

Book Review - John T. Sidel, *Republicanism, Communism, Islam: Cosmopolitan Origins of Revolution in Southeast Asia*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca NY 2021

*Thinking thought usually amounts to withdrawing into a dimensionless place in which the idea of thought alone persists. But thought in reality spaces itself out into the world. It informs the imaginary of peoples, their varied poetics, which it then transforms, meaning, in them its risk becomes realized...Culture is the precaution of those who claim to think thought but who steer clear of its chaotic journey. Evolving cultures infer Relation, the overstepping that grounds their unity-diversity (Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 1997) || Kartini met people, received news, and heard rumors on the train or at a railway station: "In the train ... I pressed my hand on my heart ... I heard much in the tram." The dreams were most frequent and drew the clearest image "Now, we fly with a storm over the iron road": "Would I ever be able to forget that divine ride with her to the station? ... Do not fly so fast on the smooth iron tracks, you sniffing, steaming monster, do not let this beautiful meeting end so quickly... I prayed that the ride would never end. . . But, alas! the stoker did not hear me (Rudolf Mrázek, 2002).*

In the preface to John T. Sidel's *Republicanism, Communism, Islam: Cosmopolitan Origins of Revolution in Southeast Asia* (Cornell University Press, 2021), Sidel writes of the many years the work has been in the making. At the School of Oriental and African Studies in London in 1994, nights in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, Penang, Lake Mälaren in Sweden, his early years as a graduate student under Takashi Shiraishi at Cornell, an age in motion, workshops in Leiden, micro-film of Jawi newspapers and the people who had passed, his mother Nancy, the ardent traveller, his father-in-law Lennart Hedman, the mariner, Jeff Hadler his Baha Indonesia classmate and fellow Yale-Cornell mafia 'made man', and Ben Anderson, 'for ben', 'to mourn the loss of Ben is also to mourn the passing of an era, not only for me but also for Southeast Asian studies' (p. xii). Sidel writes from a place near Hampstead Heath, he runs across the heath each day ending on Parliament Hill, near the house where Jose Rizal lived in the 1880s and Engels around another corner, Ho Chi Minh in his brief stay in London.

Like Rudolf Mrazek's illumination of the spirit of Raden Ajeng Kartini, the young Indonesian revolutionary travelling the iron road from Majong to Semarang or Edouard Glissant, finding thought in reality spacing itself out in the world, there is a geopoetics to Sidel's project that seeks to step outside the precaution, as Glissant writes, of culture into the chaotic journey, the rail-lines and shipping yard origins of revolution in Southeast Asia. On page 258, the image holds of an episode illu-

minated by Christopher Goscha in his work, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885–1954*: Nguyen Ai Quoc, later to be Ho Chi Minh, working in candlelight at an address in downtown Kowloon, June 1931, scouring his meticulous detailed lists of Vietnamese and Chinese sailors, laundrymen, cooks, servants, lists that map out sailors across the sea lanes connecting the ports of Singapore, Hong Kong, Canton and Bangkok, and on to Vladivostok and Marseilles. In a file marked “List J,” a table of ship movements of the Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes, one of the largest shipping companies in the world at that time. The dates for the Company’s ships’ arrivals and departures from major Asian ports are noted meticulously by Quoc for the months of February to August 1931, coded lists hold corresponding Vietnamese and Chinese maritime agents’ (p. 258). Then comes the knock on the door of Hong Kong police and British Special Branch, following a trail left by a French Comintern agent arrested in Singapore months earlier.

Sidel writes early on, ‘there have been countless studies of the Philippine, Indonesian, and Vietnamese revolutions’, localised studies on the “revolutions within the revolution”, macroperspectives of comparative historical sociology, studies on the rise of nationalist consciousness and mobilization across Southeast Asia (p. 3). Much of this scholarship has been energised by Benedict Anderson’s 1983 *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, written against the backdrop of the Third Indochina War and Vietnam’s invasion and occupation of Cambodia. In a review of Tim Harper’s *Underground Asia: Global Revolutionaries and the Assault on Empire* (Harvard University Press 2020), Thomas Meaney articulates how,

‘Anderson, though of the left, was not keen to oversell the role of Communism in the independence movements of Southeast Asia. Writing early in the Reagan Administration, as the United States hardened its stance toward the Soviet Union, he was wary of feeding the old Cold Warrior line—that the anti-colonial revolutions of the postwar decades were really just

bogus insurrections orchestrated by Moscow. Instead, Anderson and his generation of scholars saw nationalism in Asia as the work of, on the one hand, élites who were educated by colonialism and then turned against it, and, on the other, mobilizations by peasants and urban youth, whose national consciousness merely needed to be stirred.’¹

Sidel, in contrast, locates his work as a synthesis of post-Andersonian scholarship in the past two decades that has begun to trace the origins and animating energies of the Philippine, Indonesian, and Vietnamese revolutions to forces and dynamics lying beyond the boundaries of the new nation-states that they helped to produce. Anderson himself would intimate toward the necessity of such scholarship in his later work *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (2005), ‘situating Filipino nationalists such as José Rizal, Isabelo de los Reyes, and Mariano Ponce within the transcontinental networks of late nineteenth-century anarchism’ Sidel writes, ‘Anderson created a Pynchonesque narrative spanning the breadth of East and Southeast Asia, the Americas, and continental Europe’ (p. 7). Sidel ultimately broadens this outlay with a dynamic image of *three currents* - republican, communist, Islamic - which could run in parallel, perpendicular or against one another and charged each revolution with distinct transoceanic lines of origin, solidarity and tension.

I found his work most illuminating in episodes that identified tensions of current, interference dopplers. ‘At the Fourth Comintern Congress in Petrograd and Moscow in 1922, following the Congress of the East in Baku in September 1920, the exiled Indonesian Communist Party leader Tan Malaka delivered an impassioned speech on the subject of Communism and Pan-Islamism’ (p. 84). Three days of heated debate would follow before he would formally be prohibited from further contributions to the proceedings and the official resolutions on the ‘Theses of the Eastern Question’. In the subsequent Sovietization of Azerbaijan, figures such as Mirsaid Sultangaliev would be arrested

¹ Thomas Meaney, “Asia’s Anti-Colonialist Journey,” *New Yorker*, May 17, 2021

for nationalist and Pan-Islamic deviations and spend the next two decades in and out of Stalin's gulags before his execution in 1940' (p. 85).

Tension in the currents also applies to a critical dimension of Sidel's work drawing it closer to historical institutionalist analyses of how timing, sequences and path dependence affect institutions at critical junctures which themselves may set in motion events that are hard to reverse. Sidel writes how 'even as deepening incorporation into the world economy' brought cosmopolitan revolutionary currents into the equation,

'it was only through international conflicts that political opportunities for full-blown revolutionary mobilization emerged in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam [...] the Cuban War of Independence and then the Spanish-American War were crucial for shaping the onset and trajectory of the Philippine Revolution [...] the Sino-Japanese War, the Russo-Japanese War, and World War I helped to set the stage for the first, foundational phase of popular mobilization in the Netherlands East Indies [...] World War II, the Japanese occupation period, the Allied Liberation of Southeast Asia, and the onset of the Cold War decisively shaped the course of the Indonesian Revolusi; World War I, the onset of World War II in Europe in 1939, and the peculiarities of its extension into Indochina in 1940–1945 and Liberation in 1945–1946, combined with the conclusion of the civil war in China to enable the Vietnamese Revolution' (p. 13).

In this capacity, Sidel prefaces his book with an important series of comparative questions such as why did the Philippine Revolution unfold so much later than the revolutions of Spanish colonial America and yet so much earlier than the revolutions in colonial Southeast Asia? And why was the Indonesian *Revolusi* more manifold in its manifestations than the Philippine or Vietnamese revolutions?

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Republicanism, Communism, Islam: Cosmopolitan Origins of Revolution in Southeast Asia follows a chronological sequence tracing the cosmopolitan origins of the Philippine Revolution (1896-1899) to the Indonesian Revolusi (1945-1949) and Vietnamese revolution (1945). His chapters are denoted in a way capturing the movement of revolutionary currents, from...to: 1. From Bohemia to Balintawak: Cosmopolitan Origins of the Philippine Revolution; 2. *Masonería, Cofradía, Kapitunan*: Revolutionary Brotherhoods in the Philippines, 1896–1901; 3. From Baku to Bandung: Cosmopolitan Origins of the Indonesian Revolution; 4. From Cultuurstelsel to *Komedie Stamboel* The Long Nineteenth Century in the Indies; 5. Newspapers, Rallies, Strikes: The Rise and Fall of Sarekat Islam (SI), 1912–1926; 6. Soekarno and the Promise of *NASAKOM*: From *Rust en Orde* through the Pacific War, 1926–1945; 7. Republicanism, Communism, Islam: Revolusi, 1945–1949; 8. From Guangzhou, Porto Novo, and Antananarivo toward Điện Biên Phủ; 9. From Cần Vương to Việt-Nam Duy-Tân Hội to Thanh Niên; 10. From Thanh Niên to the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) and the Việt Minh.

Sidel's remarkable unearthing of the connections between distant places holds much space ajar for future Southeast Asian scholarship. It was illuminating to read of Baku in the 1920s as a vantage point for a reevaluation of Indonesia's Revolusi of 1945–1949. Sidel writes how Baku was a thriving oil boom town, "equal part Dodge City, medieval Baghdad, industrial Pittsburgh, and nineteenth-century Paris", "situated at the crossroads of the Romanov, Ottoman, and Qajar Empires, the Caucasus had evolved into a site of exile ("the warm Siberia") for convicted Decembrist officers, Russian Romantic poets, Pushkin, Lermontov, agrarian socialist *narodniki*, and a field of activism for *jadidi* Islamic reformist networks stretching from the Crimea to Central Asia and beyond. Already in the 1870s, episodic experiments in publishing in Baku had produced a range of periodicals in Russian, Turkish, and Farsi, and with Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, the

failed Russian Revolution of 1905, and the onset of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran in 1906, Baku's intellectuals began to come into their own' (p. 73).

Fedora-topped Georgian Bolshevik Josef "Soso" Djughashvili, later Stalin, was storming around from 1907 to 1910, labor organising, committing shakedowns, currency counterfeiting and kidnappings. Sidel documents the September 1920 Congress of the Peoples of the East held in Baku months after the Second Comintern Congress in Moscow where Dutch Comintern agent Henk Sneevliet ("Maring") had spoken at length of the travails and triumphs of the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI), including its complex links with an organization known as Sarekat Islam, intimating at the revolutionary possibility of converging communist and Islamic currents in Java. Two years later, at the Fourth Comintern Congress, Tan Malaka would make his speech on Communism and Pan-Islamism before being frozen out by a broader Stalinist sequence of Sovietizing Azerbaijan.

What is interesting is how Sidel then diagrams the Indonesian Revolusi to a triangle linking Baku-Bandung-Cairo. Sidel documents Janet Abu-Lughod and Roxani Eleni Margariti's respective scholarships on how 'by the thirteenth century, Muslim merchants had developed transoceanic trade routes that stretched from the Arabian Peninsula to the coasts of India and Southeast Asia, and from Aden at the mouth of the Red Sea to the Holy Cities of the Hijaz and the Mediterranean ports of Cairo, Alexandria, Venice, and Genoa, making the Indian Ocean a vast Muslim lake.'² Sidel illuminates Ronit Ricci's work on the Arabic cosmopolis and Dennis O'Flynn and Arturo Giraldez on the flows of Peruvian silver from Potosí to Canton and Fujian via Manila, fueling long-distance bulk trade in Brazilian and Caribbean sugar, Chinese silks, Indian textiles, and Southeast Asian peppers and spices in intimate connections of Europe, the Americas, and Asia in a unified global

² Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System, A.D. 1250–1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Roxani Eleni Margariti, *Aden and the Indian Ocean Trade: 150 Years in the Life of a Medieval Arabian Port* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

trade market.³ Sidel uses this genealogy to illuminate distinctive elements of the Indonesian archipelago's integration into the world economy:

'In contrast to the galleon trade in Manila, the absorption of the Indonesian archipelago within the circuitries of global trade not only rendered Batavia an entrepôt but also drew cultivators of Sumatran peppers and Moluccan spices into intensified forms of exploitation. In contrast to the Catholic religious orders' early successes with evangelization in the Philippines, the continuing incorporation of the Indonesian archipelago within the Indian Ocean held the Muslims of the islands within the orbit of transoceanic currents of Islamic worship, learning, and pilgrimage. In contrast to church encouragement of *sang-li* assimilation through conversion, intermarriage, and creation of the official administrative category of mestizo in the Philippines, the Hokkien merchant communities of the Indonesian archipelago were isolated and identified as foreign, encouraging continued connectedness to China for a pariah entrepreneur minority on the one hand, while presaging their growing estrangement from the Muslim majority on the other' (p. 95).

In this way, Sidel writes, the Revolusi was imbricated into certain forms of cosmopolitan revolutionary brotherhood that would eventually distinguish the Indonesian Revolusi of 1945–1949 from the Philippine and Vietnamese revolutions. The scholarship of Victor Lieberman might also have been explored further in Sidel's comparison. Lieberman writes of how centrifugal rather than integrative tendencies would predominate in archipelagic Southeast Asia after 1670 due to the geography of the archipelago: 'supply ports were widely separated by treacherous seas; the Straits of Melaka could not provide an avenue of communication and control comparable to the Irrawaddy or Chao-phraya. In Malaya, tin and other resources were so dispersed that in contrast to most of the main-

³ Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, "Born with a 'Silver Spoon': The Origin of World Trade in 1571," *Journal of World History* 6, no. 2 (Fall 1995)

land, the growth of international demand in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries actually encouraged political devolution; the volcanic soils of Central and Eastern Java were able to contain a population comparable to the Burmese or Thai lowland, however with no unifying riverine artery or easy island wide communication, and with mountains and swamps, the tendency toward centrifugality reigned. Tensions between the mercantile coast and the agrarian interior led to more severe outbreaks of violence than in Burma or Thailand. In what sense the geography and telluric currents of the earth, P-waves, S-waves, inflected the *Revolusi* might add a depth cord to Sidel's focus on the horizontal continuities and serendipitous travels of the revolution's stokers.

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Another episode of enduring intrigue in Sidel's description of the Revolusi connects Bandung to the Suez Canal. Sidel writes of the magnetic consequences on the Netherlands East Indies and on the revolutionary movement of Islamic reformist magazines and pamphlets between Cairo, Zanzibar, Aden, Bombay, Singapore and Surabaya once the canal was opened. The lost twin of Anderson's 'nationalist' print presses are intimated at existing in the steamboat hulls in light and ink. In July 1947, a Dutch warship carrying two thousand troops to reinforce the first Dutch "Police Action" against the Republik would collide with thousands of workers stretched along the full length of the canal, from Port Said to Suez, shouting *Merdeka!* and waving Indonesian flags. A transoceanic Islamic current intersecting communist sentiment in the dockyards of the Suez further illuminates a wider timeline of the revolutionary currents that would later energise Afro-Asian solidarity at the 1955 Bandung Conference. It also holds implications for future scholarship that might explore the revolutionary exports rather than imports of Southeast Asia, a point explored in further detail later.

Sidel locates an article in 1926, emanating from *Indonesia Muda* (Young Indonesia), the journal of the Algemeine Studieclub (General Study Club) in the exclusive West Javanese Dutch hill-station town of Bandung (p. 146). It is the the eve of the ill-fated PKI-led uprisings in Banten and West Sumatra, the article entitled "Nationalism, Religion, and Marxism" Sidel reveals is written by a

young Sukarno, who traces a cosmopolitan gridwork of influences, Mohatma Gandhi and Sun Yat-sen, Islamic activists, Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muhammad ‘Abduh, and the Ali brothers of India’s Khilafat movement, revolutionary socialist luminaries, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, the Comintern leader Karl Radek, and drawing on arguments by a French historian Ernest Renan and Austrian socialist Otto Bauer, to make a rallying cry for Indonesian nationalism, for “unity which will bring us to the realization of our dreams: a Free Indonesia.” Sukarno’s article might have been brought into the introduction of the book as it illuminates Sidel’s key focus on historical junctures as one shared by Sukarno: ‘we must not forget that all elements in our movement, whether they are Nationalist, Islamic, or Marxist, have shared for hundreds of years a “unity of historical experience.” For hundreds of years they have shared a common experience of bondage. We must also not overlook the fact that it is this “unity of historical experience,” this common lot, which creates the feeling of “belonging”’ (p. 147). Sidel prises open an interactionism of currents in this ‘unity of historical experience’.

Future scholarship of comparative historiography between the revolutions might further examine the differential weight of currents, and their inertia, as Sidel describes what webbed the Philippines into the trajectory and collapse of the Spanish empire - conflicts of Christianity and Catholicism in the Europes and Americas, galleon trade and the Cuban revolution, revolutionary letters shared between Rizal and Blumentritt, the networks of ilustrado students in Madrid, Manila, the agitation in Spain for reforms in the Philippines and the founding and publishing in Madrid of the famous newspaper of the Propaganda movement, *La Solidaridad* - was fundamentally different from the Indonesian revolution and its inertial currents of Islamic influence from the vast Muslim lake of the Indian Ocean in earlier centuries. Indonesia’s land was also primed in ways for greater communist influence in the vast exploitative plantations of Anglo-Dutch colonialisms, and a closeness like Vietnam to the revolutionary currents of China. The manifold, diverse manifestations of the Revolusi were furthermore a condition of time as much as space and the magnetic pull of a post-WWII Indi-

an Ocean, whose cities - Bombay, Calcutta, Colombo, Rangoon, Singapore, Batavia, Surabaya, Saigon, Manila, Hong Kong, Canton, Amoy, Shanghai—were vibrant, densely populated, ethnically diverse cosmopolitan entrepôts, aflood with returning soldiers and decolonising sentiments.

In *The Road Not Taken: Decolonisation and Independence in Indonesia and Indochina*, Evelyn Colbert notes how Ho Chi Minh sent a personal letter to leaders of the Republic of Indonesia in November 1945, proposing that the Indonesian and Vietnamese nationalist movements work closely together. Isaac, an American correspondent with whom Ho Chi Minh had been speaking, delivered the message. Though it was tempting to the idealism of Soetan Sjahrir, then Prime Minister of the Republic, he would reject the suggestion, explaining to his associates that the Indonesian movement would succeed because the Dutch could be beaten but that the Vietnamese movement would fail for a long time because the French were too strong. Colbert asks the question, why did the two roads diverge?⁴

Such a moment of the revolutions speaking across to one another might have been brought out more forcefully in Sidel's work, which by focusing equally on the three revolutions perhaps loses a critical edge of comparison on the Vietnamese and Indonesian revolutions emerging as they did at a shared post-war, decolonising critical juncture. Sidel traces Vietnamese revolution-making to different geographical currents than the Cairo-Baku-Bandung Indonesian Islamic connection. He writes of how following France's defeat and occupation during World War Two, anxieties began to emerge with the Sétif uprising and ensuing massacres in Algeria in May and June 1945, the railway strike and riots in the key Cameroonian port city of Douala in September 1945, and the vitriol and violence with which insurrectionary mobilization, unilateral proclamations of independence,

⁴ Evelyn Colbert, 'The Road Not Taken: Decolonisation and Independence in Indonesia and Indochina', *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 51, No. 3 (Apr. 1973), pp. 608-628.

and the withdrawal of French forces unfolded in Lebanon and Syria over 1945 and early 1946' (p. 267).

The war had also brought a deep technological current into Vietnamese revolution-making, 'through the wireless radio station at Bach Mai, south of Hanoi, the Viet Minh telephoned, cabled, and radioed instructions to civil servants in most of Vietnam's provincial and district towns.' From early September 1945 through mid-December 1946, the DRV's Voice of Vietnam aired its broadcasts across the country, transmitting information and instructions to millions of listeners' (p. 269). "The disarming of more than 100,000 Japanese troops, the demobilization of much of the Royal Thai Army . . . and the arrival of almost 27,000 Allied troops" in late 1945 had left Thailand "awash with arms," and Bangkok emerged as "the major Southeast Asian crossroads for arms shipments coming from abroad—from the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Macao and China on the one hand; and from Italy, Sweden and Czechoslovakia on the other." While Vietnamese émigré networks provided an overland pipeline for weapons, equipment, explosives, and medicines to be smuggled from Thailand via Laos and Cambodia, maritime trade links enabled the DRV to source war matériel both from Thailand and elsewhere' (p.271).

Sidel further unearths Ho Chi Minh's time in Paris in the early 1920s, writing his famous 1925 tract in collaboration with Dahomeyan Louis Hunkanrin and the Malagasy Jean Ralaimongo, *Le Procès de la Colonisation Française* (French Colonialism on Trial) exploring how peasants of Dahomey and Madagascar figured alongside that of the subaltern classes of colonial Indochina. Ho Chi Minh along with African and Afro-Caribbean activists would form the Union Intercoloniale (Intercolonial Union) and publish a journal whose circulation ran as high as three thousand by the mid-1920s, distributed in France, in the Dahomeyan cities of Porto Novo and Cotonou, in Madagascar, and across Indochina. From the shared experiences of African soldiers and Indochinese laborers in France in World War I and its early aftermath to the significance of African troops in French efforts to reestablish colonial rule in Indochina after World War II, and the sudden irruption of mobilization in Mad-

agascar in 1947 would draw African and Vietnamese revolution making into a tightening circuit (p. 246).

This circuit would then heavily interact with Ho Chi Minh's Guangzhou connections, where from 1925-1927, Ho Chi Minh, then Nguyễn Ái Quốc, would train as a Comintern agent and found the *Việt Nam Thanh Niên Cách Mệnh Đồng Chí Hội*, or Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League, out of Phan Bội Châu's network, Kuomintang and Chinese Communist Party linkages, and access to the Whampoa Military Academy. Vietnamese activists at the time would also attend courses in the Peasant Movement Training Institute, whose leadership was assumed by the Hunanese CCP activist Mao Zedong in 1926 (p. 253).

There is a gestalt moment reading of Mao referred here as 'the Hunanese CCP activist', which in radically de-centring his position opens up a new sense of the historiography of the Chinese communist revolution and its cosmopolitan origins in currents of activity flowing between Vietnam, Indonesia and China. Sidel opens up the prospects of 'revisiting - and retriangulating - the Vietnamese Revolution from the combined vantage points of Guangzhou, Porto Novo and Antananarivo' and draws on a quote of Alexander Woodside in *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*, 'no amount of statistics, rhetoric, or social science theory can explain the Vietnamese Revolution if its properties of acute historical consciousness and cultural pride are insufficiently considered. These properties were not so much destroyed as psychologically enlarged by the shock of French colonialism' (pp. 207-208).

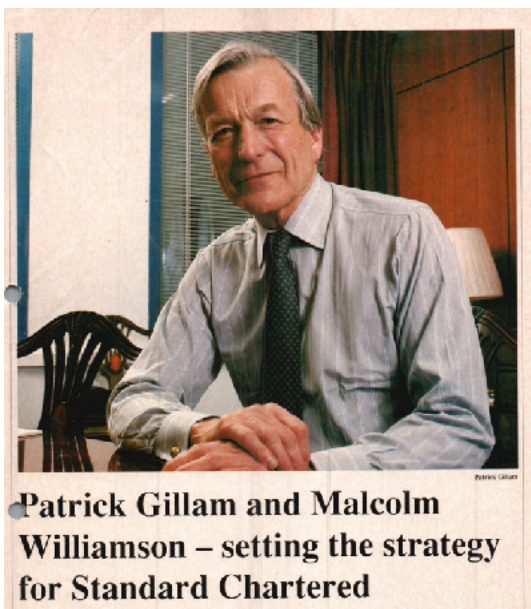
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Sidel received his BA and MA from Yale University and his PhD from Cornell University where he studied under James C. Scott and Benedict Anderson. His previous work includes *Capital, Coercion, and Crime: Bossism in the Philippines* (Stanford University Press, 1999), *Riots, Pogroms, Jihad: Religious Violence in Indonesia* (Cornell University Press, 2006), and *The Islamist Threat in*

Southeast Asia: A Reassessment (East-West Center, 2007). Sidel has also co-authored numerous books, *Philippine Politics and Society in the Twentieth Century: Colonial Legacies, Postcolonial Trajectories* and *Thinking and Working Politically in Development: Coalitions for Change in the Philippines* while working as a Professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies and since 2004 as the Sir Patrick Gillam Chair in International and Comparative Politics in the Departments of Government and International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

Patrick Gillam is seen in photographs with Prime Minister of Singapore Goh Chok Tong in 1999 as the Chairman of Standard Chartered Bank. In a 1994 interview with *Banking World*, it reads ‘in those days, when Britain had an empire, two great banking businesses were founded. One, Standard Bank of British South Africa, concentrated on Africa. The other, The Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China, focused on the east. In the 1970s, they came together.’ This is perhaps an under-explored cosmopolitan current in Sidel’s opening acknowledgement which might too have examined Singapore’s economic miracle via business revolutionary figures such as Lee Kuan Yew.

Sidel does illuminate the story of the emergence of the Banque de l’Indochina in 1875, he writes, ‘the ports of Sài Gòn and Hải Phòng attracted considerable French interest as potential commercial



hubs and points of access to southern China rivaling British Hong Kong, especially after the forced evacuation of French forces from Zhoushan (Chusan) Island, south of Shanghai, following the signing of the treaties ending the Second Opium (or Arrow) War in 1860. French exploration of the Mekong and the Red River from the late 1860s through the mid-1880s had likewise been undertaken with an eye to commercial penetration of the southern inland provinces of the vast Qing realm. With the establishment of the Banque de l'Indochine in 1875 by a consortium of French banks and companies based in Paris, Lyon, Marseille, and Strasbourg, a vehicle emerged for French investment in southern China, challenging the hegemonic position of British banks in the region. While serving as the issuing bank of the French colonial state in Indochina, the Banque de l'Indochine began to work with major French shipping lines such as the Marseille-based Messageries Maritimes to expand trade along routes connecting French, Vietnamese, and Chinese ports from the 1880s onward, while joining a consortium of French banks and major railway firms to fund a railroad line connecting Tonkin to Yunnan Province in the early 1900s' (p. 222).

Sidel might have further examined this episode as a capitalist wave entering the Vietnamese littoral to contend with British capitalist currents in Singapore and existing merchant currents of Vietnamese and Chinese extraction. Lieberman illuminates how in contrast to Thailand or Burma, the peculiar geography of Vietnam in its elongated coastline and lack of a unifying river historically meant that maritime inputs more easily encouraged centrifugalism. Sidel further writes of 'the vast plantations of Sumatra and Java that saw strong representation of British, Belgian, German, and Swiss capital, even as the Dutch colonial army relied heavily on European recruits from beyond the Netherlands, just as the inclusion of Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin within the French Empire attracted hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese-speaking people into other parts of what became the Union Indochinoise (Indochinese Union, i.e., Cambodia Laos) through the magnetic pull of expanding bureaucracies, railroads, and markets, as Christopher Goscha has shown, but also, by the 1910s

and 1920s, drew them into encounters with Algerian immigrants and a diverse range of African intellectuals and activists in Paris and elsewhere in France' (p. 11).

While Sidel states that his work is a project of synthesis, he might have opened more broadly into Lieberman's unifying-centrifugalising optic and spent more time delineating the complexity of currents as they began to swirl into nebulae, concentric cosmologies, or telluric senses of placehood. In *Writing the South Seas: Imagining the Nanyang in Chinese and Southeast Asian Postcolonial Literature*, Brian Bernards documents the numerous cosmologies that co-existed and predated colonial or national boundaries in Southeast Asia: Nusantara (Javanese: "archipelago"), Suvarnadvipa (Sanskrit: "Golden Islands/Peninsulas"), Nanyang and its Japanese counterpart, Nanyō.⁵ Sidel for one notes how the Philippines of the late sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries was a colony of Spain but also an outpost of a China-centered trading network in the Pacific Ocean.

Recent scholarship such as Dahpon Ho's brings to the fore early figureheads of Southeast Asian globalisation such as Zheng Zhilong, a seafarer whose political, economic, and military power coalesced into an organised trading system akin to a sort of quasi-state.⁶ Like his European rivals, Zheng Zhilong encountered what might be called a hub problem. Each European empire tried to construct a double-hub system to link the Southeast Asian zone with East Asian zone. All aimed for monopoly power, though success was evanescent: Spanish: Manila + (attempted Taiwan, destroyed by Dutch); Dutch VOC: Batavia + Taiwan (lost Taiwan to Koxinga in 1661); Portuguese: Malacca (lost to Dutch in 1641) + Macau; Zheng Zhilong: Amoy + Hirado; Koxinga and successors: Amoy + Taiwan (lost to the Qing in 1663 and 1683 respectively). Following the Qing-instigated coastal depopulation, legions of anti-Qing resisters would flee overseas to Southeast Asia, later generations of

⁵ Brian Bernards, 2015. *Writing the South Seas: Imagining the Nanyang in Chinese and Southeast Asian Postcolonial Literature*. University of Washington Press.

⁶ Daphon Ho, 2011. *Sealords Live in Vain: Fujian and the Making of a Maritime Frontier in Seventeenth-Century China*. University of California, San Diego.

whom such as Oei Tiong Ham would be imbricated in capitalist circuitries with the Dutch and British authorities.

Part of the issue of integrating this story of early Chinese and Philippines led globalisation relates to the scattering of evidence of the cosmopolitan movements of individuals such as Zheng Zhilong who operated in a liminal, parallel circuitry to the Qing tribute trade system. In this capacity, the work of salvage operations and maritime archaeology might provide a rich interpretive terrain with which to reopen the shape of these pre-capitalist revolutionary currents. Joseph F. Fletcher would intimate at his project of integrative history as a 'beautiful mosaic' of translucent threads, of horizontal continuities (the weft of the web) and the vertical continuities of successive societies (the warp), illuminating the possibility of a language like Glissant's of tracing the cosmopolitan currents of republicanism, communism or Islam in interpellation into the hot bright core of the revolution. In this sense, a broader question for future scholarship is whether a historiography of cosmopolitan revolution-making requires a post-human, technological lens, a style intimated at by Rudolf Mrazek which might bring life to the shipping lines of revolution.⁷

A further exploration of the *technological origins of revolution making in Southeast Asia* might for look at whether radical changes in understandings of the physical world, Einstein's 1905 Special Theory of Relativity and 1915 General Theory of Relativity, also had a material effect on the Chinese, Russian and Southeast Asian revolutions, changing perceptions of history in key individuals, and prising open a sense of a quantum world, spooky action at a distance, the aether and radio waves altering the perception of how regions could be inter-connected or might hold open the promise of revolutionary currents. Theorisations of the cosmopolitan overground might further explore for instance how radio altered the geography of revolution and the mechanics of transoceanic

⁷ Joseph F. Fletcher, 1985 "Integrative History: Parallels and Interconnections in the Early Modern Period, 1500-1800" *Journal of Turkish Studies* 9: 37-57.

revolution-making, and how its infrastructure of transmitters and receivers restructured the tension between republican, communist, and Islamic currents. Scholarship such as Joshua Barker's *Indonesia in the Satellite Age* and Rudolf Mrazek's *Engineers of Happy Land* illuminate the central role of the Bandung Institute of Technology as a placemaker of radio and therefore the revolution.

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Sidel's documenting of the revolutionary currents between Indonesia and Australia during World War II also captures an element of the serendipity and timing in which revolutionary currents might have begun to flow: 'in the wake of the Japanese invasion in March 1942, the Dutch KPM shipping fleet sought refuge in Australia bringing as many as ten thousand Indonesian merchant seamen, soldiers, civil servants, and medical orderlies. In 1943, Dutch ships would transport to Sydney hundreds of political prisoners from its infamous internment camp in Boven Digoel, New Guinea, with PKI members arrested and imprisoned in the wake of the failed 1926–1927 rebellions. On arrival in Sydney, these transported prisoners were taken away to isolated internment camps, however not without one prisoner leaving a note describing the internees' plight on a railroad station platform, where it was discovered by a puzzled railway worker and passed on to activists of the Civil Rights League of Australia, who took up their cause' (p. 166).

In July 1945, Australia would reject a Dutch plan to use Australia as a base for the training and transportation of one hundred thousand troops to assist in reclaiming the Netherlands East Indies, as well as preparations for further resistance to the restoration of Dutch rule. By September, in Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, and Fremantle harbors, Indonesian crewmen would desert their ships and Australian longshoremen refuse to load cargo, which Sidel notes had a considerable impact on Dutch efforts to reestablish control over the Indies in 1945–1946, just as linkages to Singapore and Penang and Cairo would pressure the Dutch, Radio Cairo would play 'Indonesian Raya' deep into the night, broadcasting Dutch aggression against the Muslim people of Indonesia. In this way, communist and Islamic currents flowed through a capitalist circuitry of shipping routes, illuminat-

ing the rub of psychological plates that Nguyen Ai Quoc would have felt while compiling his List-J of ship movements, personnel, by portlight.

In a May book launch, Sidel was asked by Kevin Fogg about some of the near-misses in Southeast Asian history, of how Indonesia might not have wound up as Indonesia but three or five Indonesias; of the worry that, as historians, we accept the structures that came after and then go about retrospectively explaining them, instead of wondering what might have happened or become otherwise. The story of Sultangaliev as a possibility arc for Islam and communism in Central and Southeast Asia snuffed out by Stalin perhaps illuminates one such avenue for future scholarship. Isabelle Stengers provides a heuristic through which to imagine these critical junctures in cosmopolitan revolution-making when she writes in *Cosmopolis I*: 'like the Amur or the Yukon rivers, history filters, abandons, retains, returns, forgets, lazes around, freezes, or seems to sleep among multiple tracteries and suddenly, without our being able to foresee it, brings about a linear flow, a straight line, irresistible, nearly permanent, as if immortal. History flows, but other historical possibilities "dry up", incapable of resisting the grand narrative taking shape, and it is all those absent histories, all the questions that weren't asked or were left unanswered, that delineate the true space of percolation'⁸

Brian Massumi, in contrast, writes of a history that moves: 'in order to grasp what animates and moves history, it is necessary to move to a more abstract level. For the force of history is more abstract than what it resolves into in its concrete expressions. It is a radically abstract force.'⁹ What is curious in Sidel's scholarship is that it intimates at the split currents and tensions of a revolutionary zeitgeist, what Hegel would refer to as the invisible agent or force dominating the characteristics of a given epoch in world history. Future scholarship might however further broaden into the space of

⁸ Isabelle Stengers, 2010. *Cosmopolitics*. Trans. Robert Bononno. Vol. 1. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

⁹ Brian Massumi, 2014. *Ontopower: War, Power and the State of Perception*. Duke University Press

percolation in each current. Sidel writes of how ‘instead of the linear telos of the birth, rise, and triumph of the Philippine, Indonesian, or Vietnamese nation, the book suggests a dialectical process of profoundly transnational economic change, social transformation, and political mobilization and institutionalization in the making and remaking of the societies of Southeast Asia over the proverbial *longue durée*’ (p. 16). Sidel also writes of how the book seeks to advance beyond the ‘Cambridge School’ of Southeast Asian studies, which has stressed technological connectivity, port cities and commerce, sometimes at the expense of more intentional revolutionary activity, opening up a critical space for interrogating a dialectics of technology and intentional revolutionary activity.

Sidel might in this capacity have gone more deeply into the psychology of individuals and how dialectics were considered within a telos of nascent nationhood, Oliver Crawford in *The Political Thought of Tan Malaka* documents how ‘Malaka would theorise Indonesia moving through the dialectical logic of historical materialism from primitive Communism, to feudalism, capitalism and ultimately Communism, whereby Minangkabau institutions would be regenerated, while Javanese ones would be destroyed.’¹⁰ Indonesian Communism for Malaka would represent a kind of renewal of certain ‘original’) ‘asli’) communal institutions which had been corroded by feudalism and colonial capitalism.

The rub of such ideology as telos against what Sidel describes as a dialectical process of profoundly transnational economic change, social transformation, and political mobilization might further illuminate a more fundamental space for scholarship bridging phenomenology with structuralism, Mrazek with Sidel. There are moments in which Sidel intimates at the existence of this psychological world, he writes of the emergence of popular poems (*awit*) and plays (*komedya*) in philippine cities and towns in the early nineteenth century, “Ang Pinagdaanang Buhay ni Florante at ni Laura sa Cahariang Albania,” set in the far-flung kingdom of Albania that generated among a growing

¹⁰ Oliver Crawford, 2019, *The Political Thought of Tan Malaka* (Doctoral thesis). <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.35261>

segment of the population, a sociological imagination and frame of reference extending beyond the Philippine archipelago and “Mother Spain” to the broader world (p. 30).

Sidel further writes of the emergence of “autoethnography” and investigative journalism (*phóng sự*) in Vietnam in the 1920s with Vũ Trọng Phụng’s celebrated accounts of prostitution and venereal disease and the plight of domestic servants in Hà Nội, through such novels and the incorporation of the first-person pronoun *tôi*, the psychological world of the individual, ‘interior depth, psyche, and self-consciousness was illuminated. At the same time, diverse sociological types, rickshaw drivers, street peddlers, civil servants, police officers, Buddhist monks, landlords, plantation owners prised open an expanded social vision and free-floating points of view’ (p. 228). He writes of Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and Sun Yat Sen who ‘from the vantage point of exile in Tokyo and trips to Penang, Singapore, and as far afield as Hawai’i expanded the global field of vision within which they situated their hopes and dreams for China, developing a global perspective on the Qing realms, comparing the Middle Kingdom to the Ottoman Empire and the British Raj in India, and pondering the implications of such diverse developments as the Philippine Revolution and the Boer War (p. 127).

Sidel notes the magnetic pull of such revolutionary stagings and notes the publication of several recent monographs on the emergence of revolutionary consciousness among the masses¹¹ that would suggest space for a deeper study of how central figures of the revolutions came to imagine, or doubt, or reconfigure their thought. As Glissant writes, ‘rather than a dimensionless place, thought in reality spaces itself out into the world. It informs the imaginary of peoples, their varied poetics, which it then transforms, meaning, in them its risk becomes realized.’¹² As in the geopoetics of Li-

¹¹ J. Francisco B. Benitez, “*Awit and Syair: Alternative Subjectivities and Multiple Modernities in Nineteenth-Century Insular Southeast Asia*” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin at Madison, 2004). Ahmat B. Adam, *The Vernacular Press and the Emergence of Modern Indonesian Consciousness (1855–1913)*

¹² Edouard Glissant and Betsy Wing, 1997. *Poetics of Relation*. Ann Arbor :University of Michigan Press

ang Qichao or Ho Chi Minh imagining the nation from a different vantage, a broader theorisation of how revolutionary perspectives are conditioned through geographic movement might add a valuable dimension of psychological depth to the cross-currents.

An element I thought might also be further expanded upon in future scholarship is how revolutionary currents dissipated, the alter-world or upside down of revolution-making. Sidel intimates at this project, he writes of how these revolutions might be understood not only in terms of their victories and their victors but in light of their betrayals and their victims, as the diverse and diverging emancipatory energies that helped to fuel revolutionary mobilization were in various ways absorbed, appropriated, and eviscerated by postrevolutionary (nation-)states.’ A much broader question might concern why scholarship rarely looks at the embers, the way Pynchon describes the postwar Berlin night: ‘blasted dry-docks, charcoal ribs of warehouses, cylindrical chunks of submarine that never got assembled, go ripping by in the darkness. Separations are proceeding. Each alternative Zone speeds away from all the others, in fated acceleration, red-shifting, fleeing the Center.’¹³

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The concept of integration into the world economy might further have benefited from a deeper expansion, as there is an implicit dimension that the world economy was a fixed entity, complete in form at the time a less formed Southeast Asia was integrated rather than illuminating a geopoetics of fuse ends and improvisatory frontiers. There is a lurking sense of Lieberman’s law of Southeast Asian inertia at work at times: unless acted upon by external forces, native societies remained at rest, without external stimuli, Southeast Asian societies existed in space but not in time. Lieberman’s insights might for instance question whether Sidel’s chapter on the role of Guangzhou in the Vietnamese revolution might also have expanded the other way into the effects of the Vietnamese revolution on Chinese revolution making. To Lieberman’s law of Southeast Asian inertia, Sidel’s

¹³ Thomas Pynchon, 2014. *Gravity's Rainbow*. New York: The Penguin Press.

work intimates at the possibility of a law of Southeast Asian interpellation, looking at the revolutionary ingenuity and exports of figures such as Ho Chi Minh and Sukarno abroad.

This project would suggest the necessity of scholars from Southeast Asia working across different language and source material to generate something like Fletcher's mosaic, or a Rashomon grid of how revolutionaries in Vietnam viewed the revolution and revolutionaries in Indonesia or the Philippines and vice versa. Michael Godley's 1981 *The Mandarin-Capitalists from Nanyang: Overseas Chinese Enterprise in the Modernisation of China, 1894 - 1911* documents the intricacies of the last Qing Emperor's attempts to entice wealthy overseas Chinese merchants in Singapore, Malaya and Sumatra back to the Qing Court to support the modernisation of China's railways and infrastructure. It would be interesting for future scholarship in Sidel's light to probe this juncture as a critical duration of Southeast Asian interpellation and revolutionary export, moving the other way than the revolutionary linkages of Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei in Tokyo. Work such as Godley's add further complexity to Sidel's broadstroke description of the Philippine or Indonesian 'integration into the world economy' by again prising open the shape of this world economy as fuse ends rather than fully formed spaces, and mobilised by amorphous actors who moved in all directions, not solely west-east but north-south.

In relation to Malaysia, Sidel writes in the conclusion of the book of how 'the Malay sultans, in sharp contrast with the Javanese *priyayi*, enjoyed custodial control over the institutions of Islamic worship, education, and publishing, thus precluding the emergence of autonomous Islamic associations, movements, or political parties such as Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, Sarekat Islam, and Masyumi in Indonesia. Workers for the tin mines and rubber plantations of Malaya were recruited from southern China and the Indian subcontinent, even as the Malay peasantry was preserved and protected from the agricultural involution and immiseration that produced a steady flow of Javanese coolie laborers onto the plantations of Java and Sumatra over the late nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries. Thus, even with the disruptions and dislocations of World War II, Malaya saw little in the way of Islamic or other challenges to aristocratic hegemony among the Malays, and the armed guerrilla struggle mounted by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in the late 1940s and early 1950s remained largely confined in its appeal to the ethnic-Chinese working class, thus foreclosing the possibility of an Islamic and/or Communist revolution on the Malay Peninsula' (p. 294). Kevin Fogg asks whether this diminishes from a more complex historiography of the ten year Malayan Emergency and numerous revolutionary figures who sought a revolutionary direction in Malaya at the time.

In a similar arc toward future scholarship, the revolution-making of women such as Tandang Sora, Ka Oriang, Nanay Isa, Heneral Agueda, Trinidad Tescon, Gabriela Silang in the Philippine Revolution; or Kartini and the leaders of Gerwani (Indonesian Women's Movement) in the Revolusi; or Nguyen Thi Nghi, Do Thi Net, Ngo Thi Loan, Nguyen Thi Van, Nguyen Thi Tien, Ha Thi Mac and numerous other women in Vietnam might be further explored within Sidel's schema. Another set of revolutionary currents that might yet be explored further are the connections of India with the Southeast Asian revolutions, and of figures in Soviet Central Asia who continued to explore the productive possibilities of Communism and Islam. Similarly, connections with figures in Africa, Latin America and East Asia would more broadly open up the cosmopolitan origins of revolution in Southeast Asia. An interesting connection Sidel does not draw toward but that might open further space is how China's Belt and Road Initiative linking Central Asia with the Indian Ocean and the Gulf and East Africa re-threads many of these historical connections and might itself open a geopolitics or tidalectics that simultaneously searches for the submerged fuse ends of past revolutions as it unearths the edges of possible revolutions to come.

Michael R. Godley in contrast to Sidel writes his preface from Hilo, Hawaii in 1980, recollecting how his research began in Singapore in 1970. Why Singapore and why Hawaii opens up the dimen-

sion of how research, like revolutionary perspective is informed by its geography or vantage. In this capacity, an 'integrative history' of the cosmopolitan origins of Southeast Asian revolution-making in the 20th Century might require a far deeper cubism of perspective-matching from scholars in geographies beyond the Yale-Cornell axis, located in and across Southeast Asia, East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, East Africa, Latin America, Oceania and the broader arc of possible currents in the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

Republicanism, Communism, Islam: Cosmopolitan Origins of Revolution in Southeast Asia opens up several further avenues for research on the cosmopolitan origins of revolution in Southeast Asia, across new linguistic and source material, in the realm of science and technology studies and in gender studies examining the revolutionary activity of key women in the revolutions. Sidel gave an illuminating talk on his book in May with numerous archival photographs. The tenets of a much broader audiovisual project of revolutionary currents might form one future avenue of *Republicanism, Communism, Islam: Cosmopolitan Origins of Revolution in Southeast Asia* that attends to Sidel's closing promise toward a scholarship that rediscovers and revives the spirit of Nguyễn Ái Quốc's List J and the printpress moving the ocean by night.

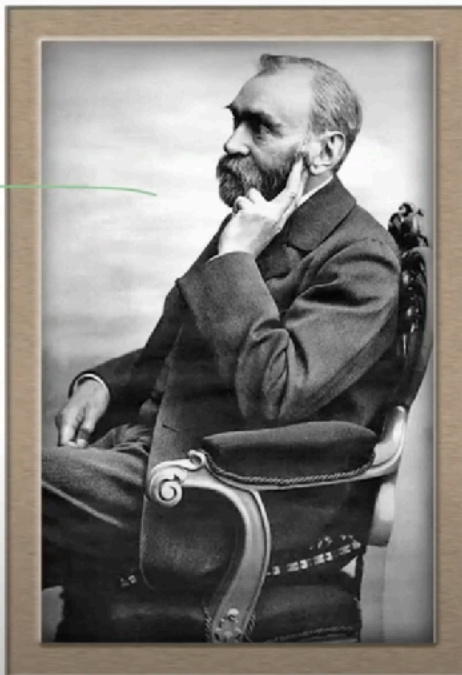


Nguyen Ai Quoc alias Ho Chi Minh



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Peng Pai and the Peasant Movement Training Institute



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Hong Kong-Canton Seamen's Strike, 1925-26, Canton Commune, 1927



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1947 "L'Insurrection Malgache"



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John Sidel

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