

narrative, making this an engaging read even for those who are unfamiliar with legal history's terminology.

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### Southeast Asia

*Modern times in Southeast Asia, 1920s–1970s*

Edited by SUSIE PROTSCHKY and TOM VAN DEN BERGE

Leiden: Brill, 2018. Pp. 214. Illustrations, Bibliography, Index.

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Among the many accounts of colonial and postcolonial modernity, the novel approach of this collection of studies on Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Burma, Siam/Thailand and Vietnam is an unexpected pleasure. By taking the half century from the 1920s to the 1970s as their historical focus, the ten contributors highlight continuities between the late colonial and early post-colonial eras. Editors Susie Protschky and Tom van den Berge aim not to define modernity in Southeast Asia, but rather to assemble accounts that describe how colonial subjects as well as European and American colonists understood and instrumentalised ideas of modernity across the late colonial and early post-independence periods. The nine chapters thus straddle often-polarised accounts of colonial modernity as a choice between either a Euro-American imperialist programme of modernisation or an indigenous/nationalist alternative.

The chapters are empirically rich and engaging and the periodisation has the potential to challenge the academic silos of colonial history and postcolonial studies. However, this potential remains largely unexplored and there are missed opportunities to marshal the excellent individual studies to make interventions that draw on the book's novel focus to locate Southeast Asia within a broader comparative frame. A number of themes that recur and provide links among the chapters are not highlighted in Protschky's Introduction, which does not provide a comprehensive account of the significance of many of the issues raised in the following chapters. As a result, the book is novelistic in form, with each chapter reading like a vivid account of one character in a grand story of modern times in Southeast Asia, but with the reader left to weave the linking threads between the characters into a bigger picture of modernity across the region.

One issue not addressed in the Introduction is the diversity of forms of colonial and, in the case of Siam/Thailand, semicolonial rule across Southeast Asia. A short summary of the distinctive features of French, British, Dutch and American colonial regimes would have provided a clearer basis for readers to assess how the colonial subjects detailed in the studies of Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines appreciated and mobilised notions of modernity. Protschky's failure to mention Siam/Thailand's non-colonised, but nonetheless semicolonial, status, a topic addressed in the chapter by Janit Feangfu and Rachel Harrison, also means that

her Introduction conflates this country's engagement with modernity to that of directly colonised societies. Janit and Harrison argue that in semicolonial Siam modernity was conceived in conjunction with a royal-supported recreation of an idealised archaic past with Siamese modernity in the early twentieth century seeking to reinvigorate and fortify rather than eradicate tradition (p. 174).

An important theme that recurs through several chapters is that locally conceived understandings of modernity provided resources for emerging indigenous educated and middle classes not only to claim a position in the Western-dominated colonial order but, just as importantly, to challenge cultural norms and the political authority of established indigenous elites. As Janit and Harrison note in their study of Thai author Seni Saowaphong's 1954 novel *Pisat* ('The spectre'), whose title drew on resonances with the opening words of Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*, 'With the rise in importance of the urban middle classes the discourse of modernity was wrested from the confines of the Bangkok elite and diffused more widely following the move to constitutional monarchy in 1932' (p. 188). Chie Ikeya details the biography of the prolific Burmese author Moe Nin, whose many writings on sex and love in the decades before the Second World War challenged gender norms by affirming sexuality among both men and women as a hallmark of the modern subject. Marieke Bloembergen details how in the interwar years the new Javanese spiritual movements Subud and Sumarah emerged within inter-Asian networks as local engagements with theosophy and notions of Asian spirituality that idealised India as a primal source of old Java's Hindu-Buddhist culture. In a contrasting chapter that reflects the diverse religious ferment of pre-independence Indonesia, Julian Millie explores the anti-colonial orientation of reformist Islamic movements in the first half of the twentieth century, detailing the importance of Islamic modernism in the rise of Indonesian nationalism.

In considering the ambivalent tropes of modern femininity depicted in Malay films produced in Singapore from the 1940s to the 1960s, Timothy Barnard details the contrasting screen identities of female stars Siput Sarawak and Maria Menado variously as independent career woman, femme fatale temptress and wife-cum-mother. Barnard argues that influential actor-cum-director P. Ramlee's commitment to cinema as a vehicle of social reform to promote ideas of modernity and independence was central to changing filmic representations of Malay women. In the Philippines Michael Pante traces the agency of Filipino elites and middle classes through the ideas of modernist town planning that lay behind the building of the new capital of Quezon City on the perimeter of Manila. Pante reveals how 'ideologies of modernity benefitted both foreign and indigenous elites in twentieth-century Quezon City ... [E]ven after the end of colonialism, the native elite's ascendancy assured the continuation of a modern culture that colonialism had set in motion' (p. 16). Tom van den Berge studies exhibitions of the impressive private modern art collection of the successful paint entrepreneur Pierre Alexandre Regnault, which included works by Picasso, Chagall and Van Gogh, and which were staged in Batavia in the second half of the 1930s. Van den Berge traces the reasons behind the generally negative reception of European modernist painting by both Dutch colonialists and Indonesians in the pre-war years. Christina Firpo considers the fate of *métis* Franco-Vietnamese boys, the children of Vietnamese mothers and French fathers, whose ambiguous identities between colonised and coloniser saw them

being taken from their mothers and raised in ‘orphanages’ where their masculine gendering and sexuality were policed. Raised in a French cultural, linguistic and educational milieu and fed French food, the boys were trained to become French citizens, with the ‘protection programs’ for *métis* children only ending in 1975 when the communist forces of the north defeated the southern Republic of Vietnam.

All the chapters are rich in detail but the book overall lacks cohesion. Missing is an account of the possibility of a regional imaginary of a Southeast Asian modernity. Apart from Bloembergen’s account of how colonial-era ideas of ‘Greater India’ circulated in Indonesia, neither the Introduction nor the separate studies offer insights into possible links between the several colonies and semicolonies. Was there cross-border traffic in ideas of modern times and practices of modern living across the region? This book presents a series of multiple national snapshots rather than an account of Southeast Asia as a field of study that might inhere within a common frame by which to envisage instantiations in each colony, semicolony and postcolony. One of the missed opportunities for comparison is presented in Barnard’s account of Ramlee’s 1955 film *Penarek bechak* (The trishaw puller) and Janit and Harrison’s study of Seni Saowaphong’s almost contemporary 1954 Thai novel *Pisat*. While there was no contact between Ramlee and Seni, the film and novel both deal with ill-fated relationships between elite women and men from lower social strata, and in Malaysia and Thailand *Penarek bechak* and *Pisat* are respectively regarded as cinematic and literary turning points that promoted new social agendas and critical social commentary. Barnard’s account of the 1950s revolutionary Malay artists and writers organisation *Angkatan Sasterawan 50* also has direct parallels with the ‘art for life’ movement in Thailand two decades later and whose pro-democracy members Janit and Harrison tell us eulogised *Pisat* as a foundational text in fashioning socially engaged genres of Thai art and literature. A concluding reflective epilogue by the editors that addressed synoptic perspectives revealed by the contributors would have brought the threads that link the chapters into relief and transformed *Modern times in Southeast Asia* from a set of separate parts into a more coherent account of the often-parallel modern transformations across this diverse region.

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## Indonesia

*Wayang and its doubles: Javanese puppet theatre, television and the Internet*

By JAN MRÁZEK

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This book discusses the television broadcasting of Javanese shadow puppet performances, and how this is different from the live performances. This study is about