DEMOCRACY AND AUTHORITARIANISM IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

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Abstract
Southeast Asia is one of the regions of the world that is saddled with the rigorous effects of colonial rule. The end of the Second World War in 1945 heralded the adoption of different political and economic systems by Southeast Asian countries. Some of the most popular systems adopted namely, democracy and authoritarianism, are viewed in opposing perspectives as regards to the factors (colonial and non-colonial) that informed the adoption of the systems, and how the countries in Southeast Asia have fared so far in their various systems of choice. Using qualitative method of research which entails analysis and description, this paper through the use of secondary data in the form of books; and tertiary data in the form of online documents, identifies that the structures and dynamics of the present Southeast Asian region is rigorously influenced by the political systems adopted by the countries in Southeast Asia after their independence, which is influenced by both colonial factors and non-colonial factors, and have notably shaped the level of economic development in the region.

Introduction
Southeast Asia has since been a Centre for trade and commerce even before the advent of colonialism. The geographical location and the abundant natural resources inherent in the region made the area important to global trade.[1] Southeast Asia is known for copious measure of spices and aromatic products, tin, gold and other metals. Southeast Asia have had contact with the outside world years before colonial conquest. The region has experienced dominations and conquests, from various nations like Britain, France, Netherlands, America, Portugal and Japan, all of which left relics of impact in the area; thus influencing their political, social and religious systems and in the modern states of Southeast Asia. India and China are also very notable in their contacts with Southeast Asian region during the precolonial period especially in the areas of trade and economy. China in particular weld hegemonic powers in the Southeast Asia through their hierarchical order which was used to coordinate the region before the incursion of the Western powers. By implication of colonial rule and neocolonialism, western system of democracy is expected in the nations previously colonized by European countries. Western powers consider the adoption of western democracy as yardstick to measure civility and good governance; whereas societies have excelled in the past in their own peculiar systems, some of which have measures of democratic tendencies or are authoritarian as the case may be. Most countries of the Southeast Asian region have however done relatively well, not minding the varied political systems they adopted at independence or the influences of their historic conquests experienced as well as their structural complexity over the years. The economic contributions of some countries of the region like Singapore, Indonesia and the likes have mesmerized the globe, as they have through their growth levels of economic development and expansion continued to make the region a Centre of attraction to the international community.

Political Development of Southeast Asia in the Pre-colonial Era

From the earliest civilization to the present day, Southeast Asia has experienced consistent interactions with other foreign nations, which has contributed to the present structure of the region.[2] One must agree that the cultures and traditions of Southeast Asia is a combination of foreign cultures as well as the native forces. Notwithstanding this fact, Clark Neher supports that the ancient Southeast Asian societies had "an autonomous civilization" and had established an indigenous societal order long before the first migrations into the area by outsiders from China and India[3]. This however suggests that the influences of the external forces did not replace the native culture, but rather added to it. The Chinese and the Indians were the first to explore the areas of Southeast Asia. The relation created was on the bases of trade. The Chinese created trade routes where they collected tributes from the native kingdoms and through which major trading activities were carried out[4]. Hinduism was introduced in Southeast Asia through the interaction with the Indian merchants who came for the spice trade, as well as the priests who worked in the local courts. This influenced and brought about changes in the region; for example, the local chieftains were replaced with the religious concept of 'god-king', which proclaimed the king to be an incarnation of a Hindu deity[5]. This concept emphasized the principles of absolutism and hierarchy in Southeast Asia, except for Vietnam and the Philippines, who were not influenced by the Indian culture. Also, through the Indian contacts, Buddhism was introduced to the people. Buddhism on the other hand created a form of egalitarian religious community, which made it more acceptable to the people. It created a link between the peasantry and the rulers, thus undermining the concept of god-king.[6] Another pre-colonial external influence in Southeast Asia was Islam. Islam came into Southeast Asia through the trade routes. The spread of Islam in this area was free of violence; although many urban merchants who accepted the religion did so for economic reasons, as the Muslim traders preferred to trade with fellow Muslims. Islam in this area professed an egalitarian creed, that all are equal before Allah. They were able to permeate the areas of Malaya Peninsula and Indonesia, while some of the kingdoms like Brunei, who abinitio imbibed Hinduism and Buddhism were converted to Islam in the fifteenth century.[7] Some areas of Southeast Asia were also influenced by the Chinese Confucian administrative system. In Confucian system, there was no absolute ruler but an elites rule known as Mandarin bureaucrats. This system was assimilated by Vietnam, where there was also an emperor whose power was more religious than political.[8] By the turn of the sixteenth century, Southeast Asia was made up of small kingdoms without specified boundaries, which practiced different political systems and concepts based on Hind- Buddhist conceptions of statehood; Islamic practices, and Chinese Mandarin bureaucracy.

Colonial influence

The 19th century was a period of conquest and exploitation, when parts of the world like Africa and Asia were dominated by the European powers such as Britain, France, Dutch, Portuguese, among others. This century saw the massive growth of the European manufacturing industry due to new innovations in machines, which facilitated production processes. The industrial revolution necessitated the use of machines which resulted into surplus production without corresponding market availability to dispose of the manufactured goods. This created the need for the establishment of overseas markets for the European manufactured goods and for easy access to cheap raw materials for their growing industry. European contact with Southeast Asia began in the sixteenth century by the Portuguese, followed by Spain and Dutch in the seventeenth century. Later on, Britain and France Joined. During the imperialist wars of expansion in the nineteenth century, Southeast Asia was dominated by various European nations. The British conquered Burma,

Singapore and Malaysia; the French annexed the areas of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos and named it Indochina Empire; while the Dutch took over East Indies- Indonesia. Later on in the twentieth century, the United States took over the Philippines from Spain. Among the Southeast Asian countries, only Thailand (Siam) was not colonized.[9] The political history of Southeast Asia over the years has not been stable or evolutionary[10]. This implies that the various experiences of their foreign contacts had affected the stability of political systems practiced in the region. During the colonial era, the Western colonists adopted both direct and indirect rule systems of government, depending on the situation and the extent of elite's resistance they met in the territories occupied. For instance, indirect rule was adopted where local rulers or political elites were allowed to exercise authority on behalf of the western colonizing countries. This system was preferred because it was less costly and easier for the colonialists. In other cases where the foreign colonizing countries met strong resistance, indirect rule became impossible, hence, the adoption of direct rule system where the colonial officials administered their colonial territories directly.[11]European colonial leadership was authoritarian in nature. It favoured submission to the authority and did not allow much of personal freedom. It was overbearing, domineering, and favours concentration of power on the colonial governor. This pattern of leadership was eminent in the policies adopted during this period. For instance, the Dutch adopted the policy of 'cultivation system' until the 1870. This system means that the Subjects of the colonies forcefully pay taxes to the colonial administration in the form of Labour, land, and produce. In order words, the farmers used half of the year to farm for themselves and their families, while the other half was for the cash crops needed by the colonists. This system was later changed to the liberal period and then to the ethnical policy, which allowed for more freedom through welfare programme and also provided shared leadership with the local educated individuals.[12]On the other hand, the French in administering the Indochina claimed that it was their duty to colonize the undeveloped regions of Africa and Asia, to bring modernity and civilization to them[13]. The French rule was said to be more brutal than the British rule; several governors were sent from Paris to administer Indochina. In the French colonial system, colonial governors and bureaucrats possessed more power and authority, which encouraged corruption and pursuit of self-interest; this was also prevalent in the Spanish territories.[14] France was totally driven by economic interest geared towards acquiring land, exploiting labour, gross exportation and profit maximization.[15]

Democracy in Southeast Asia
Democracy is usually measured by citizenship participation, civil liberties and electoral competition. Democracy is practiced differently by nations and it's also classified in different forms by scholars, depending on the nature of political practices of nations. Although, the western colonial powers may not consider any other form of democracy apart from the western liberal type of democracy. On the attainment of independence, Southeast Asian countries adopted the political systems of their former colonizers but with modifications and variations. For instance, Burma and Malaysia adopted the Parliamentary institutions while the Philippines adopted the American political pattern.[16] Some other countries of the Southeast Asia experienced harsh authoritarian rule and military government after independence. In Thailand for instance, the military had ruled until 1992 elections, when it entered transitional democracy; again, in 2006, it returned to military rule. In the Philippines, there existed distinct divisions between the higher class and the lower class, making democracy difficult to achieve.[17]Most Southeast Asia countries have strived to transit from authoritarianism to democracy. But in the turn of the millennium, democracy seemed to have rolled back due to corruption, public distrust, and political dominance of figures from past authoritarian

regime. The process of democratization has become a challenge in Southeast Asia, as they are still struggling to ensure stable democratic institutions and practices. The political system in this region has been majorly influenced by their various erstwhile colonial powers and the politics of the divided Europe. The effect of neocolonialism is still very prevalent in the media, politics, economy and virtually in all sectors. By observation, it could be deduced that Countries that Southeast Asia which excel economically are those whose leaders have succeeded in shoving off extreme influence of the west in their systems. Singapore for instance under Lee Kuan Yew made remarkable efforts in leadership and expanded the Singapore's economic development; his strategies includes taming the excesses of Western influence in the media, politics and the economy of Singapore, which previously created confusion in leadership with minimal results in growth and development.[18]

* Nation before community or self
- Upholding the family as the basic building block of the society
- Regard and community support for the individual
- Resolving major issues through consensus rather than contention
- Religious and racial tolerance and harmony[21]. It could however be said that the political system of Singapore evolved through the modification of their political experiences from their ancient contact with China as well as their colonial episode.

Vietnam and Laos practice a one party system (no competition), while Burma (Myanmar) remains under military rule after several attempts to democratize the nation; Brunei on the other hand, practices absolute monarchy[22]. For the Philippines, their system of democracy was highly influenced by their past experiences with Spanish rule of patron-client system, American liberal system and the Macro's authoritarian regime with massive corrupt practices. With the adoption of liberal democracy, and the past political experiences of the Philippines, they could not show a better understanding of democracy. The elite class domination over the government policies is still prevalent, as is still found in many previously colonized countries of the world especially in Africa parts of Asia. This means that liberal democracy adopted was just sabotage, as there still exists massive 'top-down' rule which was a colonial legacy[23]. The Philippine leadership have proved to have poor managerial structures; even the political parties were not formed bases on ideologies as could be found in Singapore and Malaysia. Party members constantly shift allegiances to always favour the incumbent administration. The Philippine political structure could best be described as 'Oligarchy democracy'[24]. In the case of East-Timor and Indonesia, they have a multi-party system but with relatively restricted civil liberties in the media; freedom of demonstration and strike are still relatively restrained politically[25]. Scholars have given varied terms to different forms of political structures prevalent in Southeast Asia. From the views of Sorpong peou, the Southeast Asian political system could be analyzed as follows:

Vietnam and Laos	One party system (authoritarian)
Cambodia	Dominant party autocracies
Malaysia and Singapore	Quasi democracy
Thailand	Military/constitutional monarchy
Brunei and Myanmar	Absolute monarchy/authoritarianism.
Military Indonesia, the Philippines and East Timor	Multi-party democracy.[26]

Yet another scholar described the political system of Brunei, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar as 'Closed authoritarianism'; Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore as 'Moderate electoral authoritarianism'; while

Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and East Timor were termed 'Defective democracies'.[27] However, in the 2016 Southeast Asia ranking and scores by the EIU (Economist Intelligent Unit) democratic Index, Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore were categorized as 'Flawed democracy'; Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar were termed 'Hybrid regime'; while Vietnam and Laos were categorized under 'authoritarian system'.[28] The above descriptions of the Southeast Asian political system shows that the countries of the Southeast Asia are still in the process of finding the perfect political system that will best suit them.

Conclusion
Southeast Asia has been heavily influenced by its years of contact with the outside world. These contacts have however left the region with numerous experiences towards politics and religion. This is perhaps why some countries in the region have been going through series of changes in their political system without consistent efforts towards the achievement of sustainable development. However, considering the developmental level of the countries in Southeast Asia, it could be observed that there is a nexus between good governance and economic development, without any particular attachment to the western type of democracy. Singapore and Malaysia have a better growth rate, which is perhaps related to good governance and proper managerial structure. In Indonesia and the Philippines, there exists poor managerial structures that reflects negatively on their growth and development level[29]. This indicates that economic development of a nation is not necessarily achieved only through the western liberal democracy. However be the pattern/form of democracy or any other political system adopted by a nation, the end result should be a considerable growth rate in economic development, which seeks among other things to satisfy the basic needs of all the citizens. It should be a system devoid of intimidation, domination and poverty.In order to combat the problems of democracy as well as other system challenges in the Southeast Asia, some variables are eminent to ensure better choice of practical political system:

1. Socio-economic variables are to be considered. This concerns itself with the impacts of economic progress and consistency on social behaviour. The problem that hinders this variable is 'income inequality' and 'low level of modernization'. This will help to combat the income widening gap and extreme class division, to make for a better growth and development.
2. This has to do with the structural foundations of any given political system in the country. Political systems are organized by actors like the military, political parties, past authoritarian elites, parliament among other, in shaping the structural foundation of democracy or other systems of governance as the case may be. Therefore, a reliable degree of discipline is required in these institutional bodies, in order to maintain a sustainable development.
3. Indigenous culture and ethnic factors are usually influenced by external contacts, but should not be allowed to override the existing structure that abinition worked for the people. A cultural and ethnical approach should be highly considered when deciding on any political system to operate upon. This will ensure that all cultures and religions are not shortchanged but are allowed to contribute positively to the growth and development of the country. This has to do with public and state perception of democracy and how best it can be practiced keeping their culture and ethnicity in mind.[30]

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