

## Question 1

### Part A

The core of this film lies in the change in the political landscape of Alexandria (then as a part of the Roman Empire). It stresses the tension between the pre-hegemonic Paganism, led by Neoplatonic school, and the incoming Monotheism, mostly Christianity. Apart from a barbaric battle, the conflict can be reflected in differences between these two ideologies - in how to explain the phenomenon of earth, space, and mind - through a bunch of polemics.

The essence of the preexisting “Neoplatonic” paradigm was centrally driven by the character *Hypatia* - a teacher, astronomer, and mathematician. The school was based on two ontologies. The first was mindful consciousness, translated as thought or intellect, was ontologically prior to the physical realm i.e. *Mind Over Matter*. The second assumption was *The One* principle, which argued that the reality, although could be seen in different tenets, depended on the highest principle which is unity and singular, and everything can be understood on the basis of that single cause. The platonic epistemology was that the knowledge could be *recalled* via a discovery of that knowledge by our own selves. Expressed in a film, we can observe that *Hypatia* struggled to investigate the one “best” explanation of motions and relationships of motions between the earth, the sun, the moon, and the star. To obtain this, she used a mixture of physical experiments, for example, she tried to drop a piece of fabric to observe the possible motion, and discussions with a variety of people, ranging from her elite student to her own slaves.

Meanwhile, there was an intrusion of Christianity into Alexandria shown in the film, which had very distinctive viewpoints from the preexisting hegemony. Its prime ontology was God is the ultimate fact; God is the creator of all realities. The epistemology - to gain knowledge - was through the speech of God, which could be realised via scripture and interpretation of various church members and others who declared to convey the message of God. To illustrate, *Hypatia*’s works on Heliocentrism (Sun is at the centre of the Solar system, whilst planets and earth orbit around it) was rejected after the Christian occupation due to religious objection against this model. The library and its contents were destroyed as the Christians believed that God was the ultimate source of knowledge and no knowledge would be equal to him.

A disparity between these two camps brought about a rampage. A Christian belief about God supremacy caused their believers to destroy the Paganic statues, and based on a postulate that only the believers would be saved by God, they challenged the heretic to burn in a fire. The Pagans instigated a battle but were beaten by the outnumbered Christian troops. All of the knowledge that the Pagans had studied, collected in the library, were demolished as the Christians believed they might be contradictory to God’s speech. A school ran by *Hypatia* was banned to continue. In sum, all institutions that helped to proliferate and encourage the creation of knowledge were disappeared by the Church order. The outlook from this was the incoming of the Middle Ages - a period had neither continuation of scientific and technological advancement in Europe.

## Part B

Despite having one main plot, the audiences can behold this film differently based on the variation in perceptions. From four in class, I will analyse the phenomena from the film by two social science paradigms - Social Constructionism and the Critical Theory.

### *Social Constructionism*

The Interpretative paradigm is based on the assumption that *the truth varies* from one person to another according to how they interpret the context. The reality is socially constructed, framed by our social context and interactions with others in our own group. To analyse the phenomena of the film, we have to indicate whose viewpoints we are looking at and look through their lens. We can look at *Davus* as our example. He was surrounded by the Neoplatonic culture as being *Hypatia's* father slave. Plus being in one-sided love with *Hypatia*, he was immersed with science and also interested in resolving the heliocentric model, reflected by his attempt to construct the model of the Solar system. However, after engaging with Christian apostles and seeing his fellow slaves outside, he was allured by Christian notions and practices instead and later joined the Christian crusade in the battle. Especially when he freed from *Hypatia*, he jettisoned his belief in science and discovery and argued that only God knows the truth of the disputes. In other words, his perceptions about the world and interests shifted once he interacted with different social groups.

### *The Critical Paradigm*

The critical paradigm posits that the reality is shaped by social, political, economic, and other forces that have been ripped over time such that people take the existing social structure as granted. Thus, neither phenomena, also the way we obtain the knowledge of the phenomena, can be value-free. Its focal point lies around issues like power, inequality, and social change. In the film, the division of people of Alexandria, into those believed in Greco-Roman Polytheism and those believed in Monotheism, both Christians and Jews, rooted from the socio-economic inequality within this city. To clarify, believers in each group had distinctive characteristics from another. On the one hand, Paganism was mostly held by educated, upper-class citizens. On the other hand, those attracted by Monotheistic thoughts, also including the pre-inhabited followers, were mostly the grassroots and slaves. The rising number, and dramatically exceeding the Pagans, of Christian followers could be implied by the resentment of the lower class towards the upper class; they may feel living under injustice, with no mercy from the elite. This pushed them towards the Christian notions of mercy towards human beings to encounter upper-class exploitation. The commotion might reflect desired of the grassroots to overthrow the Pagan government and turn over the preexisting government system.

## Question 2

### Part A

This film *Where To Invade Next?* (2015) tries to criticise the American way of *development*. Despite being an economic superpower, most of its expenditure is poured to the military, whilst leaves many fundamental factors of human development unprogressive. The middle class are neglected and the inequality gap is widening. Michael Moore, the director and

narrator, seeks for a variety of *development* aspects in different countries which are overlooked by the American society. We can group the discourse of development illustrated in a film into three distinctive groups: 1) Expansion and revision of social welfare 2) Protection over the oppressed groups and 3) Increase in the role of the underprivileged group.

*The expansion and revision of social welfare* is a set of policies trying to be more inclusive and rectifying the existing ones to be actually beneficial to the targets. One example is how labour rights are included in national policies in Italy and Germany. Both recognise the importance of work-life balance as a part of worker well-being. Italy's paid holiday and parental leave, as well as Germany's mandate to have workers as a part of the board of directors are secured by laws such that they can prevent the issues of labour exploitation. Finland also has educational reform by transforming traditional schooling towards student-based learning, resulting in the well-known best education system in the world. *The protection over the oppressed groups* is a set of policies that try to recognise and protect those who are mostly suppressed by most state policies. For example, prisoners typically receive brutal treatments from the state. Norway instead has done it in a humane way, with the possibility of prisoners to enjoy self-development within prisons. Lastly, *an increase in the role of the underprivileged group* is a discourse of development trying to empower the rights of who are systematically oppressed in society. This film depicts the empowerment of women. As in the case of Tunisia, a Muslim country, it enhances the role of the female in the constitutional drafting process and opens access to reproductive healthcare services and abortion.

Although those schemes are constructed in different manners, all aim to improve the well-being of their citizens. These are inclusive in nature - making the universal welfare to be accessible for all and improving the status quo of those who are oppressed and marginalised such that they can enjoy the same level of welfare to others. In other words, the common feature of the *development* is that everyone in the society can be accessible to the good quality of life, their empowerment, and their self-development, not only the top 1% as in the United States.

### Part B

Out of the four hypotheses discussed in class, the institutional approach can explain the determinant of development portrayed in a film. Argued in *Why Nations Fail* (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012), the source of long-term development are the inclusive economic institution and its linkage with the inclusive political institution. Those inclusive natures mean that economic and political powers are distributed in a pluralistic manner, unlike the opposition - *extractive* institutions. Change in institutions is dynamic, despite taking place in the existing institution rules. However, the arrival of a *critical juncture* provides an opportunity for the major institutional change. Societies can take advantage of the critical juncture and become more inclusive, while some can fail to capture it, or some can gravitate towards more extractive from this disruption. This *divergence* causes a disparity in level of development among countries.

Our prime example was Slovenia. Formerly a part of Yugoslavia, it began its *institutional drift* despite within a communist regime. It had gradually adjusted its policies

towards a market economy, such as privatisation. When Yugoslavia collapse, also with the help of its existing institution as mentioned, it could capture this *critical juncture* by letting social protection programme to play an important role during this transition process. Wide range of social policies, ranging from unemployment benefits to free education, shaped Slovene economy to become more inclusive. It had one of the lowest Gini coefficient amongst OECD countries (2015), which could be an indicator of its success in inclusive social protection. On the other hand, the United State was seen as comparatively extractive. The Cold War could be seen as a major event that even diverted its national budget away from social policies, investing a massive amount in the military instead. More importantly, an economic institution of this nation was deep-rooted into neoclassical notions - under minimal government, excessive competitiveness, ineffective distribution strategy. These could be one of the factors to explain how the United State had one of the largest gaps between the rich and the poor among OECD countries. Post-secondary education was heavily competitive, with the privileged had lots of advantages over, such that some people were afraid to be left out from this mechanism. As we saw in a film, there were a number of American students who decided to pursue their undergraduate study in Ljubljana instead, also with free education fee.

### Part C

Even though economic growth alone is far from what *development* means to be, I am highly sceptical that all of the *development* portrayed in a film can take place without some level of growth. Concluded in the chapter of Szirmai (2015), an increase in productive capacity remains one of the necessary conditions for long-term development, as investments in welfare schemes are mostly dependent on state finance. Moreover, due to the eurocentric path of globalisation, all countries cannot escape but have to pursue modernisation, which obviously requires economic prosperity. The alternatives, such as being highly protective over international trade, can sink such small, developing societies deeper into poverty and misery, whose situation is unlikely for the *development* to take place.

Almost all countries featured in a film were OECD countries. The only exception was Tunisia. However, back to the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali, Tunisia economy was outperforming its neighbours in the eyes of many researchers. Its macroeconomic management was robust, supported by the fact that its average GDP growth was 5% during the 2000s. Clearly, Tunisia also failed in many aspects of *development*. Under many impressive macroeconomic figures, the problem of high unemployment ignited the famous *Jasmine Revolution* in 2011. Nevertheless, no one could deny the fact that previous economic growth was crucial for the expansion of *development*, into what had been neglected before such as the role of women, carried out after being democratic. This could be explained by using the Kuznets' logic. The problem of inequality became substantial such that it was visible to be tackled after some level of economic growth.

### Question 3

This oscar-awarded documentary film depicts the different practices in the manufacturing workplace between two economic superpower - American and Chinese styles. After the closure of GM plant in Ohio, many workers were laid off. Years later, the Chinese firm *Fuyao* invested in Ohio, taking place in the old GM plant. The initial outlook of its investment in the United States was optimistic as it tried to bring the employment back into this dull plant. Nevertheless, due to several differences in working practices, cultures, business mindsets, and regulations, the difficulty and conflict accrued to both parties - the Chinese and the American in *Fuyao Glass America Inc.*

The Chinese production style can be seen as a representative for Smithian political economy where the value of the production system lies around the notions of efficiency. Productivity can be achieved via both divisions of labour and capital accumulation. Machinery-like labours are put to work under their maximum workforces. Entrepreneur profit is the most relevant measurement for a business operation. This contrast the American style in which workers concern more about their rights - including safety issues and leisure time. The conflictual conception about labours arose by American labourers is comparatively leaning towards the Marxist view about the production system, as a criticism of Classical- (and Neoclassical-) favoured practices, which argues that the capitalistic system helps entrepreneurs exploit their labours. In more details, we will discuss the differences between Classical and Marxian school of thoughts in three facets - division of labours, labour union, and technological development.

#### *Division of Labours*

Smith views the division of labours as the road towards higher productivity. In his views, the *wealth of nations* is assessed by the stream of trading activities, that is, the exchange of productive inputs and outputs in the economy. By assigning a specific task to each worker such that one can be specialised, total production increases enormously compared to one man carries out every production process of one unit of output. Goods can be sold at a cheaper price due to higher efficiency, thus being more accessible to the grassroots and higher probability of expansion of markets. All of these consequences result in a larger volume of trades, and hence economic prosperity. All in all, the division of labours is perceived in a positive sense. We can observe that, in a film, Chinese workers are working like machinery - very disciplined and industrious. They are highly praised by their bosses, in contrast to the *sluggish Americans*; for example, the output per hour manufactured in the Chinese plant outnumbers that of the Ohio plant.

Conversely, Marx criticises this notion as a source of alienation among proletariats. Lowe (2015) have summarised worker alienation in a capitalistic world in some distinctive ways. It makes workers alienate among themselves by competing with each other for jobs and wages, instead of being allies against capitalists. Additionally, since working conditions are posited by capitalists, not the workers, the tasks are repetitive and dreadful. These circumstances are the main theme of this film. Because of the management of the company,

the sense of “us and them” is created between American and Chinese workers. The interactions and bonds among labourers are detached since the Chinese practices are adopted into the American plant. Wages are highly suppressed relative to other American manufacturers. Working hours are irrationally prolonged with almost no holiday. More importantly, the working conditions are extremely dangerous, which lead to the next conflictual concept - *Labour Union*.

#### *Labour Union*

The classical (and neoclassical) approach opposes the formation of the labour union. The concept of *pursuance of self-interest* is a gist in Smithian thought. In a market place, every party does business in order to maximise their profits. The mutual gains from exchange, an argument for the free-market efficiency, rely upon voluntariness from both sides. The unionisation disrupts the market mechanism of the labour market. In other words, the bargains from labours are not in the interest of capitalists, thus are seen to prevent the productivity of firms. This reflects in *Fuyao CEO's* fear of labour unionisation within the Ohio plant as this may lower the shareholder confidence, even intimidating his American management team to be fired if they cannot prevent the unionisation.

Marxism, on the contrary, sees the unionisation crucial for labour emancipation from the existing class struggle, between the *bourgeoisie* - who own capital, and the *proletariat* - who own nothing but labour. The capitalistic system helps the bourgeoisie to constantly exploit the proletariat, such as by keeping the wage down to squeeze surplus value. The formation of labour unions to empower the position of labourers in any negotiation processes. As depicted by the film, workers desire to form a labour union to raise their concerns about safety issues since many of them got injured from the production process. Far more importantly, Marx views unionisation as a catalyst to build class consciousness among proletariats. This consciousness is a necessary condition for the revolutionary process, the path to overcoming a class struggle of the working class.

#### *Technological Development*

Before I proceed with my writing, I have to put my postulate that this technological development means the advancement in the capital used in manufacturing. Technological Advancement is favourable in the classical tradition. Technology, mostly coming in the form of capital, enhances productivity. A manufacturer can produce a higher volume of output, which leads to an increase in trading activities. As we have seen, *Fuyao company* also uses machinery in their production to increase the amount of production. This concept has been later expanded in the neoclassical tradition, which argues that technology increases the *marginal productivity of labour* - the amount of output an additional worker can produce. This also benefits workers as higher marginal productivity of labour increases the demand for labour, thus raising the wage rate.

Technological development will further aggravate the problem of division of labour. Workers are at risk of getting ousted as a substitution of labour for capital is naturally in the interest of the bourgeoisie - to squeeze more and more surplus value. The bargaining power of labours worsened, resulting in, for example, lowering the wage rate. This also further reduces labour into a monotonous creature. During the middle part of a film, American

workers also express their concern about how more intensive use of machinery in the production makes them feel more sole, with repetitive tasks and no communication with their fellows. In sum, technological advancement can be an impressive tool for the bourgeoisie to control their domination over the proletariat.

#### Question 4

Thai modern history was a series of great commotion, contesting over political forces. It could be dated back to the Siamese revolution of 1932. Before the revolution was sent off, Siam was under an absolute monarchy. Only the monarch, the royal family, and high-ranking bureaucrats had monopoly power over the Siamese political sphere. Catalysed by fiscal difficulties, this regime was under vulnerability. *Khana Ratsadon*, comprised of civilians and military, launched the revolution on 24 June 1932, turning the old system into the democratic system. Nevertheless, the continuation was turmoil. The climax was a concurrence between three political forces - Phibun nationalist-military government, pro-Pridi liberals, royalists whose role was faded since the revolution. The 1952 Silent Coup reduced the role of the pro-Pridi, which already teamed up with royalists, but Phibun's government was very fragile. Eventually, Sarit could take absolute controls in 1957. His authoritarian government brought back the old royalist political order and embraced US patronage continuously. The Sarit-Thanom-Praphat regime had suppressed various forces that could not exert their political wills, such as left-wing and anti-colonialism movements. The pressure exploded in the popular uprising on 14 October 1976. Although this could end the paternalistic era, the ultimate result was 'semi-democracy' with the expansion of free-market capitalism and urban economy. The electoral politics was back during Chatchai era with the increasing role of local entrepreneurs and elected politicians. Due to the high level of corruption, this instigated the resentment of middle-class urban dwellers. The military, trying to regain the old-day political order, took an opportunistic behaviour; it declared a coup in 1991 which later lost their image again in Black May. The conflict between the military and elected politicians and businessmen arose again during the Thaksin era. Infused by a visibly higher inequality and a trauma from the financial crisis, his nationalist-populist government gained mass support from the provincial entrepreneurs and the peripheries. By his excessive executive power, the old political and economic monopoly - the military, the monarch, as well as the urban middle-income - felt threatened. His controversial corruption spurred the demonstration by the PAD. This later spread into mess unrest, with the opposing protest group the UDD. The military group once again launched a coup in 2006, while the commotion was continuing to boiling.

Our main framework in this essay, *Historical Materialism* lies at the centre of Marxist revolutionary theory. The basis of this theory is Hegel's *dialectical process* - history consists of the struggle between the opposing forces. Those forces are *thesis*, the preexisting substance, and *antithesis*, the challenge to the thesis. The contradiction between those leads to the *synthesis* - the solution of that tension. Unlike the original, Marxian dialectical process posits that the determinants those forces are material conditions, not ideas. The ruling class, who own means of production and have control over the *superstructure*, is seen as the *thesis*.

On the other hand, the mass exploited by the ruling class is the *antithesis*. *Synthesis* occurs when a vast majority of the productive class acknowledge their class consciousness, bringing the *revolution* to liberate themselves from the existing system. New material conditions are reshaped in the interest of the previous productive class, and old superstructures are thus destroyed.

From this framework, we can set our criterion of which issues in modern Thai politics can be explained by *Marx's dialectic process*. It is worth noting that the “means of production” used in our analysis the extent and distribution of power ones can exert in the political and economic spheres, rather than the conventional machinery or labour force. We thus seek for a struggle over this exertion between the existing ruling class, who have power over political and policy determination, and the mass exploited class who hardly gain benefits from the Thai political system. Lastly, the exploited class in our analysis must experience the class consciousness and take action against the opposing party, either successful or not. From the entire series, we select two scenarios to be clarified in-depth - 1932 *Siamese Revolution* and the struggle of the rural against the urban, more visibly in *Thaksin's controversial*.

Before the abolition of absolute monarchy, the ruling class was the monarch and the royal family. They own the absolute political power; the administration was extremely centralised to the palace. The superstructure, such as the regulations and the bureaucratic system, was entirely monopolised by the blue blood. The opposing force was defined by the civilians. In spite of being educated and having managerial ability, they could not find any place for political participation. The efficiency of the existing system was diminishing over time, which could be comparable to *Marx's theory of the falling rate of profit*. The institution of the monarchy was vulnerable under the excessively unproductive government expenditure and the fragile of the empire system after World War I, for instance. This struggle of civilian students and young militarists was visible such that the consciousness - the demolition of the old system and the embracement for democracy - was bloomed. Eventually, the monarch-centralised system was overthrown. *Khana Ratsadon* had control over Thai politics with the set of new instruments to justify their possession, such as the draft of the constitution.

The economic disparity between the poor rural and the rich urban was worth discussed. Thai contemporary *development* scheme was undeniably exploitative over the rural people. Since the day of US patronage, natural resources were quickly depleted and the expression of local cultures was halted under *national unity* notion. The exploitation over the rural intensified an orientation towards liberalism and capitalistic economy. Urban businesspeople were granted many benefits. Thai economy was extremely urban-dominated, where civilisations were centralised in Bangkok with no proper local infrastructures and investments. Local characters were under the fear to be faded. The labour unionisation was curbed. The attempt to liberate from the urban domination occurred over time, with the help of NGOs such as *Assembly of the Poor*, but none resulted in absolute. This struggle became more visible since the Thaksin era, where he empowered provincial business people and distributed welfare to the grassroots through his populist policies. His practices threatened urban possession over economic resources, as well as believers in old-monarchic and

bureaucratic style. The ruling class (the royalist, military, and urban middle-income) tried to impede Thaksin's influence through undemocratic means and more tightening superstructure (e.g. the new constitution, the use of regulations). Those means widely awakened the consciousness of the exploited class. They set up the UDD in opposition to the ruling class-favoured PAD. Nevertheless, their attempt to revolutionise from the old structure failed by another coup.

In conclusion, the series of Thai contemporary politics is the class struggle over political and economic influences of various forces. The actors for the ruling class and productive class vary over time with their interactions with vast streams of changes - democracy, bureaucratic administration, ideology, inequality, and so forth. Attempts of the emancipation and participation in the political arena are seen over time with different results. Nevertheless, despite the prolonged influence of the military junta and the state's oppressive behaviour, this class struggle and the endeavour to overthrow the existing system remain.

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