

The Philosophical Thoughts of Vajiravudh: A Dialogical Analysis from the Perspective of Critical Filipino Philosophy

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Abstract

Vajiravudh (1881-1925), or King Rama VI of Siam, son of Chulalongkorn (King Rama V) and brother of Prajadhipok (King Rama VII), was a writer, nationalist, reformist, known as the Maha Thiraraja (philosopher king), and a creative genius among the Thai people. His context of a semi-colonial country that was pressured to embrace globalization and modernization still resonates with the conditions of some parts of Southeast Asia, such as the Philippines. This paper explored his philosophical ideas from the point of view of critical Filipino philosophy, a family of discourses that can be traced back to the musings of the late 19th century Filipino propagandists, with the intention of gleaning meaningful lessons for the contemporary Filipino people. Specifically, this paper looked into Vajiravudh's thoughts on nationalism and identity, the Chinese and Muslim minorities, modernization and international relations, politics, gender, and family, as well as on his use of literature in philosophizing. This paper is significant in building up the literature on comparative Southeast Asian philosophy.

Keywords: Vajiravudh, Rama VI, Thai Philosophy, Southeast Asian Intellectuals, nationalism, minority relations, modernization, Filipino philosophy

INTRODUCTION

Vajiravudh (1881-1925) or King Rama VI of Thailand, was the sixth monarch of the current Chakri Dynasty. He was the son of Chulalongkorn (King Rama V) and brother of Prajadhipok (King Rama VII), and was a writer, nationalist, reformist, known as the Maha Thiraraja (philosopher king) and creative genius among the Thai people. His

context of a semi-colonial country that was pressured to embrace globalization and modernization still resonates with the conditions of some parts of Southeast Asia, such as the Philippines. This paper grappled with the main question: what are the lessons and insights that can be gleaned by critical Filipino philosophy from the cultural and political thoughts of Vajiravudh? Critical Filipino philosophy is a family of discourses that can be traced back to the musings of the late 19th century Filipino propagandists that deals with the analysis of the injustices and deformations of the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the Philippine realities.

There are already some published works on the life, thoughts, philosophy, and praxis of Vajiravudh. Vina Sritanratana's 1966 master's thesis "Vajiravudh's Policies as King of Thailand, 1910-1925" dealt with the political, social, and cultural reforms undertaken by Vajiravudh during his reign (Sritanratana 1966). Walter Vella and Dorothy Vella's 1978 book *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism* focused on how Vajiravudh conceptualized his distinctive form of nationalism that is anchored on Buddhism and Thai monarchy (Vella and Vella 1978). Nuttanee Ratanapat's 1990 dissertation "King Vajiravudh's Nationalism and its Impact on Political Development in Thailand" analyzed the effect of the nationalism that was advocated by Vajiravudh on Thai politics (Ratanapat 1990). Stephen Greene's 1999 book *Absolute Dreams: Thai Government under Rama VI, 1910-1925* studied the challenges and hindrances faced by Vajiravudh as he pushed his reform agenda for Thai society (Greene 1999). Ratana Tanadbanchee Tungasvadi's 2004 dissertation "King Vajiravudh's Moral Concepts for Citizenship" delved into the realization of Vajiravudh on the necessity of molding first the civic consciousness of the Thais before he can pursue his massive reform agenda, as such agenda presupposed a citizenry with sound moral values and readiness to serve (Tungasvadi 2004). None of these published works so far has systemically and thoroughly studied the thoughts of Vajiravudh as a philosopher and sage, and none of these looked into the overall aspect of his cultural and political philosophies.

There are already a number of published works by known Filipino philosophers in dialogue with oriental philosophies, such as the ones by Emerita Quito (1929-2017) "Oriental Roots of Occidental Philosophy," "The Filipino and the Japanese Experience: A Philosophy of Sensitivity and Pride," and "Yoga and Christian Spirituality"; the one

by Romualdo Abulad (1947-2019) “Shankara and Kant: A Comparison”; the ones by Florentino Timbreza (born: 1938) “Ahimsa at Satyagraha,” “Ang Doktrinang Wu-Wei ni Lao Tzu,” and “Ekolohiya at ang Landasin ng Tao”; and the ones by Alfredo Co (born: 1949) “Elements of Chinese Thought in the Filipino Mind,” “Confucian Model for a Filipino Philosophy of Value,” and “The Meeting of the East and West: A Story of the Clash of Cultures, Humiliation of a Civilization, and the Restoration of Pride” (Quito 1990a; Quito 1990b; Quito 1990c; Abulad 1984; Timbreza 1999; Timbreza 2008a; Timbreza 2008b; Co 1988; Co 1990; Co 2001). However, there is no published work yet by Filipino philosophers or scholars of philosophy on Thai thinkers, whether dialogical or plain expository. There is no published dialogical work also on Vajiravudh from the point of view of any culture other than Thai.

This paper is significant in a number of ways. For the general discipline of philosophy, its contribution is the philosophical analysis of the intellectual heritage of a respectable sage that has not yet been given its appropriate attention by philosophical scholars. For oriental philosophy, its contribution is the study of a modern Asian philosopher who came from outside of the more known centers consisting of India, China, and Japan. This paper can expand the corpus of oriental philosophy. For Filipino philosophy, its contribution is the systematic and hermeneutical study of a foreign philosophy that has the potential of enriching Filipino philosophy. Filipino philosophy can glean much lessons and insights from analyzing a philosophy that comes from a country that resembles the Philippines in many aspects. For Philippine studies, its contribution is the use of the dialogical strategy with a foreign text that has the potential of deepening the reflexive insights of Philippine studies. For ASEAN studies, its contribution is coming up with a work in which the culture of one member country attempts to study the culture of another member country.

The methodological approach of this paper is based on the hermeneutical theory of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) that veered away from the philosophy of realism of Aristotle (384-322 BCE) and the philosophy of the subject of Rene Descartes (1596-1650), philosophies that were taken for granted in the phenomenological method established by Edmund Husserl (1855-1938). Both Aristotle’s philosophy of realism and Descartes’ philosophy of the subject that the human mind is capable of forming an accurate image of the aspects of reality examined by the

said mind. Even though Husserl's phenomenology doubted the capacity of the scientific method and accepted the weakness of the human mind, he still believed that a systematic approach can enable the human mind to know aspects of reality and to attain self-consciousness. Husserl thought that in order to grasp the meaning of a text, the interpreter must clear his/her mind of all prejudices and allow the text to reveal its meaning to him/her. Thus, Husserl suggested the process of *Einklamerung*, the methodic clearing of the interpreter's subjectivity.

Heidegger was a student and follower of Husserl, but he questioned the capacity of the interpreter to control his/her prejudices and presuppositions from mixing with his/her efforts in grasping the meaning of a given text. Heidegger's philosophy of the subject was different from the philosophy of the subject of Aristotle, Descartes, and Husserl. Heidegger's subject is being who is totally immersed in his/her life-world. This is a subject that is formed by the prejudices and presuppositions of his/her life-world and has no chance of attaining an objective knowledge about any aspect of the real world. Thus, instead of pushing for the *Einklamerung* of Husserl, which for Heidegger is a hypocritical process of setting aside the interpreter's prejudices and presuppositions, Heidegger's hermeneutic theory laid down the more tenable alternative, which is about the use of the interpreter's cognitive baggage as steppingstones in dialoguing with texts. For Heidegger, this cognitive baggage, whether social, political, historical, or cultural, is part of the hermeneutic process.

Vajiravudh's thoughts come from a time and place that is different from the time and place of the author of this paper. Instead of setting aside the contemporary Philippine context of the author, this paper followed the hermeneutic theory of Heidegger that pointed out that this Filipino author should stay in his own time and place for him to be able to have a meaningful interpretation of Vajiravudh's thoughts and life-world. Instead of setting aside the author's life-world, Heidegger's hermeneutic theory invited him to use this life-world as stepping stones and foundation towards a fuller understanding of the different thoughts and life-world of Vajiravudh. Thus, instead of setting aside and forgetting the contemporary life-world of the author, there is actually a need for the author to be more conscious of the significant elements and aspects of his life-world.

This paper has three substantive sections: 1) one for the intellectual biography of Vajiravudh, 2) another on his cultural and political philosophy, and 3) still another on critical Filipino philosophy's dialoguing with the thoughts of this Thai thinker. This paper was made possible by a generous funding from De La Salle University.

An Intellectual Biography of Vajiravudh

Vajiravudh or Rama VI, is the sixth king of the Chakri Dynasty that ruled Siam or Thailand from 1782 up to the present, with the current King Vajiralongkorn or Rama X as its tenth king. Chakri is now the longest-reigning Thai dynasty. This dynasty emerged after the fall of the short-lived Thonburi Dynasty which lasted only 1767 to 1782. The Thonburi Dynasty was toppled by a rebellion that was in return suppressed by Thongduang (1737-1809) who created his own dynasty with the capital at present day Bangkok, and he is now known as Rama I (Crosby 1920, 2-3). From Rama I, the crown was passed on to his son Chim (1767-1824) or Rama II; from Rama II, the crown was seized by his son Thap (1788-1851) or Rama III; from Rama III, the crown was restored to his half-brother Mongkut (1804-1868) or Rama IV, the rightful successor of Rama II; from Rama IV, the crown was passed on to his son Chulalongkorn (1853-1910) or Rama V; and finally, from Rama V to his son Vajiravudh.

From the reign of Rama I, and even prior to it, Thailand was a relatively enclosed kingdom as far as foreign relations and trade were concerned (Graham 1924, 215). Before the Chakri Dynasty was founded, Great Britain had already started to control the Malayan Peninsula, Thailand's neighbor to the south. During the reign of Rama III, specifically in 1826, a trading treaty was established with British India (Crosby 1920, 3). Around this time, Great Britain started to control Burma, Thailand's neighbor to the west. But the full opening of Thailand happened during the reign of Rama IV when in 1855 a treaty of friendship was established with Great Britain, which was followed by similar treaties with France and the United States of America in 1856, with Denmark in 1858, with Portugal in 1859, with some German states in 1862, with Sweden and Norway, and Belgium in 1868 (Crosby 1920, 3-4). Around these times, France started to control the territories to the east of Thailand, collectively known as the French Indochina. With its western and southern boundaries controlled by the British Empire, and

its western boundary controlled by the French Empire, Thailand was at that time wedged in between these two powerful western colonizers. Rama V continued establishing treaties with other foreign countries, specifically Italy in 1868, Austria-Hungary in 1869, Spain in 1870, Japan in 1898, Russia in 1899 (Crosby 1920, 4). These treaties made the Thailand of Vajiravudh a country that was in a rapid phase of westernization and modernization.

The Chakri kings reigned as absolute monarchs from Rama I to Vajiravudh's successor, his younger brother Prajadhipok (1893-1941) or Rama VII. Sometime between Rama VII's ascent to the throne in 1926 and his abdication in 1935, Chakri's absolute monarchy gave way to a constitutional monarchy that remains in place up to the present (Crosby 1945, 20). Vajiravudh was therefore the last Thai king who reigned as an absolute monarch from his ascent to his death. Buddhism was the state-sponsored religion of Thailand. It was tolerant of the Christian denominations brought in by the Westerners. It was likewise open to polygamy. Polygamy, or more specifically polygyny, which gave Thailand a bloated royal family that, together with its other high-ranking government officials, sat at the top of its social pyramid (Crosby 1920, 14). Its weak middle class consisted of the lower government officials and workers, as business and trade were taken care of by foreigners, the Europeans, Chinese, Indians, Burmese or Shahs (Crosby 1920, 15). At the bottom of this social pyramid are the workers who are mostly tied to agriculture (Crosby 1920, 15). During the first two decades of the 20th century, the literacy rate outside the metropolitan province of Bangkok was less than 15% (Crosby 1920, 17). However, there was a considerable number of wealthy Thais who secured the education of their children in Europe and America.

As the full opening of Thailand happened during the reigns of Vajiravudh's grandfather, Rama IV, and father, Rama V, these two Chakri kings made significant innovations for their country. Rama IV was an enlightened monarch, as when he was bypassed by his half-brother Rama III, he spent his life as a monk who devoted his time to the study of Buddhism, foreign languages, history, science, and mathematics, and to travelling around his country on foot (Graham 1945, 216). Rama IV infused the Thai monarchy with principles of democracy that he gleaned from his austere life as a Buddhist monk (Frankfurter 1904, 193). He demythologized the Thai monarchy and brought it closer to

the people (Frankfurter 1904, 198). The treaties that he signed with the mentioned Western countries brought economic and commercial growth in Thailand. He made it a policy to modernize Thailand along the Western model of progress (Crosby 1945, 19). He promoted canal digging and road building, encouraged the study of Western languages, and set up printing presses. His son Rama V received an excellent education from Western teachers and became the first Chakri king to travel outside of Thailand. Rama V continued the reforms started by his father. He ended the practice of making the people prostrate before the king and abolished slavery and corvee labor (Crosby 1945, 19). He modernized the judicial system, the state financial system, and the political structure by replacing the semi-feudal system that persisted in the regions with a uniform and centralized state administration (Graham 1924, 219-220). He founded Western-style schools for children of the royalties and government officials, as well as specialized schools that are appended to certain government units to assure the intake of qualified government workers (Bovonsiri, Uampuang, and Fry 1995, 58). He built railways, electrical lines, telegraph lines, and telephone lines. He sent more and more Thais abroad to get their education, including his son Vajiravudh.

Rama V had more than 70 children, but Vajiravudh belonged to a special sub-set among these because his mother was the royal queen. His education in Thailand was taken care of by Phraya Sisunthonwohan who was a poet and an authority on the Thai language, Phraya Itsaraphansophon who was also a poet and a language teacher, and Robert Morant who also partially taught Rama V the English language and who later on would become an important British educational reformer and a knight (Tungasvadi 2004, 3). At age 12, Vajiravudh was sent to study in England, accompanied by Phraya Visuth Suriyasak as his Thai language teacher and counselor (Tungasvadi 2004, 6). Vajiravudh was not the original crown prince of Rama V, as this title was given to his elder brother Vachirunhit (1878-1894) who died in 1894. Vajiravudh was already in England when the title was passed on to him. He received his private basic European education from a former British colonial official and fiction writer Basil Thomson who later on would also become a knight, and his private basic military training from C. V. Hume, a military officer who was specifically designated by the British government for this task (Tungasvadi 2004, 6-8). He became a voracious reader and ardent keeper of his diary (Vella and Vella 1978, 5).

For his full military training, he was finally sent to Sandhurst Military Academy to study artillery, and military mechanics (Tungasvadi 2004, 9). After graduation he was assigned to the Durham Light Infantry Department, and later to the Cannon Military Training Camp. He received further training at the School of Musketry at Hythe. He then capped his British education with a specially designed program at Christ Church College, Oxford University that focused on constitutional history, Indian history, the history of the Peninsular Wars, political science, and economics (Tungasvadi 2004, 9-10). His thesis was on the war of succession in Poland. Vajiravudh returned to Thailand after spending nine years in England. Back in Thailand, he studied Buddhism while doing his tasks as the crown prince.

Vajiravudh reigned from 1910 to 1925. With the political and infrastructural reforms set by Rama IV and Rama V, Vajiravudh focused his attention on cultural and military reforms (Kamalanavin 1969, 116). He was an ardent literary writer who used his art to promote his cultural and political ideals (Crosby 1945, 45). He established higher education in Thailand, made elementary education compulsory, and put up modern medical facilities. He further improved the railway system of the country and established its broadcasting system. As the first foreign-educated Chakri king, he also focused on the improvement of Thailand's foreign relations. But from the eyes of the Thai people, Vajiravudh would always be overshadowed by the greatness of Rama V (Crosby 1945, 45). His foreign education and aloofness isolated him from the bloated royal family and older government officials who were efficiently used by Rama V to pursue his reforms. Rama V was one of Rama IV's more than 80 children. Vajiravudh's extravagance and lack of interest in finance ruined the Thai treasury (Crosby 1945, 45). He remained single throughout most of his adult life, preferring the company of his male courtiers and members of his paramilitary organization, and married only at the age of 41 and again at the age of 42. These marriages, which happened just a few years before he died in 1925, failed to produce a male heir. The crown was then passed on to his brother Prajadhipok or Rama VII. The title Maha Thiraraja was posthumously given to Vajiravudh by the Thai people (Poolthupya 2012, 97; Kamalanavin 1969, 122).

A Mapping of the Cultural and Political Philosophy of Vajiravudh

This paper's mapping of the cultural and political philosophy of Vajiravudh centered on the following themes: 1) nationalism and identity, 2) the Chinese and Muslim minorities of Thailand, 3) modernization and internationalization, 4) political theory, 5) gender relations and family, and 6) the use of literature in philosophizing. Vajiravudh's cultural and political thoughts are tightly interwoven and very difficult to disentangle from each other.

Nationalism and Identity

Rama VI was not the first Thai king to propagate nationalism, as Rama IV and Rama V needed to advocate for an earlier form of nationalism to consolidate the Thai state and bypass the dominance of the regional nobility (Sturm 2006, 92 & 113). There was an elite (*sakdina*) form of nationalism or a monarchical nationalism that legitimized the power of the king and at the same time was energized by the charismatic figure of the king (Sturm 2006, 89-136). But in an era when the mystical image of the king was eroded by a centralized bureaucracy, when the monarchical political order was challenged by more and more Western-educated Thais and the emerging Thai press, when nationalism was zealously discoursed and pursued in Europe and America as well as in some points of Asia, and when the country is headed by a king whose charisma was always overshadowed by the charisma of his predecessors, Rama VI understood that the elitist and monarchic nationalism advocated by Rama IV and Rama V would no longer be sufficient (King and Amnuay-ngerntra 2017, 63). Rama VI then constructed a semi-monarchical and semi-political nationalism that dislodged the centrality of the monarchy from the discourse and brought in new concepts, such as race, freedom of the nation, purity of the Thai culture, and the nation itself (Sturm 2006, 138-139). Rama VI tucked these old and new concepts into his triple symbols of nation (*chat*), religion (*sasana*), and monarchy (*kasat*) (King and Amnuay-ngerntra 2017, 63).

In the nationalist discourses of Rama IV and Rama V the nation was blended into the central concept of monarchy. But in Rama VI's reconstruction, the nation was not only decoupled from monarchy but also became the primary among his triple symbols (Sturm 2006, 142).

He understood the nation as a chat, or a family, or a group of people, who were born Tais or living among the Tais (Vajiravudh 1951, 56 as quoted in Sturm 2006, 140). Although Rama VI's understanding of the nation was anchored on race and ethnicity, specifically on being Tai, it actually remained open to other races and ethnicities as long as these races and ethnicities were willing to live among Tais and follow the Tai ways of life (Vajiravudh 1977, 16 as quoted by Sturm 2006, 140). The subtle shift of terminology from Tai, the majority ethnicity, to Thai, the name of the now unified people, signaled this openness (Renard 2006, 310). But these groups of people will not solidify into a nation without the constant effort of nation building that teaches and reminds them about their common identity, history, values, and language. The monocultural and monolingual nation as conceptualized and mobilized by Vajiravudh attempted to create identity, memory, pride, unity, and dedication among the various peoples of Thailand. The nation bound together the various peoples, their geographic terrain, and the past, present, and future of Thailand.

Religion as *sasana* refers to Theravada Buddhism in Thailand, which under Rama IV and Rama V was purified, reformed, and centralized under the control of the king (Sturm 2006, 94; Schedneck 2010, 24 & 25; Tungasvadi 2004, 56-59). If the preceding Chakri kings cultivated this *sasana*, it was with the intention of enhancing the mystical image of the monarch and the symbolic power of the state (Vella and Vella 1978, 65). But Rama VI understood the role of Christianity in stabilizing and developing Western cultural and political systems. He realized that Theravada Buddhism could serve an analogous purpose in stabilizing and building Thai nationalism. If nationalism is the soul of a chat, it is religion that infuses spiritual values and strengths into this soul. More specifically, Rama VI believed that Theravada Buddhism can produce more devoted citizens and more patriotic soldiers (Vella and Vella 1978, 226 & 228). Rama VI argued that Buddhism is not only older than Christianity, but also nobler, more rational, and more suited to the culture of the Thais as this religion had been with them long before the arrival of the Christians in Southeast Asia (Schedneck 2010, 27). For him, Thais converting to Christianity is as absurd as Europeans converting to Buddhism (Vella and Vella 1978, 231).

Monarchy as *kasat*, the third concept in Rama VI's triple symbols of nationalism, refers to the absolute monarchy of Thailand that existed

for four centuries. He elaborated *kasat* using history and pointed out that the rising and falling of the strength of Thailand correlated with the rising and falling of the strength of its kings (Vajiravudh 1986, 13 as quoted by Sturm 2006, 139). Thus, for Thailand to become stronger and stronger, the people had to give their full support to the monarchy. The intertwining of the fate of the kings and the fate of Thailand created an obligation on the part of the modern kings to continuously look after the welfare of the people. Thus, *kasat*, especially during the reigns of Rama IV and Rama V who were trying to consolidate Thailand and bypass the dominance of the nobility, although an absolute monarchy was not a tyrannical regime but something that tried to be enlightened and benevolent to its people and adhered to some sort of social contract theory (Murashima 1988, 92).

Dealing with the Minorities of Thailand

Around the time of Rama VI, the ethnic groupings of the people of Thailand were the Negrito, the Mon-Annam, the Tibeto-Burman, the Lao-Tai, and some unclassifiable ethnicities. The Tais as the dominant ethnicity belonged to the grouping of the Lao-Tai, while Malays belonged to the grouping of the Mon-Annam (Graham 1924, 112). It appeared that Rama VI did not encounter any major problem as he unleashed his nationalist project on the minority ethnicities. But not mentioned among these groupings and ethnicities and for a long time intermingling with these were the Chinese. Around the year 1920, the pure-blooded Chinese constituted about 5% of the about ten million total population of Thailand (Graham 1924, 114). Rama VI used the Chinese as his epistemological other in his effort to sharpen the image of the Thai (Sattayanurak 2002, 117; Chaloeontiarana 2018, 163).

There were three major reasons that led Rama VI to this controversial use of the Chinese. The first one had to do with politics, the second one had to do with the reluctance of the Chinese to fully integrate with the dominant Thai culture, and the third one had to do with the Thais' dependence on Chinese workers and entrepreneurs. The political reason had to do with the republicanism that was raging in China at the time, which successfully toppled the Qing Dynasty, and reached the Chinese communities in Thailand (Chaloeontiarana 2018, 162). Rama VI was apprehensive that such republicanism might synergize with the sentiments against absolute monarchy that were

already present among Thai intellectuals at that time (Ratanapat 1990, 168). The integrational problem had to do with the practice of the Chinese communities in Thailand to retain their cultural practices and language, and even run their own schools to replicate these things among the succeeding generations of Sino-Thais (Sattayanurak 2002, 117). Rama VI suspected that such reluctance to integrate with the emerging mainstream Thai culture was based on Chinese and Sino-Thais' racial and cultural superiority complex (Renard 2006, 311). The economic question on the dependence of Thais on Chinese workers and entrepreneurs is something that is good in the short-range but not good in the long-range as this created among the Thais laziness and failure to develop their own entrepreneurs (Vella and Vella 1978, 204).

Rama VI's use of the Chinese remained within the realms of epistemology to tell the nation who the Thais were not by marking his imagined Chinese qualities of avarice, ungratefulness, not being exemplary citizens, superiority complex, and refusal to thoroughly assimilate with the nation (Chaloemtiarana 2018, 159-160). His anti-Chinese discourse did not generate actual violence or vicious hatred against the Chinese in Thailand (Vella and Vella 1978, xii; Chaloemtiarana 2018, 165). Rama VI left a wide door open to these Chinese and Sino-Thais for them to become part of the Thai nation. All they had to do was to truly integrate with this emerging nation by embracing the Thai language and showing loyalty to the king (Sattayanurak 2002, 117). It was noted that even Rama VI had more Chinese than Thai blood in his veins due to the propensity of the Thai kings to take Chinese wives, consorts, and concubines (King and Amnuay-ngerntra 2017, 63-64).

The Malays that were mentioned earlier as part of the Mon-Annam ethnic grouping presented a minor problem in the face of Rama VI's monocultural and monolingual nationalist discourse. Like the Chinese, the Malays had a culture and language that were different from those of the Thai majority. But unlike the Chinese, the Malays who were a smaller minority group, were located far south of the kingdom's capital in Bangkok, and most importantly were not seen as immigrants as they were indigenous to the southern parts of Thailand (Vella and Vella 1978, 205-206). Furthermore, these Malays were Mohammedans, and therefore were adherents to a religion that was different from the sasana that was part of the triple symbols of Rama VI's nationalism. But in front of his Malay subjects, Rama VI's monocultural and monolingual

nationalism allowed some concessions as long as these subjects learned the Thai language over and above their Malay language and as long as these subjects demonstrated their commitment to the Thai chat and kasat (Vajiravudh 1917 as quoted by Vella and Vella 1978, 206).

Modernization and Internationalization

Chat as part of the triple symbols of Rama VI's nationalism required constant building to make the Thais understand and accept their identity among others. But Rama VI's project of Thai identity building seemed to be compromised by the floodgates of modernization and westernization that were opened by Rama IV and Rama V and even opened further by Rama VI himself. Rama IV and Rama V saw modernization and westernization as necessary measures for the survival of Thailand against the threat of total colonization (Vella and Vella 1978, x). Rama VI, therefore, had to harmonize his project of Thai identity building, on one hand, and their dynastic policy of modernization along Western lines. Rama VI had a better perspective on the process of Western modernization of Thailand in the sense that he was able to observe the positive and negative effects of Rama IV and Rama V's efforts and in the sense that had a long exposure to the actual modern West itself as a student (Vella and Vella 1978, x).

The presence of Westerners and Western modernization in Thailand did not just erode Thai identity like water passing through an inert landscape. Instead, the Thais themselves became active agents of such erosion with their excessive admiration for and imitation of the West, and their consequent contempt for and elimination of what they see as traditional Thai elements of their culture and way of life (Vella and Vella 1978, 187). Rama VI noted that imitation of the West would not bring respect from the Westerners, because imitators are always second class compared to those who were imitated (Vajiravudh 1915, 9-10 as quoted by Murashima 1988, 95). He lamented that even the vices of the Westerners were enthusiastically copied by the Thais (Vella and Vella 1978, 187). He also noted that the contempt and abandonment of traditional Thai elements would not bring the Thais at par with the Westerners, but would only make them a people without a coherent culture and history (Vella and Vella 1978, 16).

The already mentioned subtle shift of terminology from Tai to Thai not only signaled the openness of the chat to other ethnicities aside from the dominant Tai, but also played with the meaning of Thai as a free people. Rama VI reminded his people that the excessive admiration for and imitation of Western modernity was a form of cultural enslavement which was contrary to the very nature of the Thais as a free people (Vajiravudh 1915, 9-10 as quoted by Murashima 1988, 95). Thus, the continuous nation building that was necessary for the creation of the chat through the teaching and cultivation of the Thai identity, history, values, language, religion, and even tangible (such as architecture) and intangible (such as dance drama) arts, had to be done with the full knowledge that the whole chat was moving against the surge of Western modernization.

The scenario that Rama VI preferred was for confident and enlightened Thais to choose for themselves which aspects of Western modernization should be advantageously pursued and which aspects should be abandoned or avoided. Rama VI detested the scenario of Thais being swept away by the raging Western modernization. Once the Thais learned how to stand confident of their Thai identity and their successful appropriation of Western modernization, and how to look at the Westerners as equals, such was the moment that Rama VI expected the international community to respect the Thais and look at them as equals (Sattayanurak 2002, 118).

Political Theory

The Western modernization of Thailand started by Rama IV and Rama V and further pursued by Rama VI included the Western education of a number of Thais that unavoidably exposed them to the ideals of democracy. Thus, as early as the reign of Rama V, a petition was submitted by eleven princes, including three of the king's brothers, demanding for a change from absolute monarchy to a parliamentary and constitutional monarchy (Engel 1975, 11). Rama V rationally turned down the said petition. Rama VI faced a coup attempt in 1912 that intended to dethrone him and crown his brother Chakrabongse as a constitutional monarch.

Rama VI was fully aware of the benefits of having a democratic constitutional monarchy as he saw for himself as a student in England how

the centuries-old English system worked. He particularly appreciated the distribution of power among several persons and the mechanism for listening to the voices of the people (Ratanapat 1990, 44). Nonetheless he still argued for the continuance of absolute monarchy in Thailand. He had four major reasons for momentarily resisting democratic constitutional monarchy. First was the level and spread of education among the Thais, which he thought were still insufficient to enable them to meaningfully and advantageously participate in the democratic processes (Ratanapat 1990, 44). Second was the unreadiness of Thai society for such a radical change noting that the English constitutional monarchy took centuries to emerge and that the American democracy, although it appeared to have rapidly blossomed, had actually a long gestation in the English system (Vella and Vella 1978, 74). Third was the danger of an ill-prepared and ill-suited democratic system to degenerate into an oligarchy, or the rule of a few manipulative and opportunistic Thais (Vella and Vella 1978, 75; Murashima 1988, 90). Fourth, once the chat became enslaved by the oligarchs, the Thais would lose their soul as a free people (Ferrara 2015, 68).

Rama VI's anti-democratic stance was tempered by three democratic endeavors. The first one is the Dusit Thani, Muang Pratchathipatai or City of the Tusita Heaven, the Democratic Polis, a miniature town sprawling on six acres of palace ground containing over three hundred "private," "commercial," "public," and "government" structures and inhabited and operated by Rama VI's courtiers (Ratanapat 1990, 188; Chua 2021, 53). As the name of the project implied, it was a democratic space that was intended to train the courtiers on how to operationalize democracy. This suggested that Rama VI left a door open for the eventual arrival of a democratic constitutional monarchy. The second one of Rama VI's democratic projects was the unrealized experimentation with democratic governance for Bangkok to allow some citizens to directly experience governance at the local level (Ratanapat 1990, 92). Third, which was probably his greatest and most lasting tribute to democracy, was the cultivation of press freedom not only inside Dusit Thani but in the whole of Thailand (Ratanapat 1990, 188).

Democracy was not the only threat to Rama VI's absolute monarchy. In 1917, Russia's absolute monarchy was toppled by socialism. Rama VI laid down his critique of socialism by pointing out

the impossibility of attaining a classless society, as some manipulative and opportunistic people will always be there to control such a society (Ratanapat 1990, 44). Furthermore, the equal division of property was something that cannot be attained also among the pioneering members of the society and more so among the succeeding generations of such society (Ratanapat 1990, 44). In addition to these reasons, Rama VI also mentioned that socialism will never be able to set the just wages for all job items within the economic structure (Ratanapat 1990, 44). Lastly, for somebody who looked at religion as something very important for the survival of the Thai chat, Rama VI warned that socialism is always against the persistence of religion (Ratanapat 1990, 44). Rama VI explained that the society promised by socialism is like the Asian utopia named Uttarakuru where everyone is gifted with beauty, health, longevity, and happiness, and where food and clothing simply grow from plants and trees, where there is no need to labor, but unfortunately such utopia does not exist in reality (Vella and Vella 1978, 189-90; Murashima 1988, 90).

Gender Relations and Family

Even with the reforms initiated by Rama IV and Rama V, Thailand remained a very patriarchal society. Rama VI introduced further reforms on gender relations in line with his nationalist and modernization agenda. He perfectly understood that Thai women have an important role in propagating his nationalist discourse, especially in the homes of the very impressionable Thai children, and that Thailand will never earn the respect of the international community if such women cannot stand at par with the modern woman (Vella and Vella 1978, 150). Substantially, Rama VI fostered the education of Thai girls and women by opening a teachers' college in 1913 and by requiring all Thai children to have primary education in 1921 (Vella and Vella 1978, 166-167). He also encouraged the Thai women to join the Thai men as equals in social gatherings and functions. In many of his literary works, he tried to lay down paradigms of how Thai and women interact in public (Scalena 2009, 31). At a more superficial level, Rama VI even meddled with the Thai women's habit of betel chewing that blackened their teeth, their fashion of cutting their hair short, and their wearing of androgynous clothing that made them look displeasing from the point of view of Western aesthetics (Kamalanavin 1969, 117).

Rama VI did not fail to address the Thai practice of polygyny that caused so much curiosity and disgust among Westerners and embarrassment among educated Thais. Rama VI was in a better position to address the issue as he did not have a harem and even dismantled the harem of Rama V, the peak of modern royal Thai polygyny. At first, he tolerated polygyny as something that was not explicitly condemned by Buddhism. But later in his reign, he argued against polygyny on the basis of the dignity and justice that Thai women deserve, and on the basis of having Thai men who are not overly burdened with bloated family life and could focus on their duties for the nation (Vella and Vella 1978, 163; Scalena 2009, 30). He must have realized how financially and emotionally draining it was for his Father to maintain a harem that peaked at 3,000 wives, consorts, concubines, and personnel (Loos 2005, 883). He wanted marriage to be based on love between man and woman (Promnart 2015, 97). That is why he was also against arranged marriage that sometimes included parents selling their daughters to wealthy Thai men (Promnart 2015, 97; Vella and Vella 1978, 163). Rama VI lashed as well on the modern variant of polygyny where Thai men pretend to be monogamous but keep a number of mistresses in secret (Vella & Vella 1978, 163). For him, this is even worse because the mistresses and their children will not have the legal protection they deserve. But in the end, polygyny proved to be too entrenched in Thai society that Rama VI was not able to put an end to it (Vella and Vella 1978, 164). He ended up having more than one wife due to his royal burden of needing to have a male heir. However, his critical view on the practice lived on until polygyny was finally outlawed right after the end of Thailand's absolute monarchy.

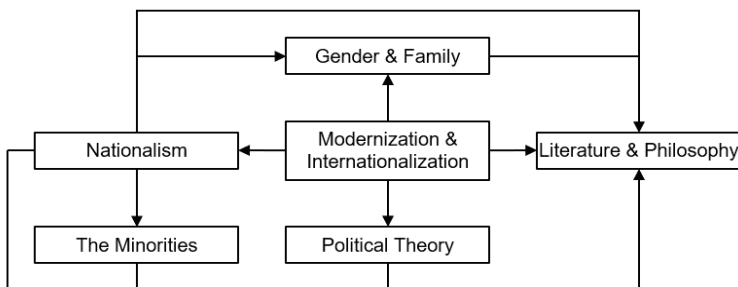
One more thing that Rama VI implemented for the Thai family was the use of family names. Prior to his 1916 legislation on this matter, Thais only had their given names and merely used their parents' given names and or their place of origins to more or less pinpoint their identities. Rama VI's insistence on the use of family names was not only intended to facilitate record keeping about the Thai citizens but more so to encourage the Thais to be more loyal to their families and not give shame to these with any misbehavior (Vella and Vella 1978, 136; Kamalanavin 1969, 127).

The Use of Literature in Theorizing

This paper already mentioned that Rama VI was an ardent literary writer. He produced over a thousand literary works including about 180 plays, plus articles, speeches, and non-fiction (Boontanondha 2013, 8; Amnuay-ngerntra 2022, 104). He both covered both Western genres and traditional Thai genres, such as travel poetry (nirat), narrative poetry (lilit), proverbs (suphasit), fables (nithan), drama (lakhon), and boat songs (he rua) (Vella and Vella 1978, 249). He wrote about royal historical themes and contemporary social, political, cultural, and domestic themes. He could easily be the most prolific literary writer in Thailand (Sturm 2006, 144). Rama VI mobilized his literary talents for his nationalistic, modernizing, internationalizing, political, and gender and family-related agenda. But for Rama VI, his literary works were not primarily intended for their didactic use because he enjoyed listening, producing, and directing these. Although he made it a point the didactic value of these works will not be lost by writing contextual introductions about them and by making some of them part of Thailand's educational curriculum (Scalena 2009, 32).

Synthesis

Indeed, the six cultural and political philosophical themes expounded by Rama VI as mapped out by this paper are tightly interwoven and very difficult to disentangle from each other. The following diagram shows the centrality of the theme of modernization and internationalization, as the other themes are either offshoots from or reactions to this theme.



The same diagram shows that the theme of nationalism is secondarily central in Rama VI's cultural and political philosophical musings, as his discourses on minorities, gender, and family are strongly shaped by the first-mentioned theme. Strictly speaking, the theme of literature and philosophy is not a stand-alone theme in the thoughts of Rama VI, but a tool for expounding and disseminating the five other themes.

Lessons and Insights for Critical Filipino Philosophy

During the reign of Rama VI, 1910 to 1925, the time of our Filipino thinkers Jose Rizal, Apolinario Mabini, Emilio Jacinto, and Pedro Paterno was already over, and the country was already under the tight control of the United States of America. The active philosophers at this time could be Trinidad Pardo de Tavera, Isabelo delos Reyes, and Manuel Quezon. This section deals with the lessons and insights that can be gleaned by critical Filipino philosophy from the cultural and political thoughts of Rama VI.

Nationalism and Identity

Critical Filipino philosophy can glean a number of positive lessons and insights from Rama VI's discourse on nationalism and identity. Nationalism is not something that will just sprout amidst a collection of people living within a state or country. Instead, it is something that needs to be consciously constructed, reconstructed, and propagated. Critical Filipino philosophy can be of service to the country within such a project. Having central conceptual elements in such a project can make a discourse on nationalism and identity more coherent. History, values, and language are important elements in such construction and reconstruction. Religion can enrich the construction of nationalism in the sense that religious values can fortify secular values. The use of central ethnicities as starting points in nationalist construction and reconstruction is something that cannot be avoided. What is important is that the emerging nationalism should be truly open to other ethnicities and their identities. Thus, a Tagalog-centric and Manila-centric nationalist discourse can be an acceptable starting point as long as such discourse grows more and more inclusive as it moves forward.

Methodologically speaking, critical Filipino philosophy can realize that solid historical research, Filipino axiology, religious studies, cultural studies, and national language planning are effective premises for nationalist and identity discourses. Secondly, nationalist construction and reconstruction will be effective if propagated by powerful organizations. At this point, it might be hopeless to expect our national government to initiate a discourse on nationalism and identity, but Filipino scholars of philosophy who may be working in different higher educational institutions can work on this project.

Critical Filipino philosophy can glean a number of negative lessons and insights as well from Rama VI's discourse on nationalism and identity. Discourses on nationalism and identity can be self-serving. Thus, although these need to be constantly constructed and reconstructed, they need to be critiqued at the same time. Religion as part of a nationalist and identity discourse should be less specific, and the use of religion to fortify secular values should be inclusive enough such that it would not be offensive even to 21st atheistic or agnostic Filipinos.

Dealing with the Minorities

Critical Filipino philosophy can glean a number of positive lessons and insights from Rama VI's discourse on the minorities of Thailand. The epistemological other appears to be a necessary element in nationalist and identity construction and reconstruction. The process of epistemological othering need not result in virulent hatred or violence against the selected ethnicity. The strong entrepreneurship and Confucian work ethic of the Chinese and Chinese Filipinos should not be made justifications for the Filipinos' undisciplined work ethic and hesitancy to engage in business and commerce. Nationalist discourse and identity construction and reconstruction can be multicultural, in such a way that nationalism can be layered over divergent ethnicities. National language, history, and select cultural practices can unify the multiple ethnicities within a state or country.

Methodologically speaking, critical Filipino philosophy should realize that epistemological othering should be done more carefully these days. What was politically acceptable in the early part of the 20th century might no longer be acceptable in the early part of the

21st century. The past colonial and imperial masters of the Philippines, Spain, the United States of America, and Japan, could serve as our epistemological others. China, which is currently seen as a bully state in the West Philippine Sea, can also serve as another epistemological other. The essentializing tendency of othering and identity formation can be buttressed by the theory of types as propagated by Max Weber.

Critical Filipino philosophy can glean a number of negative lessons and insights as well from Rama VI's discourse on the minorities of Thailand. Epistemological othering can be done negatively and positively. In fact, England was Rama VI's subtle positive epistemological other. Filipino philosophy needs to understand the various Philippine religions, especially Islam, to mobilize their values for nation building. Further efforts are needed to unify multicultural nationalism so that the country would not burst into multi-nationalism. Multicultural nationalist construction and reconstruction needs to be more inclusive, especially since in the Philippines we will be dealing with over 150 ethnicities. Rama VI's primordial multiculturalism can still be enriched with the multiculturalist theories that emerged in the late 20th century.

Modernization and Internationalization

Critical Filipino philosophy can glean a number of positive lessons and insights from Rama VI's discourse on modernization and internationalization. The Philippine discourse on colonial mentality can be framed using Rama VI's tension between nationalist identity formation and Western modernization. Resisting the homogenizing effect of Western modernity through nationalist identity formation is a viable pathway towards strengthening the respect for our country from the international community. Nationalist construction and reconstruction needs to be intensified as the country has to dialogue with Western modernization. Identity formation is a constant dialogue between tradition and modernity. Thus, even national identity changes through time.

Critical Filipino philosophy can glean a number of negative lessons and insights as well from Rama VI's discourse on modernization and internationalization. Critical Filipino philosophy should be on guard not to slide into the slopes of traditionalism and nativism. Thailand was not directly colonized, it had the capacity to select which aspect of

Western modernization to adapt, and which to avoid. The Philippines does not have this luxury. But critical Filipino philosophy can still retroactively sift through the aftermath of intense and uncontrolled Western modernization.

Political Theory

Critical Filipino philosophy can glean a number of positive lessons and insights from Rama VI's political theory. Whereas Rama VI was buying time resisting democratic reforms, our country is experiencing a dysfunctional democracy. Our transition from Spanish colonization to American-sponsored democracy happened too abruptly. Rama VI is correct in stating that democracy needs a people who are educationally and culturally ready for it, and that oligarchy will always threaten a frail democracy. In fact, Philippine democracy was immediately engulfed by oligarchy and plutocracy as soon as it was established. Rama VI's paranoid warnings can actually guide critical Filipino philosophy in pointing out the problems of Philippine democracy and finding viable solutions to address the shortcomings of our over- a-hundred-year-old experiment with democratic governance.

Socialism is still a threat to Philippine democracy. Critical Filipino philosophy can benefit from the thoughts of Rama VI in seeing that socialism is not the viable alternative for our dysfunctional democracy. In fact, in a time where red-tagging is rampant, Filipino philosophy should help articulate that being politically critical does not necessarily mean being pro-socialism. Just as Rama VI saw the importance of free press, Filipinos realized that democracy needs to be constantly critiqued for it to be true to its mission of providing equality for all. Filipino philosophy's constructive critique of Philippine society must be seen as a necessary component of democracy. Just as absolute monarchy was the best choice left for Rama VI during his time, our dysfunctional democracy could be our best choice for our time. But with constant constructive critique from critical Filipino philosophy, such deformed democracy need not remain as such.

The negative lesson that critical Filipino philosophy can glean from Rama VI's political theory is that democracy need not be learned through an extravagant Dusit Thani project. The student councils all over

the country can serve a similar purpose. What is more important than this still elitist training is that all of the younger Filipinos can understand democracy as an ideal discourse and learn to constantly compare such ideal discourse with the stark realities of our dysfunctional and frail democracy.

Gender Relations and Family

The Filipinas' stature during the time of Rama VI might be way above their Thai counterparts, but his linking of gender equality with nation building and strengthening of the state is something that critical Filipino philosophy can reflect upon. In a period where Filipinas have equal access to higher education and have proven themselves in civic, corporate, and public leadership, a double standard on marital fidelity that favors the males unfortunately still prevails. Philandering male politicians, for example, are openly tolerated, if not admired, by their constituents. The stricter upbringing of Filipinas might have skewed the upbringing of their male counterparts resulting in spoiled Filipinos. Philippine gender relations remain a fertile ground for critical Filipino philosophy to explore. Rama VI's gender relations philosophy started with the realities of Thai society, instead of abruptly bringing in abstruse Western feminist theories.

In the Philippines, the Spanish law on the universalization of the use of surnames might have anti-dated Rama VI's reign by more than half a century, but his project of instilling good behavior by emphasizing loyalty to one's family name is a promising theme to explore by critical Filipino philosophy, noting that in the Philippine context family honor and avoidance of shame (*hiya*) are dominant cultural values. It remains an axiological paradox, for example, how Filipinos valorize family honor and avoidance of shame, and yet our politicians shamelessly misgovern us not just as individual politicians but as political clans.

The negative lesson that critical Filipino philosophy can glean from Rama VI's philosophical thoughts on gender and family is that these themes need not be primarily pursued to improve the international standing of our country, as the betterment of gender relations and family life are sufficient goals in their own rights.

The Use of Literature in Theorizing

Rama VI's use of literature as a medium of his cultural, political, and philosophical agenda should not appear strange to critical Filipino philosophy, noting that one of its finest and profoundly impactful pieces were the literary works of Jose Rizal. Yet we must appreciate a significant difference between Rama VI and Rizal's literary production: while Rizal wrote in the Spanish language, Rama VI predominantly wrote in a language that can be understood by a good number of Thais. In a time and culture where ordinary and even educated Filipinos may not be too sympathetic to the idea of philosophical discourse, critical Filipino philosophy can revisit the power of using literature as a vehicle for philosophizing.

CONCLUSION

This paper contextually/biographically studied the philosophical themes from the textual production of Rama VI and mapped out these themes under the headings of nationalism and identity, the ethnic minorities of Thailand, modernization and internationalization, politics, gender and family, and the use of literature in philosophizing. More importantly, this paper appreciated the positive and negative lessons that critical Filipino philosophy can glean from an intellectual dialogue with this Thai thinker. Despite the cultural and temporal hermeneutic distance between the thoughts of Rama VI and contemporary critical Filipino philosophy, such intellectual dialogue can enrich critical Filipino philosophy. It is unfortunate that deeper thematic analysis, using the primary texts of Rama VI, could not be undertaken due to the limitations of scope as defined by this project as well as due to the limitations of textual space set by the journal article format of this report.

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