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In Appreciation of Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, 1936–2015

Three Cheers for the Hare that Did Not Stop Running to Take a Nap: In Celebration of the Life of Benedict Anderson

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Three Cheers for the Hare that Did Not Stop Running to Take a Nap: In Celebration of the Life of Benedict Anderson

KATO TSUYOSHI

When I think of Ben Anderson, I often think of one of Aesop's fables, "The Tortoise and the Hare." Yeap, it is the story about a slow-crawling tortoise and a fast-running hare, and the former beating the latter in a race because the hare was so confident of winning and took a nap midway through the race. There is a critical difference, though, between the hare of the fable and Ben: Ben never stopped running! Being not exactly a hare in the academic race, I used to ruefully mutter to myself how unfair it was that this hare did not want to take a nap even after his retirement, thereby not giving the tortoise the

slightest chance of threatening, let alone beating, him. There came a time, however, when even Ben the hare finally had to stop running . . . to rest . . . Oops, I should not go too fast in telling my story about Ben.

By way of self-introduction, let me explain first how I got to know Ben. I went to Cornell University in the fall of 1968 to study sociology and Southeast Asian studies, and had Ben as an academic advisor in the latter field. Ben got his PhD in 1967, a year before my arrival at Cornell, and had just been appointed as a young assistant professor in the Department of Government. Being the youngest and newest faculty member, he was properly dressed in tie and jacket when I went to see him for the first time at his office. It was also the time when old-fashioned propriety still reigned on American college campuses. Girls' dorms and boys' dorms for graduate students had been separate at Cornell until their "integration" a couple of years prior to my arrival, and students at Law School and Business School went to classes in tie and jacket. In any case, when Ben turned around to get some papers behind him, I noticed there was something not proper in his attire. His shirttail was sticking out from under the end of his jacket. Seeing that, I secretly gave a smile of approval and thought I could get along with this guy nicely. Indeed, get along nicely we did for all the years after our first encounter.

I went to West Sumatra in Indonesia in early 1972 for fieldwork. Ben was to visit me there as he had never been to the land of Minangkabau people; but he was detained at the Jakarta airport and "famously" expelled as all of us know. After finishing my fieldwork, I got back to the United States in late 1974. The Ben I knew in 1968 and the Ben I saw in 1974 were different. In 1968 he was in tie and jacket. In 1974 he was all in blue jeans. His favorite was denim overall. Can you imagine Ben in denim overall? In winter he wore a denim jacket with thick lining, the kind worn by cowboys of the Marlboro Country. I suspected he must have been having a mid-life crisis or something and groping for a new identity. Pablo Picasso went through the Blue period, then the Rose period, and eventually through cubism. Ben in 1968 was in the period of tie and jacket. In 1974 he was in the period of jeans. Can you guess what his later period was? Yes, it was the period of T-shirt, short pants, and sandals with his sweet and often mischievous smiles (fig. 1).

When I got back to Cornell from fieldwork, my scholarship was about to end, and Ben kindly took me in as a free lodger at his house in Freeville outside Ithaca. During my stay at his house there were a few more occasional "lodgers," such as one of his colleagues who was divorced from his wife and



Fig. 1. At a mall in
Bangkok, late 2014
(Photo courtesy of
Anan Krudphet)

even a collie (!) whose owner moved from Cornell to a university in New York City and could not immediately find an apartment that allowed her to keep the dog. If I am not mistaken, the collie stayed with us for more than one year.

These two-plus years with him at Freeville were one of the most wonderful times in my life. I enjoyed countless hours of intelligent and not so intelligent talks we had, driving to our offices at the now legendary 102 West Avenue where the office of the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project was located, barbecuing in the summer with other officemates—mostly fellow graduate students who had come back from fieldwork in different parts of Southeast Asia—at a park near Cayuga Lake, going shopping and cooking together, drinking and having dinner, enjoying seasonal dancing parties at his house with the Rolling Stones’ “Satisfaction” blaring (thank heavens, Ben’s house was in the countryside), and seeing Ben fall into a doze in the middle of our conversation near the fireplace at night. You see, Ben was somewhat of an insomniac; I could sometimes hear him walking around the second floor of his two-story house in the wee hours of the morning and he usually got sleepy early at night due to the lack of proper sleep.

It was because of his influence that I wrote my dissertation in a way I had not expected to. American sociology in my graduate school days tried, perhaps still tries, to be “scientific.” It meant, among other things, that *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, and other famous sociology journals in the US had no articles published without tables or results of statistical testing. When I came back from fieldwork, I was armed with piles and piles of filled-out questionnaire sheets whose results were to be coded, punched into IBM cards, and processed through computer for statistical testing (I feel so ancient writing this!). Ben did not say anything about what I was doing. However, after two years of my analyzing fieldwork data, doing literature survey, and dissertation writing, I had the following to say in the preface of my book of 1982 on the matrilineal Minangkabau of West Sumatra, which had grown out of my dissertation of 1977:

Special thanks are due to Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, who, as teacher and friend, taught me the importance of appreciating Indonesian society for itself rather than merely using it as a sample to theorize about. It is primarily because of his influence that I have written a book that is, in the terms of contemporary sociology, rather unconventional. (Kato 1982, 12)

For one thing, the final product was far more historical than initially planned and it even incorporated mythology that, as I came to see it, indicated Minangkabau cultural conceptualization of their history. How much could a neophyte sociologist trained in the US go astray and become so “unscientific”?

I went back to Japan at the end of 1976. In the summer of the following year Ben visited me and Ajarn Charnvit of Thammasat University, who was then a visiting scholar at Kyoto University. The three of us made the most memorable trip, cycling along the southern coast of Shikoku Island for about ten days. We were in our mid-thirties to early forties and had fun like kids; enduring heat under a straw hat, quenching our thirst with beer (admittedly not part of kids’ fun); having leisurely dips in the sea whenever and wherever the fancy took us (bicycling *is* freedom!); competing against each other to see who could cycle up first to the top of an arched bridge; staying at countryside accommodations, selected on the daily, random basis from a guidebook of Shikoku guesthouses (*minshuku*), and enjoying sumptuous seafood dinners they provided. In the pre-Internet age with no access to popular ratings, even hitting a guesthouse with so-so dinner was as much fun as hitting a jackpot. One time we had lunch at a small eatery. When we came out of the place, Ben was surrounded by giggling high-school girls. In a far corner of a remote island in Japan of those days people had never seen a “real Caucasian” in the flesh as it were, and they wanted to have Ben’s autograph! (The girls were sufficiently civilized or timid not to poke at Ben’s flesh with their fingers.) Naturally he was quite embarrassed but gracious as well as amused enough to comply with their request.

Moving fast forward, it was after the late 1990s when Ben half-retired and later completely retired from his professorship at Cornell that we began to see each other rather regularly again. I visited him a few times at Freeville in the summer and Ben often stopped over in Kyoto on his way from the US to Bangkok, where he stayed half of the year, or the other way around. Traveling to *onsen* (hot springs) was part of our *adat* (custom) whenever Ben came to Kyoto. Among these encounters I specifically want to talk about my visit to Freeville in the summer of 2008. This visit was for preparing the Japanese translation of Ben’s “memoir” that was to be later published in Japan in 2009. I am sure many people would want to know how it came to be published in Japanese, not in English, and how the idea of this book had been conceived to begin with. It was the book Ben never intended to write.

Its idea came from Endo Chiho, a young female editor at NTT (Nippon Telegraph and Telephone) Publishing. Chiho was a great fan of Ben and she was curious to know what kind of books the European intellectual who wrote *Imagined Communities* read in his formative years and throughout his academic career.

She approached Ben for the first time on the book project in April 2005 when he attended an international conference in Tokyo. He was not enthusiastic at all about the project. He reasoned that none of his revered teachers wrote such books and thought he should follow their example. Besides, to quote him, “great books are much more important than the people who write them.” In any case, he said, he had always been far more interested in, and curious about, the big world and its history than in and about himself (Anderson 2009, 1).

Unfazed by Ben’s reluctance, Ms. Endo, bless her, approached him again in November 2007, this time with me beside her as a Yojimbo or “muscular councilor,” so to speak, when Ben stopped over in Kyoto on his way from the US to Bangkok. You know, Ben had this soft spot for young people. He always wanted to help them. I don’t know if Endo was aware of this but in their second meeting she begged him to write the book for young Japanese scholars and graduate students who aspired to be academicians. That did the trick. He finally relented, saying he had many good friends in Japan and this could be one way of thanking them for their friendship. There was one condition: it would be a Japanese edition only without any English one in the future, because he said he would be too embarrassed to see his life story printed in the language he could read. It was agreed that I would translate the manuscript into Japanese.

It was Endo who provided the basic framework of the book, asking Ben to retail his childhood, his experiences at Cambridge and Cornell, and his thoughts on area studies, fieldwork, the importance of comparative studies, and interdisciplinary studies. On my part, I asked him to add a concluding chapter on his experiences after retirement; I myself was approaching retirement then and wanted to know how he could maintain his intellectual curiosity and be so academically active after retirement. I had thought that retired professors were likely to vegetate in the rocking chair.

Ben started writing in spring 2008 in Bangkok and sent me chapter by chapter via email between April and June each time he finished one of them. The last chapter was done in mid-July. Ben was already back home in

Freeville by then and I had just arrived there a day earlier. I was to spend a month with him to go over the manuscript and ask him whatever questions I had about it. It turned out that I needed a lot of clarification about his family history and also had to ask him many questions about Classical Studies and European history both of which were not my cup of tea.

My stay in Freeville was most enjoyable and educational. It was like a one-month-long personally tailored tête-à-tête seminar, one session in the morning and the other in the afternoon everyday, with a glass or two, sometimes more, of margarita and light conversations thrown in before dinner. Ben had brought back the cocktail recipe of margarita after attending the International Congress of Orientalists in Mexico City in August 1976 when I was still staying with him, and it became “our drink” for summer whenever I stayed at Freeville. Ben encouraged me to insert into the Japanese translation whatever extra information that, in my opinion, might help Japanese readers better understand his writing. As a matter of fact I did so rather freely, drawing a lot from what I learned through the “seminar sessions” with him. In this sense the Japanese edition of his “memoir” was to become more than a “right-to-left” translation of the English manuscript.

It was only in the last couple of years that I came to realize how much that month-long stay at Freeville in 2008, together with my involvement in the translation of the “memoir,” had influenced my postretirement life and academic interests for the last several years. Not that he told me I should be interested in this or that. Yet the daily “seminar sessions” definitely awakened, without my realizing it, my curiosity about so many new things and especially made me more appreciative of the importance of history and comparison in looking around my daily life (e.g., Japanese clothing, cooking, and dwelling) and at the world in general. Thus, in addition to comparative historical studies of Japan, China, and Korea on which I recklessly started teaching about ten years ago *à la* bicycle riding, that is, keep on pedaling or studying lest I fall, I am now very much interested in learning the histories of Europe, the US, and Latin America, all in connection with the history of “development ideology.” One is never too late or too old to start new things in life. Ben was a living proof of that.

Getting back to the “memoir,” Ben had placed “My Good Luck” at the head of each chapter title as some sort of identification mark: “My Good Luck Introduction” or “My Good Luck Fieldwork,” for instance. I thought “My Good Luck” would not do as a book title, although it was one of the

themes running through the manuscript. After getting back to Japan, I mulled over this question and eventually suggested to Ben that we title the Japanese translation as “Out of the Coconut Half-Shell” (“Yashi-Gara Wan no Soto-he”). It is related to an Indonesian (and Thai) proverb, *katak dibawah tempurung* or “a frog (caught) under the (overturned bowl made of) coconut half-shell,” which was mentioned in the manuscript. It describes the situation where the frog, unable to get out of the coconut half-shell, gradually begins to feel comfortable under it and even thinks the space inside it is the entire universe. “Out of the Coconut Half-Shell” meant to tell the frog that it should not be the case. For a long time Ben did not want to

call his “memoir” “autobiography”; “memoir” was the closest he was willing to concede to as its designation. After we decided on “Out of the Coconut Half-Shell” as the memoir’s title in Japanese, Ben was gleefully referring to it as “the Frog book.” I am happy to say that Ben liked a lot the front cover design of the Frog book (fig. 2).

Ben eventually changed his mind about not having the Frog book published in English. It was, I think, sometime in the fall of 2014 and his brother Perry was instrumental in finally persuading Ben to come around on this. I spent July 2015 at Freeville, ostensibly to help him prepare a manuscript for the English edition. (He for some reason began fondly to refer to Freeville as “Free Village” from around this time, which had not happened before as far as I remember.) If truth be told, my role was more like his margarita buddy in the evening when he got tired of sitting in front of the computer. I understand that the English edition, which is a revised and partly expanded version of the Frog book, with my additions for the

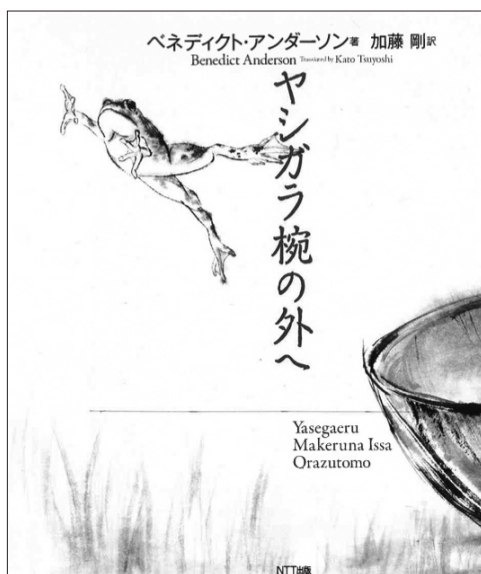


Fig. 2. Cover of *Yashi-gara Wan no Soto-he*
(Out of the Coconut Half-shell)

Japanese readership removed, will be published by Verso in March 2016 and titled *A Life Beyond Boundaries: A Memoir*. It is uncanny that, after all, Ben would not get to see his autobiography published in his mother tongue.

One important message Ben wished to convey through the Frog book was that aspiring young academics needed to get out of socially imposed or sometimes self-imposed boundaries in their thinking prescribed by institutional structures of the university, disciplinary segmentation, and narrow-minded nationalism (which, unlike earlier antidynastic and anticolonial nationalisms, scarcely share crossnational solidarities), if they wanted to be intellectually creative and simultaneously resist the onslaught of academic professionalization and globalizing influences of American English and Google search engine.

In one place in the concluding chapter of the Frog book he writes:

For a very long time, different forms of socialism, anarchist, Leninist, New Leftist, social democratic provided a 'global' framework in which progressive, emancipationist nationalism could flourish. Since the fall of 'Communism' in its Stalinist-Maoist forms, there has been a global vacuum, partially filled by feminism, environmentalism, neo-anarchism, and various other isms, fighting in different and not always cooperative ways against the barrenness of neoliberalism and Machiavellian 'human rights' interventionism. But a lot of work, over a long period of time, will be needed to fill the vacuum. This is the task to which young scholars can make vital contributions." (Anderson 2009, 274)

He concludes the book with the slogan "Frogs of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your coconuts" (ibid., 282).

I wrote a long afterword to the Frog book and ended it with a Waka poem, a classical form of Japanese poetry consisting of "5-7-5-7-7" units with a total of thirty-one syllabic units; in contrast, Haiku poetry consists of "5-7-5" units with a total of seventeen syllables. I imagine practically none of this journal's readers understands Japanese but below I write it in Romanized Japanese and provide a rough but literal English translation (ibid., 300):

Atogaki-wo	Afterword
Shitatame umashi	Just completed Sweet
Saké-wo hoshi	Saké drunk up
Tomo-tono tabi-ni	To journey with my dear friend
Toh-ten-wo utsu	Put a comma

When composing this Waka, I obviously had thought that there were still many more years to come for us to resume the joint intellectual journey. However, even the tireless hare eventually had to quit running to take a well-earned rest; I hereby reluctantly put a period to our journey.

Ben left me a lot of joyful memories and funny stories to chuckle about. As some of you may know, one small book he put out in 2012 is titled *The Fate of Rural Hell: Asceticism and Desire in Buddhist Thailand* (Anderson 2012). It is about this Disneyland-like hell recreated at a Buddhist temple in central Thailand. Before going into hell, however, let me make a little digression and talk about the devil, for the discussion of hell, I feel, will not be complete without first paying due respect to the devil.

Fortunately one of Ben's works comes in handy on this matter too. With the cooperation of two other people, he translated from Spanish into Tagalog and English and published *Ang Diablo sa Filipinas ayon sa nasasabi sa mga casulatan luma sa Kastila / The Devil in the Philippines according to ancient Spanish documents* (De los Reyes 2014). The original material is a "horror story" written and published in the late 1880s by Isabelo de los Reyes, who, among many hats he wore, was the first Filipino folklorist. It largely consists of exchanges between two Catholic priests about the "superstitious" belief in evil spirits, witches, sorcerers, and so on common among the "natives." The catch of the story is that the exchanges revolve around actual records on these topics left by four friars between the late sixteenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century. Isabelo depicts the friars and the clergymen, as much as the "natives," as deathly afraid of these malevolent forces—or newly invented folklorish presences, if we follow Isabelo's intimation—that were objectified as the "Devil" and "Satan" according to Catholic teaching and thus were "imagined presences" shared by both the colonizers and the colonized. Spanish colonization of Latin America and the Philippines took place around the time of the Spanish Inquisition (from the late fifteenth century to around 1800) with witch-hunting in tow. I would not be surprised if the friars lived in a mental world where witches and devils, whether



Fig. 3. At Wat Muang, Ang Thong Province, central Thailand, 14 May 2015 (Photo courtesy of Anan Krudphet)

Castilian, Filipino, or otherwise, were very real to them, irrespective of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment that transformed mental frames in other parts of Europe. I got the impression that Ben drew enormous pleasure and satisfaction translating the story from the fact that he sent me a copy of it soon after it was out in Manila. That was not the case with the book on hell, possibly because its satisfaction did not measure up to that of the *Diablo* or because it was published in India and to get hold of an extra copy for me was not easy.

So, what about the imagined hell at the Thai temple? Ben told me that one of the female statues represented in hell at the temple was a housewife burned in fire (fig. 3). Her sin? She was, according to the explanatory plaque, lazy and did not prepare breakfast for her husband. He said one never knew for sure for what sin one might be thrown into hell. He added that the hell was far more fascinating than the paradise. I guess his observation is somewhat akin to what is meant by the famous opening lines of Tolstoy's (1960, 1) *Anna Karenina*: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." I keep wondering if he were now somewhere up

there or down there comparing “real hell” and the Disneyland-like hell of the Thai temple. We do not have to worry if he might be in hell. He told me another of his great discoveries about hell: interestingly hell is “sectarian” in its “membership,” that is, only Buddhists get into the Buddhist hell, Muslims into the Muslim hell, and so forth. There is no religious mix-up in hell. And if I may dare say, there is no hell for nonbelievers or . . . paradise for that matter, only Mu or nothingness, a Zen Buddhist term often associated with Satori (Enlightenment), which Ben had picked up from his good friend, the late Tsuchiya Kenji of Kyoto University, and turned into one of his most favorite expressions ever, no matter with or without Satori.

Ben passed away in Batu, Malang, at around midnight of 12 December 2015 (officially on 13 December). It goes without saying that all of us who have known Ben are sad to see him gone but at the same time we will all be happy, I am sure, if we know as I do that he breathed his last peacefully in his sleep in his beloved East Java after having visited two Candi or ancient Hindu temple ruins he liked most—in retrospect, as if to bade goodbye to them—in the company of three devoted friends who attended to him dearly at his last hours. He was cremated on 19 December, his ashes scattered in the Java Sea the next morning. When the urn of his ashes was released into the sea at a more than one-and-a-half-hour distance by boat from the shore, a yellow butterfly appeared from nowhere, and in a short while was joined by a few more.

Kotsu-tsubo-wo	Ashes
Toki-hanachi-taru	Freed
Una-bara-ni	Into sea
Ki-i-roki-cho-no	A yellow butterfly
Ma-u-sugata Ha-e	Its dancing image etched in the air

No doubt there will be many obituaries written about Ben praising his invaluable scholarly contributions of “global significance,” surely citing *Imagined Communities*, for instance. What amazes me and impresses me most about Ben, though, is the kind of works he took the trouble to bring out into the world, the Diablo book for one, because he found them interesting and worthwhile to be republished or translated into English. One primary example is the republication of *Indonesia dalem api dan bara* (Indonesia in Flames and Ashes) written by an author under the penname Tjamboek

Berdoeri or Thorny Whip (Tjamboek Berdoeri 2004). The saga of Ben's personal involvement in the book, whose beginning dates back to the time of his first fieldwork in Java in the 1960s, is recounted in the final chapter of the Frog book (Anderson 2009, 254–61). The mysterious writer turned out to be Kwee Thiam Tjing, a well-known Sino-Indonesian journalist (1900–1974) who “came from an old East Java Chinese family stretching back many generations.”

The book was originally published in 1947 and, after almost sixty years, republished in 2004 with Ben's introduction and a large number of footnotes, of course all in Indonesian; it was followed by an edited book titled *Menjadi Tjamboek Berdoeri* (To Become Tjamboek Berdoeri) in which are compiled articles written by Kwee between 1971 and 1973 (Kwee Thiam Tjing 2010). It was Ben, the “scholar of world renown,” who labored to resurrect to Indonesian readership, including that of Chinese Indonesians, the books and their author, who, according to Ben's description, “was proud of the fact that he could not read Chinese characters, and felt himself to be an Indonesian patriot” (Anderson 2009, 257). What his effort must have meant to the Chinese Indonesian community in general and that in East Java in particular was evident to me throughout Ben's funeral in Surabaya; I thought to myself what more a student of area studies could wish for as a token of unworldly worthiness and heartfelt appreciation of his or her works.

I have already overshot a great deal the amount of space allowed for this writing and so will no longer say what a terrific teacher Ben was. I am sure all the students who studied under and with him would vouch for that in their own words. As my last tribute in celebration of his life, I just want to add what a wonderful human being Ben was. He shunned arrogance, self-promotion, and authoritarianism, both in principle and practice. He was always on the side of the young, the weak, and minorities, and cared for and about people close to him. He was the kind of person whose deeds—not only what he did but also how he did it—make you believe in the goodness of human beings and want to search for something or anything good inside you to have it grow so that it will be socially meaningful.

OK, Ben, wherever you might be now, I imagine you must be feeling ticklish and uncomfortable in the shower of praises, so I stop here and say “Farewell” to you “with a comma” . . . until I see you again. . . . Darn, I am going to miss you, Ben.

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