



Revisiting the Semi-Feudal Question in the Philippines: A Brief Literature Review

Jacinto R. Valila, Jr.

ABSTRACT: Notwithstanding the insistence of the mainstream left that the Philippines' mode of production remains semi-feudal and semi-colonial, even as other left organizations persevere in their belief to the contrary that the country is already capitalist, albeit an appendage to the world capitalist system—Marxist thinkers must never cease from studying the question on the foreground that different social movements in the Philippines advocating socialism appear to have been stalled in struggles since the 1930s. While there have been radical upsurges in the 1950s, 70s, and 80s, the left, in general, has failed to exploit them. A myriad of causes could be attributed to the prolonged stasis of the Philippine left. One reason is undoubtedly rooted in their analysis of the mode of production. Among the imperatives of such an analysis is that it sets forth the precise accounting and identification of classes for the revolution and counter-revolution. Without a clear grasp of this balance from a Marxist inventory of classes, a movement may lose both its social relevance and revolutionary elan. The subsequent modest and brief literature review offers a fresh invitation for a reexamination of the question at hand, far from simplifying and dogmatizing some Marxist categories. Hopefully, this paper will encourage every concerned party and student of the Philippine left tradition and development studies to revisit the question from the multi-disciplinary perspectives within the rich treasury of Marxist-Leninist literature. This is with an end-view that such a collective review which may happen soon will help approximate and reconfigure a truly Marxist specificity of the Philippine mode and contribute to the rekindling of the otherwise hindered struggles of the Filipino workingmen and people for national liberation towards a socialist future. The paper centers on the debates on the mode of production question in the Philippines among Marxists, and it does not cover bourgeois economics and post-Marxists' thoughts.

KEYWORDS: Marxism, Philippines, mode of production, semi-feudalism.

Valila, Jr., Jacinto R. 2022. "Revisiting the Semi-Feudal Question in the Philippines: A Brief Literature Review." *Marxism & Sciences* 1(2): 199–221.
<https://doi.org/10.56063/MS.2208.01204>

- *Correspondence:* Jacinto R. Valila, Jr., Polytechnic University of the Philippines, Manila.
- e-mail: jrvalila1[at]up.edu.ph
- DOI: 10.56063/MS.2208.01204
- *Received:* 15.03.2022; *Revised:* 19.06.2022; *Accepted:* 03.07.2022
- *Available online:* 31.08.2022

Prisoners of Articulation Theory?

In *The Philippine Peasant as Capitalist: Beyond the Categories of Ideal-Typical Capitalism*, Aguilar (2013) advances the thought that the Marxist debates on the question of the Philippine mode of production since the 1970s were influenced mainly by the articulation theory like those within the non-Marxist fields. Accordingly, such a theory posits that the peasantry is necessarily subordinated to the commodity economy in peripheral countries of the world capitalist system.

With the dependency theory in mind, Aguilar (2013) emphasizes further that even the mainstream left's semi-colonial and semi-feudal thesis is afflicted with this articulation theory. Citing Rivera, he describes the main left's proposition as:

[...] founded on the conviction that unevenly developed different modes of production coexist and yet are in obvious contradiction with each other. Agriculture, in particular, is viewed as dominated by a variant of the feudal mode of production, that is, by a semi-feudal mode harnessed to serve a predatory imperialist bourgeoisie. The basis for this interpretation is the historical predominance of tenancy in the Philippine countryside, especially in rice, corn, and coconut-growing areas. (Aguilar 2013, 41–42)

The countryside, accordingly, is characterized by widespread tenancy relations between landlords and the peasantry. The land rent, corvee labor, and usury on the tenants appropriated by the landlords through coercive mechanisms are considered unpaid surplus labor.

Aguilar (2013) further insists that independent academics like Rene Ofreneo and M. Magallona, who are influenced by the dependency theory, are with the position that Philippine agriculture is now maybe capitalist, considering the land reform campaign of Marcos, Sr. in the 1970s which may have broken the back of feudalism in the countryside. This is not to discount the more precise position taken by the Bukluran sa Ikaunlad ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa-BISIG (Socialist Detachment in Theory and Practice) that “the dominant and governing relations of exploitation in both agriculture and manufacturing are capitalist. It adds that while feudal relations may exist in some parts of the country, they operate mostly under the logic of a dominant capitalist mode of production [which] is why the Philippines is not semi-feudal but capitalist” (Aguilar 2013, 42).

Aguilar (2013) never lost sight also of the earlier proclamation of the old Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas- PKP1930 (Communist Party of the

Philippines, 1930) that the land reform of Marcos Sr. was a radical proposition against the centuries-old feudalism in the Philippines, with the PKP healing the dictator as a scion of the radical middle class who was instrumental for the industrialization of the Philippines. Thus, the PKP fell into the trap of supporting Marcos Sr. and abandoning its revolutionary struggle for socialism in the mid-1960s. Törnquist (1991) confirms such positioning of the left in his exposition on Communists and Democracy in the Philippines.

The above-cited conceptions of the Philippine mode of production, of course, if one has to take them seriously, are arguably more sophisticated than the official thesis adopted by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP, 1968). The party has been asserting up to now, more than fifty years since the publication of the Philippine Society and Revolution (PSR) and the founding of the CPP itself (Guerrero, 1970; Sison 1987; 2020) that the Philippines remain a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country as a result of the intermarriage of global finance capital with that of domestic feudalism. The resultant offspring, therefore, between the union of the West and the East (Lagman, 1994) is a concomitant semi-feudal economy whose growth is restricted by the local domestic production economy and the weight of global monopoly capital in consumer industries.

The inability of the country, therefore, to go forth in industrializing spells a prolonged yet agonizing delay in the transformation of Philippine agriculture into a capitalist industry.

How can we make sense of these Filipino Marxists' and socialists' positions on the issue? Is it possible to approximate the exact mode of production at any given historical specificity, the way Marx concluded with utmost conviction in his *Das Kapital* that the British economy was capitalist, or the controversial declaration of Lenin in his work, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* that indeed such a country at the turn of the last century was already marching inevitably towards capitalism, despite the immense obstacles posed by the remnants of feudal bondage and serfdom?

Aside from *Das Kapital* and *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* which the subsequent Marxists have used in modeling out their templates for their analyses of the supposed modes of production of other countries—are there advances in Marxist thought which could be used as a platform of analysis? Was Mao's semi-feudal characterization of China a deviation from the paradigm constructed by Marx and Lenin?

Lenin on the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism in Russia and Lagman's Polemics against the Mainstream Left

Since Marx preoccupied himself with the question of the extraction of surplus value in socialized labor with the otherwise privatized appropriation of the same surplus through his analysis of British capitalism in *Das Kapital*, most Marxists come to regard Lenin's *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* as the most authoritative reference on the question of how indeed late-developing economies transformed from feudalism to capitalism within the ambit of monopoly capitalism.

Lenin (1899), in this seminal work, begins by emphasizing that such a transformation is compelling and inevitable, considering that the "basis of commodity production is the division of labor" (Ch.1–The Theoretical Mistakes of the Narodnik Economists). When social labor is divided between agriculture and the emergent industries, to Lenin, the march to capitalism is to be anticipated. Thus, Lenin asserts that with the penetration of the cash economy into the hitherto feudal economy, the foundation of this natural and self-sufficient economy starts to erode, giving way to the division of labor in agriculture.

This division of labor in agriculture, therefore, leads to the depeasantization/differentiation of the peasantry within the transition from feudalism to capitalism. As Lenin (1899) emphasizes, the peasantry as a class gradually disintegrates into various classes in the countryside. He classified these classes into rich, middle, landless, and jobless peasants who are utterly proletarianized by selling their labor power to survive. Meanwhile, the middle peasants struggle to maintain their farm lots under capital penetration. In contrast, the rich peasants turn to the modernization of their farmlands, employing the proletarianized and the middle peasants and, in the process, extracting surplus value from them. At times, the rich peasants lease out their lands to the middle peasants, maximizing rent as a form of surplus value. These rich and middle peasants are the precursors of capitalist farms and the commercialization of agriculture in the countryside. They are the future capitalists in the agricultural sector, as Lenin would see it. Lenin (1899) in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* declares (Chapter II Differentiation of the Peasantry):

The sum-total of all the economic contradictions among the peasantry constitutes what we call the differentiation of the peasantry. The peasants very aptly and strikingly characterize this process with the term "depeasantizing." This process signifies the utter dissolution of the old, patriarchal peasantry and the creation of new types of rural inhabitants. (Lenin 1899)

And he asserts even earlier that (Chapter I The Theoretical Mistakes of the Narodniks Economists):

The growth of industrial population at the expense of the agricultural (or it is bound up inseparably both with the evolution of the industry and with the evolution of agriculture; the formation of industrial centers, their numerical growth, and the attraction of the population by them cannot but exert a most profound influence on the whole rural system and cannot but give rise to a growth of commercial and capitalist agriculture. (ibid., 1899)

Lenin's prediction of the massive uprooting of the rural population close to 200 years ago seems to have been confirmed by the study of Araghi (1995), which estimates that by the year 2000, close to half of the world population is already living in urban and industrial centers. He counsels that de-peasantization should not be viewed as a local phenomenon in a certain country but as a global trend given the capitalist intensification on a global scale. Insinuating on the presence of global monopoly capitalism, although it has an uneven presence in the different parts of the world, Araghi confirms that the trend is irreversible. Therefore, we are now witnessing the spectacular dissolution of the feudal economy and the uprooting of the peasantry from the countryside on a worldwide scale.

In the Philippines, another study confirms the migration of peasants to urban centers. Macrotrends (n.d.) provides data on the steady increase of rural migrants' flights. Currently, nearly fifty percent of the country's population is living in urban areas. This invalidates the long-held view that more than seventy percent of the populace are rural-based and are predominantly peasants.

Lenin may have also referred to the work of Friedrich Engels which is *The Peasant Question in France and Germany*. In his review of the book, Chandra (2002) affirms the theory of Engels on the depeasantization and the proletarianization of the small peasant sub-class due to capitalist penetration in agriculture.

As to the timeline of this transition process, Lenin (1899) appears to be silent as it seems that it is not the business of Marxist science to assign neither specific dates for the completion of the transition nor to point-out junctures of transition. What is important to Lenin consists of the development trajectory, the inner laws of development, and the pattern by which the same trajectory may have to follow in the general transition from feudalism to capitalism.

In fact, upon finalizing this trajectory and the inner laws of the development of capitalism from the wombs of feudalism, Lenin (1899) thus declared Russia during his time to be decisively capitalist. This was despite the gigantic remnants and survivals of feudalism and serfdom and even Tsarism. Surprisingly, he was never concerned with the so-called obstacles in Russia's march to capitalism. And among them were the persistence of the widespread serfdom and the agonizing process of peasant differentiation. To him, at the beginning of the peasant class differentiation through the division of labor, and with the gradual and at times rapid conversion of agriculture into an industry itself—the foreseeable march to capitalism has already begun. The continuing and irreversible decay of the old natural economy sets in.

Some Marxists would tend to worry that the slow, gradual, and even agonizing process of depeasantization which hampers and deters the growth of capitalism is a confirmation that capitalism itself may have never set in indeed in a particular country. In his work, Aoki (2020) recalls the debate among Marxists that ensued in pre-war Japan upon its embarkation on industrialization. Accordingly, the Japanese Marxists could not understand that despite Japan's massive drive for industrialization, widespread remnants of feudal and semi-feudal exploitation persisted in the countryside. To uncover this phenomenon, Aoki cites Yamada, who avers that "semi-feudal capitalism" is a deviation from the law of the reproduction of capitalism. On the other hand, Saisaki, as cited by Aoki, insists that capitalism in Japan then was immature; hence, the persistence of semi-feudalism which would eventually coalesce in the future with the general laws of capitalist development.

Again, citing Uno, who asserts that both Yamada's and Saisaki's analyses are culled from highly theoretical categories on the laws of capitalist development and reproduction akin to those in *Das Kapital*, Aoki (2020) says Uno calls to focus the study on the development stages in Japan to understand the phenomenon at hand. He affirms that analyzing a certain mode of production should grasp all the necessary historical, class, and political-state antecedents in a particular country.

In other words, the Marxist analysis of the actual and specific conditions has had to be undertaken in Japan. With this, Aoki (2020) finds out that late-developing capitalism would undergo an excruciating process of depeasantization with widespread persistence of the remnants of feudalism and semi-feudalism as imperialism supplies most of the capital goods and types of machinery into the industrial sector of Japan. This made the

locally emergent capitalism takes off gradually, given the persistence and abundance of supplies from imperialist enterprises. The demand for more workers in the cities and the mass migration from the countryside were therefore delayed considerably by this phenomenon. Such, however, is not a valid reason to deny that capitalism has already taken roots in pre-war Japan.

This understanding is only made possible through Lenin's (1916) analysis of imperialism, the global monopoly capitalism that exports surplus products and capital to the Third World, and the late-capitalizing nations.

By contrast, the mainstream Philippine left, unmindful may be of Lenin's theory on the transition from feudalism to capitalism—persists in the assumption that the Philippines' limited commodity production hinders the full development of capitalism in agriculture (Guerrero 1970; Sison 1987, 2020). Therefore, agriculture could not and would not transform at all. Hence, because of the limited development in the agricultural sector enmeshed with the capital of global monopoly corporations which require raw materials for production—the feudal forms of exploitation continue alongside the capitalist forms of exploitation in the countryside. In simple terms, the country's production model is stalled between feudalism and capitalism. Thus, the semi-feudal label.

Among the feudal modes of exploitation are the corvee labor, rent, usury, and sharecropping arrangement in leasehold lands. In contrast, the forms of capitalist exploitation or extraction of agricultural surplus are wage labor among the landless peasants and even the middle peasants who employ themselves with other farms and odd “sideline” jobs.

With the country's limited industries including those dealing with the processing raw materials, the mainstream left asserts that the country remains semi-feudal and semi-colonial by the marriage of the global monopoly capital with feudal agriculture (Guerrero 1970; Sison 1987; 2020). To them, domestic feudalism serves as the social base of imperialism, as the PSR would put it. The country appears therefore to be in suspended animation within the semi-feudal mode paradigm and without any possible and probable en-route escape towards commercialization or mechanization of the agricultural sector, the classical hallmark of capitalist inroads in the countryside.

This prompts Lagman (1994) to chastise the mainstream left. He asserts that with the phenomenon of depeasantization and as the peasantry is being liquidated by commodity production, the same constitutes a sure sign that capitalism has already penetrated the Philippine countryside. To

him, it is undeniable that the Philippine peasantry has been depeasantized even at the turn of the last century. If not, how could one explain the existence of the national democratic revolution in 1896? To insist on the suspended semi-feudal mode is to Lagman—to deny Lenin’s theory of depeasantization and the swelling of the urban centers of the disenfranchised middle and small peasants from the countryside.

Lagman (1994) emphasizes that the business of Marxist political economy is not to determine the number of the proletariat based on the available statistics. This is an obvious allusion to the mainstream left’s belief that the peasant population still predominates in number over the working class. To him, as long as these inner laws on the development of capitalism from feudalism are valid, it is apt that Filipino Marxists declare the Philippine mode as capitalist, no matter how agonizing the transition to capitalism may be and how long it would take. He cites Marx declaring England as the most advanced capitalist country in the world during his time with only around a million workers. And, Lenin for that matter, proclaimed the dawning of capitalism even in the most underdeveloped, moribund, and Tsarist Russia before the October Revolution of 1917, the first socialist victory of the workingmen.

The Particular Features and Specificities of the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism

Our reviewed literature from Marxist authors appears to be in concession to the following:

(1) Under different conditions, e.g., social formation, nature of the state, degree of the penetration of monopoly capital into the local economy, resistance, and negotiation of peasant sub-classes in the disintegration process of the entire class, and other features—there is no such thing as a Marxist developmental template in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Since different countries differ in these attributes, each country has its general development trajectory. What is certain is that once the division of labor begins in the commercial/industrial sector, it would permeate the countryside, setting forth the division of labor therein. The same will trigger the differentiation of the peasantry, constituting the agricultural sector into a distinct industry.

(2) The works of Marx (*Das Kapital*) and Lenin (*The Development of Capitalism in Russia*) deal chiefly with British and Russian capitalism. What are applicable from these works in the analysis of the modes for other

countries are the mere inner laws of the development of capitalism: (a) the division of labor which starts in industrial enclaves penetrating agriculture and thereby triggering depeasantization, and the transformation of agriculture itself into a distinct industry; (b) the transformation could be slow and agonizing as class struggles permeate among the differentiated classes in the countryside; (c) the remnants of feudal relations and exploitation may persist over a long period, and (d) peasant differentiation will trigger an exodus from the countryside to the urban centers (Lenin 1899).

(3) Social formulations are different from the mode of production category and interchanging the two may result in a distorted accounting of the class forces in the inventory of classes through the analysis of the mode of production.

On a larger issue, Aguilar (1989) appears to concede that the Marxist categories may be insufficient in fully grasping, describing, and comprehending the societies' mode in the capitalist periphery such as the Philippines. Although he takes refuge in the methodology of historical materialism, Aguilar points out in his paper that the mode of production has a complex dynamism as different classes within each specificity enter into different relations with several classes, making it almost impossible to dichotomize the dominant from the secondary and so forth.

Citing Eric Hobsbawm in his *Introduction to Marx's Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, Aguilar (1989) has this to say:

The clear implication of this methodological tenet of historical materialism is that theory cannot prescribe only one form of societal arrangement: what it can do is identify "the limits of the logically possible, while history reveals the selection of phenomena from the logically possible which have been actualized" (Kitching 1987, 43). The study of the historical conditions which account for the possibility or impossibility of the forms themselves requires an examination of the 'actually existing' relations of production, the 'essential relations' of society which ultimately consist entirely of "the actions of 'real, living individuals'" (Sayer 1987, 131-132). Consequently, the point of departure for any theoretical analysis must be the concrete social forms of productive phenomena, remembering that "the subject, society, must always be kept in mind as the presupposition" (Marx 1973, 102). (Aguilar 1989, 45)

Pointing to this as the theoretical fallacy of ideal capitalism and, therefore, any official trajectory or projection on how capitalism may develop in a certain country could not exist and may not exist at all, Aguilar (1989) suggests that each Marxist has to rely on the inner laws of the development of capitalism and apply these laws creatively to the specific conditions of

each country, taking into account the web of the complex relationships among the classes, the role of the state, and the role of international capital penetrating the local agriculture, among others.

This view appears to gain support from Ruyle (1975) who proposes to revise the popular linear and paradigmatic theory on the development of society within the historical materialist context. To him, the popular model of the development of societies from primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and world communism could be a mechanical attribution to Marx's and Engels's historical materialism. And Ruyle (1975) would thus proclaim:

Finally, the evolutionary typology espoused by this Soviet brand of "Marxism" is inadequate. The unilineal, Eurocentric (model primitive clan society, slave-owning society, feudal society, capitalist society) forces Asian, African, and aboriginal American societies into preconceived slots with little regard for their characteristics and development potential. For example, what can we make of a "slave system" that lumps ancient Sumer, Egypt, and China with the Aztecs, Incas, and the Roman Empire? Or feudalism that includes the Tang dynasty in China, the Islamic caliphates, pre-Taika Japan, and medieval Europe? How can we understand East Asiatic history without understanding the major social changes that occurred during the late T'ang and Sung dynasties, both "feudal" societies? Surely concepts that can be applied to such diverse societies have lost their specific usefulness for understanding the societies themselves. (Ruyle 1975, 8-9)

Short of suggesting that Marx and Engels were not definitive on the mode of production concept, Ruyle (1975) says what is important to them is the question of the extraction of surplus value and how this generates the contradiction of class struggle. To take Marx's and Engel's suggested development path of societies as motored by the development of the productive forces and the attendant class struggles mechanically without the attendant modification, as shown by concrete evidence in history, is to dogmatize and vulgarize historical materialism accordingly. There are variants and deviations apparently in the actual evolution of societies from what had been suggested by Marx and Engels and the Soviet Marxists as well.

A loose categorization of the modes might be more logical, and thus, Ruyle (1975) in *Mode of Production and Mode of Exploitation: The Mechanical and The Dialectical*, devises the following development schema:

Primitive communism. This is the original social order of mankind, appearing simultaneously with social production. In this primitive communal social order,

humanity evolved its present physical and mental nature. Primitive communism is characterized by the absence of social classes and the related institutions of coercion and thought control, by equal access to the social product and the means of violence, and by the equal obligation of all to participate in social production.

Bronze Age feudalism. As civilizations began to emerge in the “nuclear areas” of Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, and the Indus Valley, the earliest fully class-structured societies were organized into relatively weakly integrated “feudal” structures. Unlike the later Iron Age feudalism of Europe, these Bronze Age feudalisms evolved into centralized empires following the development of irrigation, iron technology, and improved techniques of statecraft.

Agro-managerial bureaucratic empires. These are the classic “hydraulic” societies, in which a central authority controls the key economic resource, the irrigation system, and, through a bureaucracy, controls and exploits the underlying population. Such bureaucratic empires exhibited a cyclical pattern of rise and fall but also a progressive development of the productive and exploitative systems, resulting in improved agriculture, larger populations, improved bureaucratic techniques, etc. The Near East, China, and India’s historic civilizations fall into this category.

Nomadic feudalism. Pastoral nomadism develops on the periphery of the hydraulic world, where agriculture is impossible. Because of their mobility and warlike character, such nomads can periodically conquer bureaucratic empires.

American civilizations. The New World, peopled by primitive communal hunters and gatherers by 15,000 B.C., underwent a parallel evolutionary development to that seen in the Old World, but somewhat later and with certain distinctive characteristics.

Maritime slave capitalism. In the Mediterranean, maritime trading nations emerged, which traded with the advanced empires. Slavery became economically important as these nations began to engage in precapitalistic commodity production for trading purposes.

Feudalism. In Europe, a decentralized feudal system developed in which competition between feudal rulers conditioned an extremely rapid development of the forces of production, trade, and warfare (largely borrowed from the more advanced Asiatic empires).

Capitalism. The decentralized social structure of European feudalism permitted the rise of the bourgeoisie which performed the task of integrating the entire world into a single economic system.

Protosocialist states. As the international working class attained state power on the periphery of the advanced capitalist nations, it attempted to establish socialism. The development of socialism was deformed by the material conditions under which the working class revolution was undertaken: the underdeveloped character of the production planted the threat of capitalist reconquest. The result was what Trotsky called ‘degenerated workers’ states.

World socialist industrial society. When the working class completes its revolution and becomes a world-ruling class, it will abolish class antagonisms and exploitation and establish a world socialist order. As Morgan foresaw, this will be a “revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity” of primitive communism.

(Rulye 1975, 17-18)

These are supposed to be broad-stroke outlines of developmental stages based on the development of technology/productive forces and the theory of class struggles. Ruyle (1975) avers that what is important is the mode of exploitation rather than the mode of production. Instead of ceaselessly debating the mode of production, therefore, the task of every Marxist is to determine who exploits who and how these forms of exploitation will be summed up in totality concerning the class balance of forces for social change and reaction.

On the other hand, Nadeau (1994) appears to uphold Ruyle’s views when she affirms that Marx and Engels did not define the mode of production at all as a concept. She is instructive when she posits:

There have been debates over this very issue. Marx himself did not consistently use the term in his writings. Yet, mode of production is a key conception of Marxist thought and has been used (and confused) to distinguish between social formations in history (primitive communist, ancient, Asiatic, feudal, capitalist socialist, and advanced communist), even though social formation and mode of production are two different concepts. A social formation is an entity (a particular type of society) constituted by “a specific overlapping of several ‘pure’ modes of production.” On the other hand, a mode of production can be defined only tentatively because it is subject to change. It is a complex of social relations which link human beings together in any production process, and the means of production (e.g., tools, technology, knowledge, skills, abstract forms of organization) around which work is organized to ensure the material survival and reproduction of a particular human group. Rarely are social formations found to be composed of a single type of mode of production, as may be the case in ‘primitive communism.’ (Nadeau 1994, 139)

Given the above premises, Marxists have to cease thinking mechanically and dogmatically that the mode of production within a certain social formation can be singularly defined by one specific relation of production and one mode of exploitation or surplus-value extraction method. Several relations within a certain juncture could present a web of complex relations among classes. And the exploiters can be exploited on the one hand, while the exploited can be exploiters on the other hand (Aguilar 1989).

In his paper, Aguilar (1989) demonstrates that in the transition from feudalism to capitalism—multifaceted relations and various forms of exploitation may simultaneously occur even within the differentiated peasants. For instance, the middle peasant, in engaging the labor of landless peasants scoops up surplus-value. At the same time, he is being exploited simultaneously because he has numerous “sideline” jobs aside from tilling his land. These “sideline” jobs could be in the form of engaging with other agricultural plantations, running his own tricycle business, and so many more.

And Where is Mao in All This?

Mao, to his followers, is the acme of Marxism-Leninism as he was supposed to have uncovered the art and science of Marxism at the time of semi-feudalism and colonialism. If Marx had analyzed capitalism and Lenin had contributed a lot to the theory of imperialism, uncovering the laws governing the development of competitive capitalism towards monopoly capitalism—Mao is being regarded by his admirers (including the mainstream Filipino Marxists) as the one who had theorized and applied Marxism-Leninism at the age of imperialism and neo-colonialism.

Not surprisingly, many Marxists in the Third World—from Asia, Africa, and Latin America revere Mao. Some have dogmatically flirted with his semi-feudal and semi-colonial categorization of the Chinese society before its liberation from Imperial Japan in the Second World War.

Mao’s eminence coincided with the ideological schism between the then socialist USSR and China even as most Marxist movements on various continents likewise gravitated for support either to the USSR or China. The Philippines’ and Indonesia CPs were clear examples of how the movements abandoned the USSR and pivoted to China. No wonder, therefore, that the Philippine thesis of the semi-feudal and semi-colonial mode is almost synonymous with that of Mao’s formulation for China.

Perhaps due to the difficulties of war, as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was in perpetual war with the northern warlords and various imperialist nations and then with Japan during the Second World War, Mao may have never grappled with the question of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the way Lenin comprehensively studied and profoundly understood the same question. He thus automatically classified the Chinese society as semi-colonial, owing to the presence of imperialist powers in China, collaborating with her local warlords.

Mao (1939), nonetheless, never lost sight of the development of capitalism in China. In fact, he provides (3. Present-Day Colonial, Semi-Colonial and Semi-Feudal Society):

The Chinese society remained feudal for 3,000 years. But is it still completely feudal today? No, China has changed. After the Opium War of 1840, China gradually became a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Since the Incident of September 18, 1931, when the Japanese imperialists started their armed aggression, China has changed further into a colonial, semi-colonial, and semi-feudal society. We shall now describe the course of this change.

As discussed in Section 2, Chinese feudal society lasted 3,000 years. It was not until the middle of the 19th century, with the penetration of foreign capitalism, that great changes took place in Chinese society.

As China's feudal society had developed a commodity economy and carried within itself the seeds of capitalism, China would have developed slowly into a capitalist society even without the impact of foreign capitalism. Penetration by foreign capitalism accelerated this process. Foreign capitalism played an important part in the disintegration of China's social economy. On the one hand, it undermined the foundations of her self-sufficient natural economy and wrecked the handicraft industries in the cities and the peasants' homes. On the other, it hastened the growth of a commodity economy in town and country.

Apart from its disintegrating effects on the foundations of China's feudal economy, this state of affairs gave rise to certain objective conditions and possibilities for developing capitalist production in China. The destruction of the natural economy created a commodity market for capitalism, while the bankruptcy of large numbers of peasants and handicraftsmen provided it with a labor market.

Some merchants, landlords, and bureaucrats began investing in modern industry as far back as sixty years ago, in the latter part of the 19th century, under the stimulus of foreign capitalism and because of certain cracks in the feudal economic structure. About forty years ago, China's national capitalism took its first steps forward at the turn of the century. Then about twenty years ago, during the first imperialist world war, China's national industry expanded, chiefly in textiles and flour milling, because the imperialist countries in Europe

and America were preoccupied with the war and temporarily relaxed their oppression of China.

The history of the emergence and development of national capitalism is the same as the history of the emergence and development of the Chinese bourgeoisie and proletariat. Just as a section of the merchants, landlords, and bureaucrats were precursors of the Chinese bourgeoisie, a section of the peasants and handicraft workers were the precursors of the Chinese proletariat. As distinct social classes, the Chinese bourgeoisie and proletariat are newborns and never existed before in Chinese history. They have evolved into new social classes from the womb of feudal society. They are twins born of China's old (feudal) society, at once linked to each other and antagonistic. However, the Chinese proletariat emerged and grew simultaneously not only with the Chinese national bourgeoisie but also with the enterprises directly operated by the imperialists in China.

Hence, a very large section of the Chinese proletariat is older and more experienced than the Chinese bourgeoisie and is, therefore, a greater and more broadly based social force.

However, the emergence and development of capitalism is only one aspect of the change that has taken place since the imperialist penetration of China. Another concomitant and obstructive aspect is the collaboration of imperialism with the Chinese feudal forces to arrest the development of Chinese capitalism. (Mao, 1939)

To Mao, Guerrero, and Sison, imperialism impedes the development of national and industrial capitalism. Accordingly, imperialist capital restricts the growth of national capitalism which is necessarily founded on heavy industries. For Mao and Sison, without heavy industries, there could be no capitalism. Nonetheless, Mao was sensitive to the inroads of capitalism in China; had it not been for imperialism, capitalism may have been solidly planted in China.

Proceeding then to his exposition of the Chinese society's specific characteristics, Mao (1939) enumerates the following: the dissolution (*depeasantization*) of the foundation of the natural rural economy (feudalism); the development of capitalism in China but not on the national scope; the replacement by the bureaucrat-warlords of the autocratic old nobility; the imperialists' total and partial domination, control of China's territories and finance in collaboration with the bureaucrat warlords who partitioned China into several spheres of influence; the emergence of sharp contradictions between imperialism and the Chinese people and between feudalism and the great masses of people.

Short of saying that China was a direct colony of the various imperialist nations through conspiracies with local bureaucrat warlords, Mao thus formulated his people's protracted war theory, a strategy in civil and national wars against the warlords and the imperialist aggressors, the latest of which was Imperial Japan. Yet, even much earlier, Mao (1928) had already foreseen the possibility of Red Power's existence in China's vast landmass. Among his justifications were the absence of a centralized economy and government, the constant warring of the bureaucrat warlords among themselves, and the sheer vastness of the Chinese territory suitable for maneuvers of big military formations in guerrilla and positional warfare.

The question that may arise now is: was Mao, in the cited two books, presenting the mode of production of China, or was he merely elaborating a description of China's social formation before the Second World War, which is characterized in international politics with the collapse of the old colonialism and the nascent imperialism. In fairness to Mao (1939), he seems to have not used the phrase mode of production. Instead, he emphasizes the "*characteristics of China's semi-colonial and semi-feudal society*" (Ch. I No.3- The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party).

Nonetheless, since the Cultural Revolution and the demise of Mao, Maoist cultists in China and around the world elevated "*Mao's thought*" as the universal theory in Marxism-Leninism in the era of imperialism and semi-feudalism. No wonder Mao's semi-feudal and semi-colonial thesis on the Chinese society became the model by which various CPs in the Third World patterned their analyses of their respective modes of production. But yet again, Mao's expositions of the Chinese society's characteristics were so unique that he would think the conditions in China during his time could not happen in any country around the world, owing to the interplay of various factors, e.g., the vastness of China's landmass, absence of central government and a unified economy, constant warring of the bureaucrat warlords with their respective imperialist patrons and so on. Mao asserts that the same combinations could not be found in any other country and at any given juncture in history.

Now, where can one find the basis affirming that these specific characteristics of the Chinese society during those times could be held as a universal truth, albeit a dogma, and as the so-called acme of Marxism-Leninism in the era of imperialism?

A universal theory encompasses the inner logic of universal development applicable to all nations. Mao's specific theories are applied

to China's specificities and China's alone. Maybe his contributions to the Marxist methods of work, dialectical materialism, and the theory against modern revisionism could be held universal. But the texts may speak for themselves on the mode of production and/or precisely on the Chinese society's specificities.

Emphasizing the particularities of every situation, Mao (1939) counsels that "the social and economic investigation aims to arrive at a correct appraisal of class forces and then formulate correct tactics of the struggle" (Ch V-Oppose Book Worship). However, maybe owing to the very dynamic and fluid situation in which China found itself at the turn of the last century and at the eve of the Second World War and noting that China was in perpetual war externally with imperialist powers and internally among the warring warlords—Mao may have been affected by the reasonable requirements of trying to unite the vast Chinese people against the Japanese aggression and other imperialist nations. He would thus appear that his main preoccupation was for the national unity and the liberation of the Chinese people from foreign aggression, rather than the analysis of the prevailing classes and their interplay among each other, the way Marx analyzed England and Lenin focused on Russia.

Making Sense of the Review: Where are We Now?

Having located the unique and non-universal character of Mao's semi-feudal and semi-colonial thesis which is maybe applicable to China alone and given that the same appears to be far from a thorough appraisal of China's mode of production, but rather an exposition of China's social formation during his time, can we now make sense on the thesis of the mainstream left as regards its semi-colonial and semi-feudal mode of the Philippines? Could it stand against the rigors of the Marxist analysis on the transition from feudalism to capitalism based on the theories of the division of labor, peasant differentiation, massive migration of rural population to urban centers, creation of agriculture as a distinct industry, and the penetration of cash economy to the countryside through the commodity production?

Both Sison and Guerrero are silent about these treatises advanced by Lenin. Rivera (1994) nonetheless would appear to support Sison's and Guerrero's arguments that the hacienda systems may have been retained in the Philippines as the social base of imperialism, given the near-monopoly of the *hacendero* class of the Philippine state in the post-

independence epoch. He demonstrated this by his study on the struggle of landlords against the emergent capitalists within the realm of import-substitution industries (ISI) in the late 1960s.

Rivera (1994) tacitly agrees in his paper with the official line of semi-feudalism from the mainstream left. He has shown the inter-elite struggles among the landed-based manufacturers with the emergent capitalists in the import substitution industries, with the former eventually winning this struggle. Several factors have been cited by him as to why indeed the landlords vanquished the emergent non-land-based capitalists: (1) the land-based oligarchs or in the language of Guerrero, the big comprador bourgeoisie (landlords in the countryside, importer-exporter in the cities) were well-entrenched in the bureaucracy and the state that enabled them to block plans and legislations against the tightening of import control to let local manufacturing flourish. Such landed elite class' interest in the exportation of agricultural raw materials and importation of finished products eventually clashed with their desire for industrialization; (2) a weak state dominated by these landed elites which wallowed in corruption, subservience to foreign dictates, and non-homogenous policy-making process; (3) dictates of multilateral agencies which were extending aids and loans to the country in order to do away with control mechanisms and continue to open the country's floodgates for imported products.

Eventually, because of this unfavorable situation, the emergent elite in the manufacturing sector had to relinquish its struggle for dominance over the landed elites. Implicitly, Rivera confirms Guerrero's thesis on the marriage of imperialism and the landed-elite class, which subsequently produced the semi-feudal mode of production in the Philippines.

On the other hand, Simbulan (1965) traces the historical evolution of this landed elite which held the state captive—from the old nobility of the pre-Hispanic *Baranganic* societies towards being the Spanish conduits, the *encomienderos*, then the *hacienderos* up to their collaboration with the new colonialists in the American era, down to the post-independence period. He appears to provide the historical evolution of the class whose interests are consistent with America's designed export-oriented and import-dependent economy in the Philippines. Hence, the class loathed the idea of national industrialization and agrarian reform. And since they held the state captive, the same state is paralyzed in undertaking neither industrialization nor agrarian reform.

Now, if the categorization of the mainstream left's position is neither Marxist nor Maoist, how do we describe then the mode of production in

the Philippines, and what is compelling the left from studying further and afresh the concrete conditions of classes in Philippine society? Nemenzo (1992) suggests Stalinism and the lack of inner-organizational democracy among communist parties and socialist organizations as among the causes of the theoretical stasis within the left movement. We will, however, cease exploring these issues as this will distract us from the main question at hand.

Excluding Lagman's thoughts here, for we have already discussed such above, Raquiza (2012; 2014) asserts that at least in the service and commercial sectors, the Philippines can be said to be capitalist. Discussing the massive remittances from the OFW sector which accounts for at least a sizable portion of the GDP, reaching 22B dollars per annum, Raquiza assumes that the Filipino capitalists are cashing it out on the service sector businesses like the malls, housing, education, and banking for deposits and remittances. Consumer goods, like cars, electronics, and appliances have likewise flooded the market, given the OFW sector's penchant for consumerism.

Again, with the enunciation of the Private Public Partnership (PPP) scheme of the government under the ambit of the neo-liberal policies of the state on liberalization, deregulation, and privatization—the top billionaires and the capitalists class in the Philippines are foraying into power generation, transmission, water services, tollways construction and concessions and other social services which were previously within the domain of government functions, so Raquiza (2014) believes.

Now, if the peasant class in the country has already been differentiated, while the migration of peasants is steadily happening from the countryside to the urban centers and with the urban centers being alive on commercial and service capitalism, can we still label the country with the semi-feudalism stamp?

Conclusion

Marxism, in general, is concerned with social progress through class struggles and the development of productive forces. Without these two, societies could not have evolved into higher forms with all the discoveries and advances in mathematics, natural sciences, and social theory. Under capitalism, the world proletariat has to be freed from the predatory worker-capitalist relation which is instrumental in privatizing the fruits of social labor. Likewise, the workingmen must be freed from all the remnants of

feudalism as others would call it semi-feudalism, for its continued development as a class would inevitably speed up without these hindrances. The forces of production may not develop as well unless the proletariat is unchained from all the obstacles of exploitative relations, whether feudal or capitalist in nature.

Yet again, the task of freeing the proletarian class is the task of the proletariat alone, as Marx and Engels (1948) would assert. It is the only revolutionary class in capitalism, and it is the only class that is desirous of socialism. All other classes, including the peasantry and even the petty bourgeois in the countryside are reactionary classes in as much as socialism is concerned.

Without the complete freedom of the proletariat, social progress would be impossible to achieve as the world would continue to suffer from massive poverty and famines, wars, and other forms of social disorder while the surplus value of labor is turned into a means for private accumulation despite the socialized nature of human labor on a global scale.

The questions on the remnants and fetters of feudalism, however, belong to the ambit of the democratic revolution, the first part of the 2-phase democratic and socialist revolutions as proposed by Marx, Engels, and Lenin. While the proletariat is desirous of freeing other classes from the shackles of feudalism, e.g., the peasant and the constrictions from imperialism, the ultimate task of the proletariat is building socialism the world over, cementing fraternal unities within the proletarian class around the world.

The question of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, therefore, represents a tactical juncture in as much as the strategic objective for building world socialism is concerned. Nonetheless, it occupies a central part in the democratic revolution agenda of the world proletariat, for it would be impossible to build socialism under the most underproductive relations and backward productive forces in feudalism and monopoly capitalism.

The liquidation of the feudal remnants in the countryside and the purging of imperialist influence in the reactionary state are necessary preconditions for the liberation of the proletariat in the democratic stage of the revolution. But such a proletariat must never lose sight of the ultimate aim of socialism. And thus, freedom from the bondage of soil and national liberation from imperialism are preconditions for building socialism. They are still far from the ultimate goal of social progress.

Let everyone listen to Engels (1890) when he counsels in his letter to Conrad Schmidt:

[...] our conception of history is above all a guide to study, not a lever for (the reconstruction of reality to fit a predetermined mold) in the manner of the Hegelians. All history must be studied afresh, the conditions of the existence of the different social formations must be examined individually before any attempt is made to deduce from them the political, civil-legal, aesthetic, philosophic, religious, etc. notions corresponding to them. (Pr. 3)

The mainstream left's thesis on the semi-colonial and semi-feudal mode of the Philippines appears to be a priori. It could not certainly justify the revolutionary strategy and tactics of a prolonged peasant war in the countryside as the path towards proletarian emancipation when the peasantry itself is being *differentiated* (fragmented), uprooted in the countryside, and is not desirous of socialism at all. Under such a condition, how can one expect to organize the peasantry as the primary force of the revolutionary struggle for socialism through national democracy? Is it not utterly impossible to build the bulwarks of socialism in the countryside when the task of liberating the proletariat belongs to the proletariat alone?

A sincere Marxist reexamination of the mainstream left's analysis of the Philippines' mode of production has been long overdue.

REFERENCES

- Aguilar, Filomeno V. 1989. "The Philippine Peasant as Capitalist: Beyond the Categories of Ideal-Typical Capitalism." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 17(1): 41–67.
doi:10.1080/03066158908438412.
- Aoki, Hideo. 2020. "Marxism and the Debate on the Transition to Capitalism in Prewar Japan." *Critical Sociology* 47(1): 17–36. doi:10.1177/0896920520914074.
- Araghi, Farshad A. 1995. "Global Depeasantization, 1945–1990." *The Sociological Quarterly* 36(2): 337–368. doi:10.1111/j.1533-8525.1995.tb00443.x.
- Chandra, Nirmal Kumar. 2002. "The Peasant Question from Marx to Lenin: The Russian Experience." *Economic and Political Weekly* 37(20): 1927–38.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4412133>.
- Communist Party of the Philippines. 2020. "PRWC: On the Current Character of Philippine Society." *Philippine Revolution Web Central*.
<https://cpp.ph/2020/08/31/on-the-current-character-of-philippine-society/>.
- Guerrero, Amado. 1970. "Philippine Society and Revolution." *Marxists Internet Archive*.
<https://www.marxists.org/history/philippines/cpp/guerrero/1970/psr.htm>.
- Lagman, Filomeno. 1994. "Works of Lagman: Counter-Thesis 1." *Marxists Internet Archive*.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lagman/works/psr.htm>.
- . 1994. "Works of Lagman: Counter-Thesis 2." *Marxists Internet Archive*.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lagman/works/ppdr.htm>.

- Lenin, Vladimir. 1916. "Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism: a popular outline." *Marxists Internet Archive*.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/imperialism.pdf>.
- . 1964. "Lenin: 1899: The Development of Capitalism in Russia." *Marxists Internet Archive*.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1899/devel/>.
- Macrotrends. 2021. "Philippines Rural Population 1960-2021." *Macrotrends, The Long Term Perspective on Markets*.
<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/PHL/philippines/rural-population>.
- Mao, Tse-tung. 1928. "Why is it that red political power can exist in China?" *Marxists Internet Archive*.
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_3.htm.
- . 1930. "Oppose Book Worship." *Marxists Internet Archive*.
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-6/mswv6_11.htm#s4.
- . 1939. "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party." *Marxists Internet Archive*.
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_23.htm.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. 1848. "Communist Manifesto (Chapter 1)." *Marxists Internet Archive*.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm>.
- . 1890. "Letters: Marx-Engels Correspondence 1890." *Marxists Internet Archive*.
https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1890/letters/90_08_05.htm.
- Nadeau, Kathleen. 1994. "More on Modes of Production: A Synthesis of Some Debates Contextualized for the Philippines." *CSUSB ScholarWorks*.
<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/anthro-publications/4>.
- Nemenzo, Francisco Jr. 1992. "Questioning Marx, Critiquing Marxism Reflections on the Ideological Crisis on the Left." *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies* 8(2): 5–25.
<https://www.journals.upd.edu.ph/index.php/kasarinlan/article/view/306/292>.
- Raquiza, Antoinette R. 2011. *State Structure, Policy Formation, and Economic Development in Southeast Asia*. London: Routledge Press.
 doi:10.4324/9780203145166.
- . 2014. "Changing configuration of Philippine capitalism." *Philippine Political Science Journal* 35(2): 225–250. doi:10.1080/01154451.2014.969799.
- Rivera, Temario C. 1994. "The State, Civil Society, and Foreign Actors: The Politics of Philippine Industrialization." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 16(2): 157–77.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25798242>.
- Ruyle, Eugene E. 1975. "Mode of Production and Mode of Exploitation: The Mechanical and The Dialectical." *Dialectical Anthropology* 1(1): 7–23.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/29789831>.
- Sison, Jose Ma. 1987. "Philippine Currents and Prospects." *Economic and Political Weekly* 22(8): 313–16. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4376701>.
- . 2020. "Semifeudalism in the Philippines." *Jose Maria Sison*.
<https://josemariasison.org/semifeudalism-in-the-philippines/>.

- Simbulan, D. C. 1965. *A Study of the Socio-Economic Elite in the Philippine Politics and Government*. Australian National University: Unpublished doctoral dissertation.
- Törnquist, Olle. "Communists and Democracy in the Philippines." *Economic and Political Weekly* 26 (27-28): 1683-91. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4398124>