to adopt a legal approach by collecting 50,000 signatures for a petition calling for the investigation of wrong-doings by Mr. Shinawatra.

## SEPTEMBER 19, 2006: COUP D'ÉTAT AND CONTINUATION OF THE BROADENING STUDENT MOVEMENT

The September 19, 2006 coup d'état which ousted Thaksin Shinawatra elicited great confusion among civil society groups and student groups. While a coup d'état is considered the ultimate evil against democracy, most civil society groups refused to criticize the coup directly. Even more embarrassingly, key institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand (NHRC) also endorsed the coup d'état when the president came out approving the coup.

The period immediately following the coup d'état brought a great deal of confusion among the larger social movement as a whole. Two days after the coup d'état, there emerged the September 19 Network Against the Coup d'état (hereafter referred to as "The September 19 Network"), which was a broad-based network of student activists and young activists who were working with NGOs. The group launched their first protest in front of the Siam Center, one of the busiest areas in the country, and condemned the Council of Democratic Reform under the Constitutional Monarchy (CDRM), which was the military body which had staged the coup. The CDRM later changed its name to the Council of National Security (CNS).

The September 19 Network gained international recognition from its first protest that it held under the martial law. Throughout this time, the Network continued to monitor the military government and made critical remarks against the NGO groups that supported the work of the military government. The Network's most remarkable campaign was to urge Thai citizens to vote in favor of the military drafted constitution.<sup>6</sup> The military government at the time was campaigning

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The period immediately following the coup d'état brought a great deal of confusion among the larger social movement as a whole.

<sup>6</sup> For more information, please see "Exclusive Interview: the September 19 Network against the Coup and the Biggest Campaign of their Lives," Prachatai, 31 July 2007. <http://www.prachatai>.

Many civil society organizations including the leading opposition political party have been blinded by the fear of Thaksin Shinawatra's return to power and have allowed the PAD to get away with these acts.

widely through TV stations, radio, and other media, that the best way to end the political conflict was to support the referendum. This was in comparison to the small groups of youth and student activists who did not have the same resources as the government. The result was a 54% vote in favor of the referendum, while 46% voted against the constitution.

### **PEOPLE'S POWER PARTY, THE RETURN OF THE PAD, AND THE WAY FORWARD**

The January 2008 election resulted in landslide support from the public for the People's Power Party (PPP). The PPP was seen as a party which had a similar face to the dissolved Thai Rak Thai party which had been headed by former PM Thaksin Shinawatra. The election returned the PAD in May 2008 with its goal to end all remnants of Thaksin Shinawatra's regime. With this return

however, the PAD became less diverse in terms of their issues and in their representation. The PAD used the nation, the monarchy, and religion as tools to attack those who criticized them. This familiar rhetoric had also been used by the right-wing group to destroy the student movement in the 1970's.

There have been reports that those who were critical of the PAD were the victims of attacks, and there were suggestions that the PAD was violating the rights of others. University professors, activists, and respected figures (such as Dr. Gothom Arya, the National Economic and Social Advisory Council Chairperson, former senator Jon Ungpakorn, and renowned historian Dr. Nidhi Eawsriwong among others) had been attacked on PAD's stage. PAD also used violent tactics in their demonstrations, including arming their supporters with firearms, batons, and slingshots. PAD's other violent methods included raiding the National Broadcasting Television facility, raiding airports around the country, and encouraging ongoing occupations of government houses. There is speculation that the PAD is trying to confront the government so that the government will respond with violence. In a recent clash between the police and the PAD, we saw photos of PAD's guards firing at the police and driving trucks over police officers. Tragically, many civil society organizations including the opposition political party have been blinded by the fear of Thaksin Shinawatra, and have allowed the PAD to get away with these acts. There have not yet been any remarks by the opposition Democrat Party criticizing or condemning the actions of the PAD, nor have there been calls for the

perpetrators from the PAD to be brought to justice.

The issues that the PAD talks about are becoming superficial ones. The PAD focuses its struggles on nationalistic issues such as whether Thailand or Cambodia holds the sacred Preah Vihear temple, instead of focusing on how the government should conduct economic policies to address rising fuel prices.<sup>7</sup> However, more progressive student groups have recently distanced themselves from the PAD, claiming that the PAD is no longer the real answer to political reforms and democratic improvements for the country. This became evident after the PAD came out with "the new politics policy," which called for 70% of MPs to be appointed while 30% would remain elected.

After the general assembly of the Student Federation of Thailand (SFT) and the election of the new Committee in 2006, the SFT announced its withdrawal from the PAD. Groups that had been critical of the PAD, such as the Northeastern Universities Student Federation (NUSF), continued to express their condemnation of the PAD. Currently, we are seeing a division emerge between different generations in the Thai social movement. Most leading organizations such as the NGO-Coordinating Committee on Development, Thai Labour Solidarity Committee, and other more prominent civic groups appear to be silent regarding the PAD's illegitimate tactics. The younger staff and activists within these organizations however, are standing more on principles rather than on strategies. They believe that if they sacrifice their principles to achieve their goals, then civil society would be no different than the corrupted politicians that they claim they are fighting.

## CONCLUSION

In the past few months, amidst the silence of civil society groups and opposition political parties to the violent tactics of the PAD, there has been a rise in student and youth groups critical of the PAD. SFT and NUSF remain the more prominent groups however, at the same time as young activists within the movement are coming together to form an ad-hoc group. For

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The role of the student as the most progressive voice in the country is critical, particularly during this political crisis when mainstream civic groups and opposition parties cannot be relied upon to protect the principle of participatory democracy.

<sup>7</sup> Please see the author's article in *Bangkok Post* on August 28, 2008 titled, "Finally, the PAD finally shows its true colours," OP-ED page.

example, young activist groups have come together to urge the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand to conduct human rights investigations under the name of "Network of Concerned Citizens." The Thammasat University group ("The Red Dome") has been set up to monitor the political situation in Thailand, especially relating to the PAD.

However, the main problem that currently exists within the Thai student movement is a lack of coordination. While there are newer groups emerging (such as the Prakaifire group, which consists of leftist student groups from universities in Bangkok), there are still efforts to create a third alternative in order to address issues that would actually benefit people. Issues such as soaring amenity prices, continuous human rights violations in Southern Thailand, and corruption in Thai society go unaddressed due to the lack of a group which can deliver strong messages.

While the SFT has recently been better represented by various groups from many different sub-regions in Thailand, the SFT is still not able to successfully coordinate with other progressive groups. In the future, we can only hope that the SFT will develop better coordination among groups so that they can all function effectively. If not, the student movement would remain weak and would be unable to sustain or deliver its message effectively. Ultimately, the role of the student as the most progressive voice in the country is critical, particularly during this political crisis when mainstream civic groups and opposition parties cannot be relied upon to protect the principles of participatory democracy, non-violence, and a universal respect for human rights.

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*Mr. Pokpong Lawansiri was a student activist from 2004 to 2006. He served in the Thammasat University Student Council, the Thammasat University Faculty of Liberal Arts Students' Council, and the now-defunct Student Coordinating Center during the anti-Thaksin Shinawatra movement. He currently works as a Southeast Asia Programme Officer with the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA). He has been quoted and has appeared in numerous international media such as AP, AFP, BBC, Press TV, and Al-Jazeera regarding human rights and politics in Southeast Asia. He also writes regularly for the Bangkok Post, The Nation, Prachatai, and The Irrawaddy.*

# MY GILDED EXILE

Vanessa Remoquillo

Filipino

Location: Bonn, Germany

A few years ago, laden with suitcases and optimism, I left the Philippines to study abroad. Graduate school, a scholarship, and the promise of brand-new adventures beckoned. This period in my life, when I would be away from my home country, would later be described to me as the “gilded exile.” Indeed, it was a privilege to study abroad, to see the world, and to expand one’s horizons. As an old professor often said, this was a process of “self-actualization” – the act of accomplishing more than earning a degree at a foreign university. This is a familiar tale, replicated across Asia and reflected in the experiences of other Asian youth venturing out of their home countries and into new societies. These youth leave in the high hopes that their academic and professional pursuits would somehow take them far in life and not merely far from home.

To be able to view one’s homeland from a comfortable distance, from the vantage point of a more developed (though not always better-governed) host nation, can create the feeling that a young Asian’s participation in the ongoing narrative back home is temporarily suspended. As someone accustomed to vigorous civic participation in her life, and who thrived on the latest bit of current affairs, the sudden estrangement from home was confounding. Though several thousand miles away, I continued to deeply care about what was happening in my country. The news from home buoyed me, frustrated me, thrilled me, and at times angered me.

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For the most part, I still considered myself to be a socially involved young Filipino. Essentially however, I was becoming a person far removed from the realities of socio-political life back home. I was no longer part of that important conversation that characterizes an active citizenship. I became an armchair activist, commenting from my ivory tower. It certainly was not a deliberate choice to be excluded from my native society. However, there is only so much that one can do away from the country, and I quickly became aware of these limitations.

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For me, the past two years have been a period of deep dissatisfaction with socio-political life in the Philippines, as it has similarly been in other parts of Asia. I lamented that I was not on the streets in exercise of my freedom of expression, seeking redress for grievances. I was not around for the discussions among like-minded youth interested in solutions. I was not present when it seemed for a while that it was touch-and-go for our democracy. Distance amplified the urgency of being involved, yet it was easier to feel helpless than useful.

This urge to contribute meaningfully to Philippine society has occurred to a great many members of our diaspora. I would also like to believe that the hundreds of thousands of us young Filipinos who have chosen to embark on pursuits outside the country have at one point encountered these same feelings and reflected on what to do. Furthermore, I am confident that this sentiment strikes a chord with those from other Asian nations who try to live in two societies at once.

Wrestling with such ideas, I gleaned a few lessons from the experience of being a young Asian liberal overseas who, in spite of being separated by an ocean and several time zones, remains willing to be engaged in the political milieu in her home country.

Among such lessons is recognizing that I was not a spectator but an actor in the unfolding story of my country. The role may be a minor one, supporting at best, but nonetheless it is a role. What goes on in the public sphere continues to affect how government is held accountable, how students are educated, how human rights are valued, and how the majority is lifted out of poverty. It is therefore a right and a duty to constructively contribute to the discussion and the exchange of ideas that underlie the political process, wherever in the world we may be.

Existing technology provides unprecedented, multitudinous opportunities for participation. Here we look to the example of young Burmese exiles whose blogs and websites drummed up widespread international solidarity for the 2007 "Saffron Revolution" against the ruling junta, and who, in the aftermath of cyclone Nargis,

told the world the real story of the harrowing humanitarian crisis in their homeland. Another illustration of activism comes from the associations of Taiwanese abroad, who have aggressively and effectively raised awareness about Taiwan's continuing struggle for international recognition and the constant military threat on their homeland that threatens their democratic way of life. Young Taiwanese have also successfully drawn attention to their society's openness and commitment to freedom, providing an example of robust liberalism in Asia. In Indonesia, a country with a traditional labor surplus, the widespread migration of young people for economic reasons has prompted concerns about trafficking in persons and exploitation of workers. While a collective response from overseas Indonesians has been difficult to organize, with the support of local organizations, workers have been able to press their government for increased protections and safer recruitment practices.

In support of this, another lesson comes to mind, and that is to purposefully educate myself about the pressing issues in my home country in order to effectively shape public opinion. As a liberal, I believe in the catalytic power of information. I consider it a responsibility to stay informed of crucial decisions being made in the Philippines that leave a deep and lasting impact on our economy, our schools, and even our women's reproductive rights. While living abroad, I have also learned the lessons of perspective and pragmatism. For example, drawing comparisons between home and host countries can be constructive. One cannot help but be confronted by disparities between the two societies to which one now belongs.

As a student of political systems, I have noted how vibrant democracies are characterized by a strong sense of transparency and accountability among public officials and by ordinary citizens' steadfast belief in the power of their participation. I have admired the fact that pluralism and equal opportunity were actually guaranteed by legal and cultural institutions, and not merely by trite slogans. Evidently, there were more robust and sturdier democracies than my own with a higher commitment to freedom and equality, and I longed to see the same models replicated back home. However in my view, identifying the root of endemic problems in one's native society is fundamental and should come before transplanting ideas honed on foreign shores. Awareness of

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the diagnosis takes precedence over the rush to prescription. Adaptation to the Philippine setting involves understanding the right conditions for change.

Furthermore, innovative thinking must be unequivocally encouraged from all sources. These days, I am increasingly interested in homegrown approaches that are equally relevant in foreign contexts. I have discovered that there are enduring lessons that Asian society can yet teach the rest of the world, such as striking a balance between faithfulness to the collective good and pursuit of personal gain. I

have recognized that even those esteemed models of democracy have been revealed to have feet of clay. The weaknesses and limitations of these models should propel liberals to continue honing and fine-tuning democratic ideas in search of the praxis that provides the greatest measure of freedom.

Frequently during my time away, I was confronted with questions about what is nationhood and what is country. In circles of young people from all over the globe, I encountered the extremes of the chest-beating patriot and the stateless "citizen of the world," and sought to understand my proximity to either pole. I found this to be important: identity fundamentally affects the quality of one's participation in society. Moreover, identity is dynamic, and is constantly reshaped and renewed with time and experience. For me, identity goes beyond a sentimental attachment to my country of origin. The concept of a nation-state provides the convenience of traditional borders and citizenship with which to bestow rights and benefits. Yet those borders have become porous and citizenship has become superfluous in the web of interdependence that defines current international relations. Today we build bridges, not walls.

Instead of blind nationalism, I cling to the repository of my dreams, hopes, and aspirations, and that becomes my nation. Enlightened leaders, in the Philippines and elsewhere in Asia, who seek to reenergize the body politic, should cast participation in this same light and strive to appeal to the higher ideals of the people – chiefly, by emphasizing programs and platforms. Instead of encouraging patronage to personalities, we must promote an adherence to values and principles which more clearly represent who we are and what we stand for.

I am acutely aware that many young people have had to leave their countries for reasons that were not academic or professional in nature. The flight of human capital, as we have noted for decades in this part of the world, creates a vacuum in the societies of

origin. As an Asian liberal, I see in the individual the continuing potential to contribute to the community, not only through the labor force, but also within the social, political, intellectual and cultural spheres. Those who leave, hope to fill the void of their absence by someday returning with skills, expertise, and experience.

A sense of loyalty to country alone, however, will not bring the scores of young migrants home, particularly not when they were compelled to leave due to grinding poverty, dearth of opportunity, injustice, and political oppression. Until the creation of incentives for return becomes an active priority of policymakers in countries currently experiencing massive human capital flight, many of which are in Asia, we can only expect the continuing hemorrhage of talent. The ability of government to quell the outflow rests not only on economic benefits. The tide can also be turned by improved conditions of security and peace, broader political freedoms, and greater equality and fairness in society, with which individuals can believe they can truly advance in life in their home country through sheer hard work and honest labor.

Being away for a few years has been a far greater educational opportunity than I originally imagined. While abroad, I feel as though I have a better understanding of whom I was as a political actor and as a participant in the continuing construction of a nation. It was the opportunity for political maturity to come of age. When the temptation to fall silent was greatest, it became more important than ever to join the conversation about a future I would always share, about a tie that would always bind, about a place that would always be home.

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*A young liberal from the Philippines, Vanessa Remoquillo earned her political stripes from her stint in the Philippine Senate and the Liberal Party in her home country. She holds a graduate degree in public policy and security studies from the United States, where she was a Fulbright scholar. Currently, she is a researcher on post-conflict peace-building.*

# A SCAR-FUELED LOVE

Mark Visda

Filipino

Location: Antipolo, Philippines

I was heading south during one of those slow-moving working days, awestruck at how distracting EDSA billboards had become. I usually drive myself to work and other places, but this time, while riding in my boss' chauffeur-driven car (while he was comfortably snoozing at the back) on our way to a function in Manila, I was able to enjoy all these billboards that had become more varied than the games played during noontime shows. Trying to avoid waking up my boss, I softly complained to our driver that a lot of accidents had happened because of these gigantic posters. He chuckled meekly and nodded his head in agreement, and we continued to traverse the relatively traffic-free highway in silence.

While a good number of advertisements whizzed past, a particular sign caught my eye. It said, "Love is a battlefield – get some scars." I googled the advertising copy when I got home, and apparently it had also caught the attention of a lot of other people. For the love struck, it offered encouragement: continue the search for your one true love. For the pessimist, it presented the reality of war: you'll only get hurt, so why bother?

When you live in a third-world country (or to be politically correct, 'a developing nation') and you get to experience even a few days of life in a developed nation, one is almost always inclined to wonder: why can't my own country be like this? Their transportation systems are efficient, the roads and buildings are well-planned, and the

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airports are massive but still radiate a welcome feeling. I could go on and on singing praises of these countries' advancements. But as I turn to look at the Philippines, hundreds of questions bombard my head, in particular, wondering what are the reasons why, for such a small but resource-rich nation, it is extremely difficult for us to achieve developed nation status. Of course, the question of 'if they can, then why can't we?' can be answered and debated in all kinds of ways, but it always seems like we will never find solutions which everyone can agree on.

Despite the never-ending questioning and doubts about my country's ability to ever get to that 'higher plane of existence,' I continue to love the Philippines. And maybe in the entire world, I am not alone in saying that I love my country, even though it's poor, or the system is corrupt, or the environment is decaying. I wouldn't be surprised if even through starvation and sickness in many African countries, most of their residents would not hesitate to say that they love their country. Perhaps this example is a bit more extreme, but I would guess that even North Koreans or Afghans would rather remain loyal to their flag and land, even if given the chance to live somewhere else.

Such is the tie that binds a child to his mother, or a citizen to his country. I love my country, despite the many reasons that could make it easier for me to hate it.

And for me, this is where the 'love as a battlefield' metaphor becomes a reality that I am faced with everyday. My patriotic inclinations compel me to fight for the land that I've lived in since birth. But despite this patriotic impetus to stick to my roots, each day resembles a constant war – a war that many Filipinos have to struggle through.

These days, I turn on the television and frequently stumble onto broadcasts about the US presidential race. Sometimes, I get to see either Barack Obama or John McCain speaking at a campaign rally, or if I'm lucky, I get to see them both in a debate. For all those intense speeches, my attention mostly gravitates towards the topic of Iraq and how the candidates plan to end the war or win it, as the case may be. Which leads me to say to myself, "Hey, how about ending the 'war' that's happening in your own country?" Not the war with the rebels or insurgents or leftists or whatever separatist group, but the battle that the common man goes through every waking moment – poverty, broken families and relationships, spiritual dryness, what have you. Maybe it's a bit too much to demand that each and every single one of these battles get solved, but the war has to be eventually won by conquering one battle at a time, right?

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Some may say that fighting for your country in a war-torn setting like Iraq or Afghanistan is incomparable to fighting for your country in a mundane daily-life setting. Yet, I can't help but feel like my countrymen are out there struggling to live their lives with as much ferocity and conviction as soldiers in wartime do. There are days when I too find myself feeling like a soldier on the front lines, doing the dirty work while higher ranking officials are oblivious to my toils. During lunch, I hang out with my co-workers, fellow soldiers who fall just short of complaining about when they will be able to go home after 'the war,' or wondering if they will ever be able to land a better job.

For most of us, love of country seems more important than anything else, and like good soldiers, a lot of ordinary Filipinos march on to battle. When morning strikes, they prepare for another skirmish – dodging the hazards and stresses of work or school, while also looking at their troubled relationships with their friends or family. At the end of the day, they slowly walk back home – thankful for getting the chance to fight another day.

The same routine repeats itself over and over, and they just hope that someday, their own personal war will end.

I take a fifteen minute walk to the office everyday, and whenever I look around, most people always seem to carry looks that are either entrenched in deep thought, or worse, resembling drones that just carry on with the day's work. Never mind if bombs drop in the form of a lay-off notice or pay cut, bullets of harsh reprimands zing past their ears, or knives of bad debts and expenses cut through their pockets. These random explosions and crossfire of unfortunate news, however, are just all one side of the story. There is still another often overlooked side, which contains the positive effects of every war,

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as contradictory as that may sound.

As I walk with the others, I sometimes take comfort in the feeling that I'm trudging the war-torn lands with fellow soldiers. We are complete strangers to each other, but we unknowingly stride together towards the front lines, unaware of how much ammunition will be lobbed at us today. In that thought, I feel an unlikely but inevitable unity among Filipinos. We may not say it to one another directly, but when you look a comrade in the eye, you just understand each other right away.

It's also strange how people who have gone through a great deal of suffering find solace by recounting their battles. That simple act of sharing energizes them, and gives

them the strength to dive right back into the war-zone of life. There is a certain satisfaction in earning a scar out of a deep, unexplainable love, and this is what may be the sustaining light for many Filipinos.

A year after graduating, I nearly went to Singapore for further studies, with plans of finding work and establishing a new life in a new country. The opportunity was there, and yet I decided that I wanted to stay in my country first, gain some more experience, and hopefully even be able to contribute to my country's development. One of my friends, upon hearing word of my decision, contacted me and reassured me that I had made a good choice, because more than ever, our country needed help from its own people in order to rise up from the ground.

That statement shook the foundations of my knowledge of nationalism. At that moment, I felt like I could take on everything and charge at the country's problems head-on. But like a protracted war, lifting up the Philippines from its very deep-rooted problems would not happen overnight. In fact, I recall how a history professor in high school suggested that it would probably take several generations before corruption was completely wiped out, before the war for our nation could begin to be won. I began to wonder how many more scars, literally and figuratively, the average Filipino citizen could bear out of love for his country, before he became unrecognizable to even himself.

A screen title from the movie *Black Hawk Down* read, "Only the dead have seen the end of the war". It's a pretty pessimistic and hopeless thought, but one that might appeal to those who have struggled in an entire lifetime to improve their plight. It doesn't help that there are those who take a misanthropic sense of pleasure in scarring others – in deriding patriots for loving a country that has already become so dirty and corrupted. The Germans actually have a word for this – *schadenfreude*, meaning joy or delight in the suffering of others. I've seen it not only in the workplace but also in my relationships with other people.

But even if you factor in every single one of these crazy, uninspiring acts of malevolence, I still strongly believe that there is a closure to all the chaos, even if it takes hundreds of years to get there. Filipinos continue to hold on and persevere, grasping onto the faint possibility that the country's fading light can still be restored, and that

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hopefully, one may live to see that day realized. Elementary school teachers continue their fight to educate children and instill in them a genuine love for their country. Organizations like Gawad Kalinga never tire in teaching our less fortunate brothers and sisters that nothing is impossible if people help each other without counting the cost. Student councils are now looking for bigger stakes and issues beyond their respective campuses. Soldiers remain loyal to the flag, even though corruption has crept into the army's ranks. Ordinary Filipinos continue to fight out of love and earn scars – their faces hardly discernible – yet their faith and their loyalty to their nation still very much intact.

So let each day be a reminder for all those fighting for this country: look at the scars we have earned and be proud of them. Each of us may be forced to endure our own battles, but the unifying thought of being one people even in the midst of an endless war, should hopefully be enough to help us sustain our love for this tiny republic.

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*Mark Visda graduated from the Ateneo de Manila University in 2005 with a degree in Economics. He is a member of the Christian Life Community (CLC) of the Philippines, which affords him the opportunity to nurture his spirituality while being able to take part in formation activities for others, most notably the youth, by giving recollections, retreats and seminars. He also guides a prayer group composed of Ateneo college students. He is currently working as an analyst for the Philippine Stock Exchange, and has previously worked as a project manager for a mobile services firm.*

# CONCLUSION: THE RIPOSTE

There is no greater calling than to serve your fellow men.  
There is no greater contribution than to serve the weak.  
There is no greater satisfaction than to have done it well.

- Walter Reuther

Asia's youth have spoken. There was divergence in their voices, yes – but there was convergence too - the common desire to change the world and to make it a better place.

Wendi Boxx narrated the transformation of an entire society in India. Her essay on how the individual achievements and triumphs of young girls were shared by their communities is a testament to the exponential benefits education endows to both the individual and to society.

The power of creativity unleashed, as described by Arvin Ello, has its own rewards for the teacher and the students. His essay, and that of Renu Pokharna, called for a more open atmosphere of learning inside the classroom. For according to these two keen observers of educational systems in the Philippines and India, it is only through the unrestricted dialogue of learning – whether through the arts or debates – that the unparalleled influence of our classrooms on our youth shall be realized and fully utilized.

The essays on human rights and Asian values all agree on one thing: democracy and Asian values can and should complement one another. Whether Asians practice democracy through an active and vigilant civil society as Khang Woon Ong prescribed, or through the embedding of Asian values within democratic institutions as Patrick Alcantara proposed, democracy will only prosper if young Asians are able to imagine a democratic future nested in Asian values. To paraphrase Dashell Yanchar's declaration, Asians must be able to allow their souls to take flight, and yet remain grounded by the promise that a dependable "nest" always awaits them. In this way, young Asians can strive to be conscientious global citizens while remaining responsible torchbearers of Asian culture at the same time.

Talking about youth activism and the contributions of the youth in national and regional transformation, the last three articles of the book are a fitting reminder to us readers of what still needs to be done. It does not matter how one advocates for change. Whether through student and youth movements as intimated by Pokpong Lawansiri, or

through cyber-activism as proposed by Vanessa Remoquillo, or by opting to stay in one's country as in the case of Mark Visda, the message is more important than the medium or the strategies employed. For these three contributors on the chapter on participation and empowerment, what is essential is that we remain loyal to ourselves and what we represent: hope for the future and change for the better.

Indeed, as we read the essays in this book, one comes to the realization that everything in life is eventual. However, what may be eventual does not always translate to something possible, or more importantly, to something desirable. Still, everything we read about our youth in this book is desirable. All the essays bring forth the common message of eventuality. Eventually, every one of us has to realize his or her calling. Eventually, every one of us has to do something to contribute to society. Eventually, every one of us has to help out.

To serve your fellow men, to serve the weak, and to do it well: this summarizes the call of the contributors of this work to their fellow youth in Asia. While coming in different hues, the thoughts expressed in this book by today's Asia is loud and clear: it is time.

It is time for Asia's youth to take action to ensure that education remains a liberating force for freedom. It is time for Asia's youth to speak out against human rights abuses executed under the pretence of communal homogeneity. And for the uninitiated, it is our hope that this book brought upon the realization that it is time to start the journey of self-discovery towards the realization of our role in societal transformation.

For whatever calling one hears, whatever contribution one can give, and whatever satisfaction one can have from reading the essays collated for this work, the youth always remain at the forefront of our battles to make the world a better place. This is our calling. It is the destiny that is ours to take.

We have provided a platform for Asia's youth to express their critical thoughts. It is time for critical action.

# THE YOUNG LIBERALS AND DEMOCRATS OF ASIA

The Young Liberals and Democrats of Asia, more commonly known as YLDA, is the federation of liberal youth organizations and young liberal individuals in Asia. Formally established in 2003 with the adoption of its constitution in Phnom Pehn, Cambodia, YLDA holds its permanent office with its Secretariat in Manila, Philippines, which was created in 2005. As its name implies, YLDA is a fairly young organization. Our members and leaders came together in Manila during the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) Young Leader's Workshop in 2002. From thereon, YLDA became the only regional platform for liberal youth and democrats in Asia to come together and help one another promote the values and ideals of liberalism, democracy, and human rights.

Like the region itself, YLDA's membership is diverse and dynamic. The majority of YLDA's members are liberal youth organizations from liberal and democratic political parties as well as from grassroots youth associations across Asia. Other individual members may live in countries where liberal ideals are not welcome or encouraged, but nonetheless, these members have chosen to commit themselves to the promotion of liberal-democratic frameworks in the region.

YLDA member organizations' advocacies usually vary from political education, good governance, economic and political liberalization, democracy to youth empowerment, human rights, and gender awareness. YLDA has built a consensus amongst its members centering on the principle that the best way to achieve desirable change in the region is through youth involvement in socio-political movements.

Towards this end, YLDA has organized international conferences and workshops to strengthen the liberal-democratic understanding and appreciation of our members and partners. We have also improved our Secretariat in Manila to cater to the growing needs of the organization, and this year we have begun implementing our very own capacity-building visits to help and assist our members gain their footing in international liberal movements.

## YLDA'S VISION AND MISSION

YLDA envisions an Asian society of nations where youth are empowered, responsible, and active participants in the promotion of the ideals of freedom, and sustainable progress through the practice and institutionalization of liberal-democratic principles.

## FREEDOM WRITERS

To be able to do this, YLDA wishes to become a strong and ardent network of liberal youth and organizations providing differentiated platforms for its members and partners, leading them to assume key roles in promoting liberalism, democracy, peace, human rights, and good governance in their respective countries throughout Asia.

### YLDA'S OBJECTIVES

YLDA has outlined at least six objectives for it to realize its vision of a free and democratic Asia:

- 1) To establish an organization of young people for the realization of liberal ideals and democratic principles in Asia through regional partnership, cooperation, dialogue, and forums
- 2) To develop successful liberal and democratic youth organizations in our respective country
- 3) To raise social and political awareness of Asian youth and achieve greater cultural and mutual understanding leading to common action and advocacy on issues such as peace, human rights, democracy, poverty-eradication, and gender-discrimination
- 4) To promote liberal values and adherence to liberal practices like education, individual freedoms, rule of law, and sustainable development
- 5) To encourage and train Asian youth by emphasizing the importance of a holistic and progressive education policy in the development of vibrant and democratic societies
- 6) To demand accountability, transparency and good governance

### WHAT YLDA DOES AND WHAT IT OFFERS

Since 2002, YLDA has been instrumental in bringing together young liberals across Asia to promote and represent the interests of young liberals at the regional level. With the ultimate goal of strengthening liberalism and democracy in the region, YLDA facilitates exchanges of ideas including sharing of individual or country experiences on pushing for liberal projects and solutions.

As the regional platform for the liberal movement of young Asians, YLDA prioritizes the common understanding of liberalism by organizing activities on a wide range of themes. Through plenary discussions, debates, group works, study and capacity-building visits, and rotating secretariat projects, YLDA promotes the dialectical process of knowledge formation, information generation, and consensus building.

Every year, YLDA organizes international workshops with the ultimate goals of enriching the understanding of participants with respect to current international issues relevant to YLDA's missions, and capacitating organizations to fulfill their roles of

promoting liberal values and ideals at the grassroots level.

With the capacity-building visits and rotating secretariat, YLDA offers professional services for youth organizations wishing to train their members in organizing events, mobilizing people, widening their networks, raising funds, setting up blogs, websites, and podcasts, improving office management and technical writing skills, and planning strategically.

Finally, YLDA also takes pride in its international linkages, which it employs to full use for the benefit of its member organizations and partners. YLDA has always been part of the growing global liberal family, and thus it also provides opportunities for active engagement with our partners like the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD), the International Federation of Liberal Youth (IFLRY), Liberal International, and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, just to cite a few.