

## Book Reviews

### Southeast Asia

*O Domínio do Norte de Samatra. A história dos sultanatos de Samudera-Pacém e de Achém e das suas relações com os Portugueses (1500-1580)* [The dominion of North Sumatra. A history of the sultanates of Samudera-Pasai and Aceh and their relations with the Portuguese (1500-1580)]

By JORGE MANUEL DOS SANTOS ALVES, with a preface by LUIS FILIPE THOMAZ

Lisbon: Sociedade Histórica da Independência de Portugal, 1999. Pp. 301.

DOI: S0022463403210304

The present study represents an expanded historical analysis originally submitted in 1992 as a doctoral thesis at the Nova Universidade de Lisboa. The book is divided into four chapters and also features maps, appendices and transcripts of documents from Malay, Portuguese and Italian sources. There is a comprehensive bibliography as well.

While a number of interesting studies on the Portuguese presence and influence in island and mainland Southeast Asia have been published in recent decades, Jorge Manuel dos Santos Alves laments in his Preface that these extant studies have failed to take into consideration the contacts of the Portuguese with the sultanates of northern Sumatra, i.e., Samudera-Pasai and Aceh. The basic objective of this study is to fill the gap. Alves further seeks to provide his readers with a deeper appreciation of the political as well as socio-economic dynamics of these states, and the impact that the arrival of the Portuguese had on their societies and political cultures. In accomplishing this, Alves adduces a broad range of material, ranging from Malay, Chinese and Arab to Portuguese and other European sources. In formulating his conclusions, Alves downplays the religious rift between Muslims and Christians and explains that the realities underlying the dynamics of contact and interaction are significantly more complex than the older Portuguese texts and sources appear to suggest. In this context, he also highlights the meaningful differences in the views expounded at the official level (*Estado da Índia*) on the one hand, and by private merchants, both Portuguese and *mestiço*, on the other.

In Chapter 1, Alves provides his readers with a survey of sources used or adduced in the course of his study. He divides his sources into medieval, modern, archaeological, epigraphical and numismatic. He provides extensive and insightful comments not only on their nature but also on their reliability and value to modern historians for the purposes of his study on the northern states of Sumatra.

Chapter 2 is divided into five principal parts. The first explores what Alves calls the 'physical and human geography' of the region. In this he provides his readers with basic data about the geo-morphology of the region, and the peoples that historically settled there. The second part is dedicated to the 'geo-political mosaic' of North Sumatra and the western shores of the Straits of Melaka. Here the author draws on Portuguese chronicles and sources such as João de Barros and Tomé Pires to identify units of political

administration in the north of the great island of Sumatra that evolved before the sixteenth century. Before the aggressive territorial expansion of Aceh in the sixteenth century, Pedir, Aru and Samudera-Pasai held a predominant political and economic position on the island. The sultanate of Pedir, Alves explains, was evidently the most important at the turn of the sixteenth century, but Samudera-Pasai quickly rose to prominence after the Portuguese conquest of the sultanate of Melaka in 1511. This rise to political and economic prominence, however, was soon overshadowed by Aceh's rapid expansion. At this stage, Aceh conquered many of its neighbouring states in the north of Sumatra, including Pulau We, Lambri, Biar, Daya, Pedir, and by 1523 Samudera-Pasai.

Section three of the chapter examines agricultural production, fishing and mining as well as the growth of a trading system in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that was essentially export-driven and oriented toward the Chinese market. In this context, pepper (believed to have been brought to Sumatra from India) assumed a crucial position in the rise of the export economy. Alves also elaborates on the development of extractive industries, such as gold mining, as well as silk farming and slave-raiding. Section four is dedicated to the topic of 'Indianization and Islam' that traces the spread of Islam on Sumatra – and indeed in Southeast Asia generally, to the year 1296. Section five, finally, places the rise of the north Sumatran port cities against the backdrop of Melaka's rise to commercial prominence. It is in this context, specifically, that Alves elaborates on his earlier claim that the Portuguese chronicler Tomé Pires collated unreliable information and hear-say on the north Sumatran sultanates, and as a result significantly distorted the economic role assumed by Melaka in the early sixteenth century. The author contends that Aru and Samudera-Pasai represented serious challenges to the Melaka Sultanate in terms of both size and significance during the second half of the fifteenth century.

Chapter 3 focuses on the sultanate of Samudra-Pasai approximately from the beginning of Islamisation in 1296 until its fall to the Acehnese in 1523; additional considerations on the royal family's life in exile bring the study to the year 1545. Two sections form the backbone of Alves' argument. The first traces the history of the sultanate from its foundation through the period of marked Chinese influence up to the beginning of the sixteenth century. The paucity of reliable source material means that the sultanate's history from the late thirteenth to the early sixteenth centuries is reconstructed only in broad terms. Special attention is also paid to the nature of the tributary trade with China before the arrival of the Portuguese in the region. Once Alves reaches the end of the fifteenth century, however, he enriches evidence from Asian source material with testimonies drawn from several European – predominantly Portuguese – sources. At this juncture he guides readers through the reigns of Zainal Abidin IV (1519-21) and Sultan Kamis (1521-23), which were becoming increasingly disturbed by civil strife. Portugal's establishment of a fortress to protect its interests in the prospering pepper trade is evaluated against the backdrop of this declining political stability immediately preceding the conquest of Samudera-Pasai by the Acehnese in 1523.

Section two provides a socio-urban analysis of the north Sumatran sultanate from the late thirteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. Alves painstakingly explores key facets of the urban mercantile culture by focusing on the presence, status and integration of foreigners into the merchant community at large and the foreign quarters in Samudera-

Pasai. He includes discussion of the Portuguese factory, administration of the port, the royal monopoly, fiscal and monetary policies, weights and measures in use, the fortification of the city, the palace and court and the warrior class, as well as the dynamics of commercial and social interaction with the hinterland.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the sultanate of Aceh, the other major power in the north of Sumatra. Here Alves places the decline and eventual absorption of Samudera-Pasai against the backdrop of a rapidly expanding Aceh from the late fifteenth century up to the year 1579. Drawing on a range of primary sources, such as the *Hikayat Aceh* and Portuguese chroniclers, and well-known secondary sources, the author gives synopses of the growth, consolidation, and confrontations of the Acehnese kingdom from its origins in the late fifteenth century through 1579. The account spans a truly fascinating period in Aceh's history, including its relations with the Ottoman Turks and its hostilities with rival mercantile kingdoms and tribes, including, significantly, Melaka and Aru.

Under the heading 'Final Note' the author summarises key conclusions about the political, economic and social development of the region from the late fifteenth to the late sixteenth centuries. Alves observes in this context that between the late fifteenth century and roughly 1520, the decline of Pedir was matched by the corresponding rise of Samudera-Pasai and Aru. This process, he points out, gathered speed notably after the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese in 1511. Between 1520 and 1540, the region experienced the rise and systematic expansion of Aceh. While Pedir, Daya and Samudera-Pasai fell to the Acehnese between 1521 and 1523, Aru and the Batak country offered fierce resistance to Aceh's expansionist ambitions. By about 1580, and particularly after the fall of Aru in 1564, the Acehnese expansion and domination in northern Sumatra were complete. This period also saw the spread of Islam and of Malay language and culture throughout the region, but instability in Aceh enabled Samudera-Pasai to regain some of its former glory during the 1570s.

As a whole, the book is cohesive, learned, well argued and well structured. It draws on a broad range of sources, and the value of Portuguese chronicles enriched and juxtaposed to evidence drawn from various sources of Asian origin is noteworthy. It represents an excellent piece of research and the only regret some readers may have is that it is written in a language that may not be easily accessible to them.

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*The politics of multiculturalism: Pluralism and citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia*

Edited by ROBERT W. HEFNER

Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001. Pp. ix, 319. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

DOI: S0022463403220300

In this edited volume, anthropologist Robert Hefner has brought together Indonesian, Malaysian and Singaporean intellectuals to discuss the relationship between democracy and ethnic and religious pluralism in each of these countries. The starting

point for the book and Hefner's exemplary introductory essay is J. S. Furnivall's classic work on 'plural societies' in colonial Southeast Asia. The aim is to take Furnivall's insights from the colonial era as a way of contextualising more abstract debates concerning democracy, citizenship and civil society in these three multicultural societies.

The book is a product of a research and training project funded by the Ford Foundation. As a result, the twelve different chapters in the volume fit together nicely. A basic premise of the project is that 'civil society' is a useful concept, in both an analytical and a normative sense. In the introduction, however, Hefner is careful to differentiate the use of the term from discussions that understand civil society as a homogenous unit that is necessarily a positive force in processes of democratisation. As he points out, civil society is also potentially 'uncivil'. It is in this context that 'pluralism' is engaged as a key term in order to understand differentiations and tensions within civil societies in the region. To have a sustained effect on democratisation, Hefner argues that persons and groups must be 'civil' in this context. 'Actors' words and actions can be regarded as "civil" if ... they signal respect for the rights of other citizens and thereby contribute to a public culture of participation premised on freedom of association, speech and participation for everyone regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or class' (p. 10). It is with these premises in mind, and in relation to recent and historical ethnic and religious violence in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, that the book attempts to discuss the current and future possibilities of democratisation and civil society in the region.

The eleven chapters that follow the introduction emerge as a kind of cartography of contemporary civil society. Abdul Rahman Embong asks whether ethnic pluralism can be transformed into a positive social force in contemporary Malaysia. He is both optimistic and pessimistic in relation to new forms of political and social currents that have emerged in the wake of the New Economic Policy. Chua Beng Huat and Kwok Kian-Woon discuss the emergence of new forms of civil society organisations in the context of Singapore's transformation into a global city, and the associated forms of socio-economic differentiation that have come with this development. After an historical prelude, they discuss a diverse array of organisations: theatre groups, feminists, Malay-Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Tamils, Chinese intellectuals and gay groups, are just a few examples. Mohtar Mas'ood and his colleagues focus on the Central Javanese city of Yogyakarta, long a centre for culture and education. Their map of civil society includes a focus on organisations that deal with religious, economic, political and gender issues. Sumit Mandal problematises any easy distinctions between different ethnic groups in Malaysia through a series of in-depth interviews with key informants. He shows how the dramatic economic and social changes in Malaysian society during the 1990s have led to new cultural formations that demand a more nuanced understanding of ethnic pluralism.

For Furnivall, the marketplace was famously the meeting place for different ethnic groups in colonial society. Following this, Sharon Siddique attempts to understand contemporary Singapore in terms of 'corporate pluralism'. Francis Lok Kok Wah discusses the emergence of a discourse of 'developmentalism' in Malaysian politics. Through a case study of local politics, he argues that developmentalism rather than ethnic politics poses the main threat to democratic discourse in the future. Shamsul A. B.'s analysis of Malaysian politics varies from this perspective. He argues that there has

been a shift from a politics of race, ethnicity and religion – based on colonial categories – to a non-communal and non-ethnic interest-based politics. Zainah Anwar writes from the position of a Malay-Muslim feminist activist. In Malaysia, her organisation, Sisters in Islam, has attempted to rethink and affect women's rights in relation to Islam, especially problematising patriarchal religious authority in the context of democratisation. Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin writes in an Indonesian context, arguing that the model of femininity that was constructed during the New Order regime must be replaced with one that accepts women's rights of self-representation. Vedi Hadiz, in turn, discusses emergent forms of labour organisation in post-Suharto Indonesia. In particular, he is concerned with the links between labour unions and political parties in the context of dramatic change. Finally, Hermawan Sulistiyo focuses on the role of the Indonesian military since independence, with a particular focus on ethnic and religious tensions.

*The politics of multiculturalism* is a book that makes an admirable attempt at addressing many of the key issues that Indonesian, Malaysian and Singaporean society will be struggling with during the coming years. Few other books available on Southeast Asia are as timely in this sense; it is a book that should be read by scholars and students of the region.

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*A sudden rampage: The Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia, 1941-1945*

By NICHOLAS TARLING

London: Hurst, 2001. Pp. xv, 286. Map, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

DOI: S0022463403230307

Nicholas Tarling, a senior scholar noted for his studies on the British role in Southeast Asia, has, over the past decade, produced a series of books on the World War Two era in the region. His latest work, focused on the Japanese Occupation, is based on a significant body of recent English-language scholarship and Tarling's own extensive knowledge of the British Foreign Office records.

In his first two chapters Tarling surveys the development of the Japanese Empire, Japan's historical connections with and interest in Southeast Asia, and the pre-war relations between Japan and the colonial powers that dominated the region. He argues that the Japanese decision to go to war reflected both 'growing fear and unthinking optimism' (p. 79), fear that an opportunity might be lost, coupled with wishful thinking that early victories would pave the way to a favourable settlement. Tarling emphasises that the Japanese were ill-prepared for the task of administering the vast new territories their stunning military victories would bring into their empire.

Chapter 3 covers the Japanese sweep into Southeast Asia and the subsequent course of the war through 1945. Tarling agrees with those who believe the Japanese erred in not pressing their advantage in the Indian Ocean region in the spring of 1942 in an effort to undermine the British position in South Asia and threaten the Middle East in concert with the Germans. The chapter concludes with his assessment that the most significant

impact of the war for Southeast Asia was 'the break in colonial continuity' that gave 'the nationalists their chance' (p. 124).

The efforts of Japanese leaders such as Shigemitsu Mamoru to give some substance to idealistic rhetoric about the 'liberation of Asia' occupy Tarling's attention in Chapter Four. Here he shows how this push arose from the realisation that the tide of war had turned against Japan and the Axis. Shigemitsu and his allies sought the moral high ground in hopes this might facilitate a negotiated peace, undermine efforts by the ousted colonial powers to reassert their rule, and ultimately provide a cloak of justification for Japan's aggression.

Tarling provides an area-by-area discussion of how the Japanese occupation functioned on the ground in Southeast Asia in Chapters 5 and 6. He devotes one chapter to political matters, the second to economic ones. He points out that policies varied considerably, depending on Japanese strategic and economic concerns and local political circumstances. In the former colonial areas there were, however, opportunities for nationalists to operate more freely than previously and, in some cases, to organise military and paramilitary forces. Although this would provide a critical impetus to various national liberation movements, Southeast Asians also suffered from the 'greed, violence, and incompetence' (p. 145) of the Japanese occupiers. Economically, the Japanese presence disrupted existing trade patterns, creating various hardships that affected the local peoples.

In his conclusion, Tarling speculates on the reasons why the Japanese behaved as they did in Southeast Asia and further evaluates their role in ending colonial rule. On the first point he begins by noting that inadequate planning led the Japanese to fall back on methods developed in Manchuria and occupied China. Wartime conditions, he adds, limited options, as such positive plans as existed were impossible to implement once the Allies disrupted sea transportation. Finally, he emphasises the predominant role of an army that had institutionalised brutality. In his assessment of the impact of the occupation on national liberation, the author argues that while the Japanese interregnum undoubtedly undermined the pre-war order, ultimate credit for the demise of colonialism must go to the indigenous leaders who took up the cause and pushed ahead successfully.

Structuring a book that covers all of Southeast Asia on any subject or period is a daunting task, but the book would have had greater coherence had Tarling organised it in a more chronological, integrated fashion. In particular, it is difficult to comprehend the inter-relationships between events and policies when start-to-finish coverage of the war in Chapter 3 is followed by a chapter on high-level Japanese policy and two separate chapters on the political and economic realities of the occupation. The fact that the latter two chapters are further sub-divided by area only makes matters worse.

Despite this problematic organisational scheme and the fact that specialists will find neither new information nor novel interpretation, Tarling's book is a very useful contribution. His up-to-date survey will aid newcomers to the study of wartime Southeast Asia and graduate students preparing for exams in modern Asian history. Students will also find his bibliography helpful, although an essay on sources – which Tarling is eminently qualified to write – would have further enhanced the book's value.

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## Cambodia

*Angkor Wat. A royal temple*

By HÉLÈNE LEGENDRE DE KONINCK

Weimar: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, 2001 [Architektur der Welt Series–4]. Pp. 93. Plates, Notes, Bibliography.

DOI: S0022463403240303

For such a small, thin book (98 pages, 35 drawings, 27 black and white photos, 15 x 15 x 0.5 cm), this is truly a jewel that covers art, architecture, culture and history at Angkor Wat. It is unnecessary to expend excessive ink comparing Hélène de Koninck's book with the numerous good, mediocre and sometimes bad books and essays about this temple. She has previously produced thoroughly researched works on Angkor Wat, and effectively offers several of her refreshing ideas and critical commentary in this work. Thus, the following review is designed to highlight some of the general strengths and weaknesses of the book rather than compare it with other works.

Fortunately, I had the opportunity to reread this book while visiting Angkor Wat for a fifth time during an increasingly rare situation – a time relatively devoid of tourists. This allowed for a more critical evaluation, but also resulted in a greater appreciation of the examples de Koninck selects to emphasise her ideas. For instance, in earlier sections, she discusses the layout, architecture, play of light and the manner in which certain objects appear or remain hidden. She further discusses which parts appear, at what points they appear, and how this may impact the overall experience and meaning. I found this one of the strong points of this work, especially after I was able to actually 'test' her hypotheses. Despite the possibility that we may never know the true detailed meanings of Angkor Wat to the ancient Khmer people, or the varied impacts that the 'Angkor Wat experience' had on residents, devotees and visitors, de Koninck's insights are a useful step towards increased understanding.

De Koninck is careful to give appropriate warnings that remind the reader that many very enticing interpretations are speculations rather than facts. For example, she states (p. 51) that 'this does not imply that the structures or even the features of Hindu mythology may be applied to Khmer culture and a shared set of meanings thus deduced. To do so would be inadvisable...' Later, she suggests that 'considering the amazing architectural organisation of the temple and the concentration of themes heralding better times, it seems possible that Suryvarman II wanted to present himself to the people as the regenerator of time' (p. 79). Even so, de Koninck manages to assert cautiously considered interpretations with confidence without each paragraph reading like a legal document filled with 'escape clauses/disclaimers'. In addition, she succinctly addresses equivocal issues such as the apotheosis of Angkorian kings (p. 15). Of course, some readers may desire lengthier discussions, but it is clear that the book is not designed to meander – a quality many other readers will appreciate. *Angkor Wat* is also useful for stimulating thought into a number of issues despite the brevity of the chapters. For example, the final chapter ('Angkor Wat and the question of the banners') will push most readers to think more thoroughly about the relationship between the overall design of the *bas-relief* banners and the 'royal message' which the relief presumably imparts.

As for criticisms, it would be useful to have slightly more information on the

relationships between Angkor Wat and other Angkorian temples from de Koninck's perspective, as well as a discussion on the applicability of her approaches to other temple research. It also would be interesting to know how she places her work in the evolutionary trajectory of temple building, kingship, religion and civilisation (among other factors) in early Khmer society, from the Funan period through the demise of Angkor. However, in her defence, these are not her intentions in this book. I do encourage de Koninck to think about these issues, however, and incorporate them into future publications – for it is certainly to be hoped that this is not her last book on the subject. The only other criticism is that some of the pictures and drawings are slightly obscure (i.e., grainy and washed out). They are, nevertheless, good pictures and exemplify the author's statements well.

In closing, the book is a must for any serious researcher involved with Angkorian studies and Hindu temple studies in general. The book is also a must for any serious visitor to Angkor Wat and should be in one's pocket at all times, preferably read for at least a second time while actually at the temple. Finally, it is a very useful educational tool for undergraduate and graduate students. I continue to recommend the book to my students involved in Southeast Asian studies, archaeology, architecture, art history, religion and history. It has proven to be extremely useful to them and also very manageable.

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#### Indonesia

*Een vorst onder de taalgeleerden: Herman Neubronner van der Tuuk, taalafgevaardigde voor Indië van het Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap 1847-1873 [Foremost among scholars of language: Herman Neubronner van der Tuuk, linguist in the service of the Dutch Bible Society 1847-1873]*

By KEES GROENBOER

Leiden: KITLV, 2002. Pp. 965. Maps, Plates, Bibliography, Index.

DOI: S002246340325030X

This *bronnenpublicatie* (source publication) is an invaluable reference for philologists, anthropologists, theologians, historians and linguists – and especially for those with an interest in nineteenth-century Dutch linguists and their role in Indonesia. It consists largely of linguist Herman Neubronner van der Tuuk's correspondence with the Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap (NBG – Dutch Bible Society) from 1847 to 1873, emphasising his study of the Batak, Lampungese and Balinese languages. To provide a context for the voluminous correspondence in the publication, Kees Groeneboer gives a detailed overview of the life and work of van der Tuuk in the 30-page introduction. Following this introduction is the NBG correspondence, supplemented by letters between van der Tuuk and his friends, colleagues and organisations in the Netherlands and the Indies. With 264 primary and 10 supplementary documents, Groeneboer's work is well researched and a solid piece of scholarship. With this publication, Rob



Nieuwenhuys' *De pen in gal gedoopt* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1962), in which only a small part of van der Tuuk's correspondence was included, will become largely obsolete.

The entire correspondence is published in unabbreviated form, with each letter supplemented by a critical commentary in the form of notes and cross-references. Groeneboer has compiled these notes with dedication and they are certainly one of the strongest points of the book, as it is through them that the correspondence becomes transparent and meaningful to the reader. They contain references to related correspondence and to a wealth of external sources listed in the extensive bibliography (pp. 900-49), as well as background information.

The correspondence is divided into five sections, which make up the main chapters of the book. Chapter 1 starts with some of the early communication between van der Tuuk and his study friend J. Roos, along with a book review van der Tuuk published in *De Gids* under the pseudonym 'S.B.'. This period covers van der Tuuk's two-year preparation in the Netherlands for his 1849 return to Surabaya, the city in which he was raised.

The second and third chapters follow van der Tuuk from 1849 to 1868, a period during which he lived in Barus for six years and then compiled material for the publication of a Batak-Dutch dictionary (1861), a Batak grammar (1864), a Batak reader (1860-62) and various Bible translations (1859-1867) done while in the Netherlands. Chapter 4 is the shortest of the five, covering only one year. Departing from Marseille, van der Tuuk arrived in the Dutch Indies in July 1868, but a rebellion in Buleleng prevented him from going to his destination, Bali. Instead, he received an offer to study Lampungese in southern Sumatra, where he spent one year. Despite his productivity in that year, relatively little of his work was published, not even the dictionary of 600 handwritten pages compiled during this period.

The fifth and final chapter focuses on van der Tuuk's work of translating the Bible into Balinese. Here he embarked on his monumental work of 3,600 pages, the trilingual Kawi-Bali-Dutch dictionary published between 1897 and 1912. Van der Tuuk left the Dutch Bible Society in 1873, when he was given the opportunity to devote himself exclusively to the study of languages without having to work on Bible translations, a task that he disliked.

His correspondence with the NBG and others is an indispensable scholarly resource containing a wealth of hitherto unknown facts about various aspects of Indonesian culture and the history of Dutch scholarship in the nineteenth century. The book is supplemented by ten *bijlagen* (appendixes) consisting of supplementary documents attached to the main documents published in Chapters 1 to 5, an exhaustive list of van der Tuuk's publications, a comprehensive bibliography, and an index of names and institutions. Given the volume of the publication, the wealth of information contained, and the referential nature of the book, a subject index would have added considerably to the usefulness of Groeneboer's otherwise excellent publication.

On one last note, this publication proves once again that knowledge of the Dutch language is an essential prerequisite for serious scholars of Indonesian language, history and culture.

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## Malaysia

### *Life in the kampongs of Kuching, fifty years ago*

By A. ZAINAL ABIDIN and ABDULLAH SALLEH

Kuching: Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 2002. Pp. x, 85. Maps, Photographs, Tables, Appendices.

DOI: S0022463403260306

The establishment of the Institute of East Asian Studies at the University of Malaysia Sarawak a few years ago has proven a boon for scholarship on Borneo. The Institute has not only sponsored conferences but also published useful monographs, collections and oral literatures. This monograph represents an admirable effort to make more widely available a neglected but important unpublished study from fifty years ago. As Michael Leigh points out in his introduction to the monograph, relatively little research was done on the Malay communities of Sarawak before the 1970s, enhancing the significance of this study.

*Life in the kampongs* was originally an academic exercise undertaken by two undergraduate geography students in 1953 at the University of Malaya, then located in Singapore, under the direction of Professor E. H. G. Dobby. At the time, Sarawak was a British colony still recovering from the tensions generated by the change from Brooke rajahs to British rule. Spending three months in Kuching, the two students surveyed the string of thirteen mostly Malay neighbourhoods (*kampong*) stretching for some 6 miles along the north bank of the Sarawak River across from Kuching town. These neighbourhoods occupy a thin strip of land squeezed between the river and vast wetlands stretching to the coast. No one who has spent much time in Kuching before the 1980s could fail to notice the predominantly rural and traditional nature of most of these *kampong*, in contrast to urban Kuching, a bustling town with a Chinese majority population and suburban Malay neighbourhoods on the south bank, very much oriented to the economic and bureaucratic life of the Sarawak capital.

The authors, Ahmad Zainal Abidin and Abdullah Salleh, were Malays from elite backgrounds in Malaya who possessed both the language and research skills to prepare this report on the social geography, economic activities, and other aspects of life in the *kampong*. In 1953 the *kampong* contained some 7,000 inhabitants, most of them Malay. Sarawak Malays came from diverse ethnic backgrounds, some of them descendants of migrants from elsewhere in the archipelago, but the study does not devote much space to identifying the precise population origins or distinctive subgroup identities of particular *kampong*. The authors do suggest that many of these families migrated from coastal Sarawak villages in the 1920s and 1930s.

Their report found a generally poor and isolated population living at little better than subsistence level and facing a chronic shortage of good drinking water. The disconnect between these rural-type *kampong* and the vibrant, multi-ethnic town symbolised the riverine divide. While some crossed the river daily for work, most rarely visited the town. The north-bank dwellers suffered from high rates of infant mortality, due to their distance from clinics as well as an unwillingness to use modern medical facilities. Most relied on traditional remedies.

Some residents in *kampong* closest to the city centre were middle-class, giving them a more secure life than most of the others. While perhaps one-sixth of *kampong* residents

worked in middle- or low-level government service as policemen, office boys and the like, about one-third of the population were labourers, most of whom crossed the river daily to work in private firms or for the government. (This reader wishes the study told us more about the men who plied the small sampans that ferried residents back and forth across the river.) Most of the rest followed rural occupations such as exploitation of wetland resources, woodcutting, rubber tapping and fishing. The report offers informative chronicles of the daily routine and difficult lives of some of these resource collectors. With no government schools on the north bank, few residents knew English and many were illiterate even in Malay.

The report reflects the attitudes of the authors as Malay intellectuals favouring modernisation. They echoed common stereotypes of the day in expressing doubt that these *kampong* Malays would successfully urbanise:

They are an easily contented people. The Malay philosophy, particularly evident in these kampongs, that as soon as he has earned enough to subsist he should relax and enjoy himself, produces a people of great charm and natural dignity, but it must be admitted that they are not easily fused with the inevitable sophistication of urban existence. (p. 50)

Kuching has grown dramatically and changed much since 1953, and some north-bank *kampong* have become more closely connected to the city. Still, the rhythms of life there continue to reflect some earlier patterns. Neither author remained in the academic world as teacher and scholar but both forged highly successful careers in government service, one as a diplomat and the other as a civil servant, business executive and university administrator. Later researchers owe them thanks for this careful and useful study.

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*Modern dreams: An inquiry into power, cultural production, and the cityscape in contemporary urban Penang, Malaysia*

By BENG-LAN GOH

Ithaca: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, 2002. Pp. 224. Tables, Notes, Maps, Appendices.  
DOI: S0022463403270302

This is a finely crafted monograph focusing on the complex nexus between economic development, cultural politics and global forces as it unfolds in an interesting drama centred on the demolition of an urban village in Penang, Malaysia. The book is based on doctoral research conducted in the early 1990s concentrating on a Portuguese Eurasian settlement and a specific land conflict involving the community, the Church, a Eurasian cultural association and property developers. Data was collected through an innovative multi-site ethnographic investigation that involved a combination of participant observation at a predominantly Catholic Eurasian community, Kampung Serani; interviews with developers, Church officials, state bureaucrats and Eurasian elite

belonging to a cultural association; and analysis of media reports and official documents. Goh reveals that her interest in the Kampung Serani conflict was first sparked in 1984 when as a cadet reporter she wrote a feature media article on the plight of the residents who had been served eviction notices. Property developers intending to build residential homes and shops sought the land where this urban village stood. The Catholic Church, the legal owner of the land, was also embroiled in the conflict after it sold the land to the developers and in the process was seen to have betrayed some members of its devoted congregation. The other actor in this fascinating drama was the Eurasian cultural association, run mainly by members of the community but from a class background different from the residents of Kampung Serani.

Goh elegantly uncovers the rather complex plot in this intriguing drama by providing a detailed analysis of the competing interests and stratagems of the various actors: the various residents of Kampung Serani with their differing strategies and motives, the Church, Penang Eurasian Association, the two main developers involved, and the state. In a refreshing analytical framework, the micro and local processes of the Kampung Serani are examined in the context of the macro and novel configurations of the nation, ethnicity and class in Malaysian society. As Goh puts it succinctly, 'the experience of modernity in Malaysia begins with the everyday processes of urban eviction and the accompanying upheavals of social, political, and economic behavior, which unfolds within a complex intertwining of local, national and global dynamics' (p. 201).

The book is divided into nine chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion. Chapter 2 provides a handy discussion of the theoretical issues related to conceptualisations of modernity that inform the approach and analysis of the study while Chapter 3 is a discussion of the historical and institutional aspects of Malaysian economy, society, culture and state policies and programmes (such as Vision 2020) which offers a good background for the understanding of the cultural politics that underlie the Kampung Serani conflict. The details of this conflict are covered in Chapter 4, which is followed by two chapters that focus on the Eurasians, one on the personal narratives of the residents and the other on the cultural politics of the Penang Eurasian Association. In these two chapters, Goh examines the complex politics of identity in the way Eurasians negotiate their identities in a country where ethnicity pervades the everyday lives of its citizenry. The identity reformulation processes of Eurasians are explored in the context of the political changes in Malaysia, particularly in relation to the changing Malay identity politics. Chapters 7 and 8 deal with the cultural and spatial politics of urban development in Penang and the property developers and their interests and strategies respectively.

One of the key strengths of the book is the recognition of the importance of human agency. As Goh asserts, 'Malaysian modernity should be understood less as a state-initiated, top-down project and more as a response by specific, local actors to existing social conditions' (p. 201). The book is certainly a major contribution to the understanding of Malaysian modernity. The theories and themes discussed in the study are so diverse, ranging from urban social dynamics to cultural politics to economic development that it would be of interest to a wide range of scholars from the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, politics and human geography.

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*Malaysian cinema, Asian film: Border crossings and national cultures*

By WILLIAM VAN DER HEIDE

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002. Pp. 301. Figures, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

DOI: S0022463403280309

While the film cultures of China, Japan, India and in the Southeast Asian context, Thailand, have recently received much attention in academic circles, Malaysia does not play a prominent role in the literature on cinema. In *Malaysian cinema, Asian film*, William van der Heide, a film studies lecturer in Australia, argues that the concept of 'national cinema' is problematic in a nation with the prominent ethnic differentiation of Malaysia. According to the author, 'national cinema' has been conceptualised in 'overtly homogenous terms' while cultural differences are located on the boundaries, thus emphasising the homogeneity of the centre (p. 21). Since the Malaysian film industry has historically involved the use of Chinese financing, Indian direction and technical expertise, and Malay artistry – thus fitting ethnic stereotypes from the region – as well as plots and images from a variety of cinemas from outside the country, it reflects the 'intercultural and intertextual' links between Southeast Asian cinema and the wider world. With this in mind, van der Heide focuses his attention not only on films produced in Malaysia and earlier Malaya, but also on the film activities that took place there, including the consumption of non-Malaysian films and their influence on the culture of cinema. By the time he reaches his conclusion, the author has shown how the Malay (not Malaysian) focus of the cinema, despite the numerous cultural influences, reflects many of the larger ethnic tensions of the society. Thus, if there is a Malaysian national cinema it is one that reflects the numerous global influences on it as well as the specific ways in which it is interpreted locally.

The book is divided into four main chapters, in addition to short introductory and concluding chapters. Running throughout the work is the theme of how various ideas and concepts are translated across cultural boundaries. In the theoretically focused first chapter, for example, van der Heide discusses how the Hollywood Western has been translated into other cinema cultures, such as the samurai films of Japan or martial arts films of Hong Kong, resulting in a revitalisation of these local genres. Throughout the book he places particular emphasis on the role of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* on Malay literature and storytelling, and subsequent film plots. While these Indian epics have been influential in the development of Malay arts, he has a tendency to see links to these tales in almost every Malay film he analyses, just as he believes that every clash between two individuals echoes the well-known *Tuah–Jebat* conflict of ancient Melaka.

Of the thirty-three films Van der Heide viewed, from a canon of over 600 movies, he writes extensively about eleven in Chapter Four. The films chosen are among the best known in Malaysian cinema, and were made over a 40-year period. In his analysis he focuses on 'the cultural specificity of [these] films in their interplay with local and other cultural forces' (p. 161). The limited number of films viewed, and the over-emphasis on the role of Indian epics in Malaysian cinema in his analysis, however, constitute one of the drawbacks of the book. Anyone who visits Malaysia or lives there knows that these films are shown on local television at least twice a week and pirated copies are easily available. Thus, a wider range of sources could have been tapped. In addition, the author

does not understand the Malay language, something he openly admits. When Van der Heide viewed a film without subtitles, he would have a Malaysian sitting next to him explaining the dialogue and significance of the activities. Despite these criticisms, the analysis of the selected films is well done, and his conclusion that national cinemas are not autochthonous is convincing.

*Malaysian cinema, Asian film* is a welcome addition to film studies in Southeast Asia. It places Malaysian cinema in a global context and critiques the belief in 'a nationally circumscribed cinematic identity' (p. 161). In a rapidly globalising world, such a work raises questions about how various cultures interact and respond. This is the important contribution of this book not only to film studies, but to a variety of other disciplines.

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*Democracy in Malaysia: Discourses and practices*

Edited by FRANCIS LOH KOK WAH and KHOO BOO TEIK

Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2002. Pp. xiii, 274. Figures, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

DOI: S0022463403290305

While scholars have variously described Malaysian politics as 'quasi' – or 'semi-democratic', as 'authoritarian' under a culturalist (Asian Values) guise or as a 'syncretic state' with a 'repressive/responsive regime' (p. 4), local academics in this edited collection of essays give a detailed appraisal of democratic discourse and practice in 1990s Malaysia. Significantly, the writers and editors have themselves been activists for a greater democratisation of Malaysian political life. All, with the exception of Saliha Hassan from the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), hail from Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in Penang. An island state off the northwest coast of peninsular Malaysia, Penang is the locus of many significant Malaysian NGOs, including the National Consciousness Movement (Aliran), of which many of the writers are members. The text is the outcome of the 'Discourses and Practices of Democracy in Southeast Asia Project' sponsored by two Swedish organisations with the stated aim of improving knowledge of political structures, processes and cultures and, in particular, examining 'local' interpretations of democracy and democratic alternatives in Asia.

The essays in this collection were begun in 1996 and focus mainly on the early to mid-1990s. However, revisions to the essays have been made to include analysis related to the dramatic events of the late 1990s, such as the Asian Financial Crisis beginning in July 1997, the sacking of Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in September 1998 and the November 1999 General Elections. Sceptical of both the triumphalism of Western liberal democracy proponents and the cultural relativism of Asian Values ideologists, the writers suggest a more nuanced and complex political reality as discerned from developments in the 1990s. These include a shift from ethnic politicking to developmentalism resulting in an individualising mass consumerism; an Islamising of political discourse and at the same time a democratising of Islam; a privatising and expanding of media offerings, whilst the media itself is controlled and owned by interests



associated with the government; an expanding but heterogeneous and fragmented NGO and civil society arena, which also has been circumscribed and even at times co-opted by government; and an increasing profile for gender politics with cooperation between women's organisations at the periphery and those at the political centre even while the 'women's movement at the centre' has remained opposed to fundamental political reform. Thus, despite observable pressures for greater democratisation and a lively political discourse centred on discussions of democracy, the Mahathir regime (1981–present) through periods of crisis and challenge has been able to re-invent itself, not only maintaining but strengthening its hold on power. Thus, Malaysia has resisted any general trend in the region towards greater democracy.

Clearly, politics is a complex mix of contradictory factors – structural, cultural and human – with the intersection of unexpected external events and pressures. This text provides a useful overview of Malaysian political discourse since independence in 1957 (pp. 22–38) as well as many useful insights into the country's political situation. Of particular interest is the observation that mass consumerism has served to privatise and atomise, especially middle-class political responses, and to reduce public political engagement. Also, the observed convergence between Islamic and democratic thought is a significant trend with much wider implications. However, there are a number of other aspects which could have been usefully included in such a study, such as discussion of the Malaysian electoral system and its manipulation; analysis of voting patterns in different electorates; discussion of politics within the various major political parties in both the ruling coalition and the opposition; a study of inter-relations between political elites and the business community examining rentierism, patronage and their implications for democracy; and the role of East Malaysia in the overall political equation. Though the book is part of a broader study of democracy in Asia and promising possible insights from the Malaysian case study for the larger comparative study, the editors unfortunately leave the reader to draw out the more general implications. Whilst they do acknowledge in their Postscript the limitations in scope, especially in the light of late 1990s developments, it would have been helpful if they had reflected on what they saw as the wider implications of the Malaysian experience.

Nonetheless, it is a significant and substantial text examining 1990s Malaysia and providing much food for thought as we attempt to understand the new post-September 11 climate in which even 'Western liberal democracy' in the West is seen in a more muted or attenuated light as the 'war on terror' and concerns over 'weapons of mass destruction' take centre-stage. Political calculations are complex. Democracy (as exemplified by recent experiences in Indonesia, Cambodia and South Korea) can be a rough adventure. It is one which the Malaysian elite even in the post-Mahathir era (after October 2003) are likely to approach with due caution – and not necessarily for reasons of commitment to any sort of Asian Values ideology.

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## Myanmar

*Brave men of the hills: Resistance and rebellion in Burma, 1824-1932*

By PARIMAL GHOSH

London: Hurst, 2000. Pp. 197. Maps, Tables, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

DOI: S002246340330030X

Addressing the chronologically disjointed manner in which resistance and rebellion in Burma have been studied, Parimal Ghosh connects the Anglo-Burman Wars of the nineteenth century to the Saya San Rebellion of the 1930s, lengthening the perspective through which such movements had been previously examined. While a sizable amount of attention has been directed to the anti-colonial movements of the 1930s, there have been relatively few attempts to consider the nature of Burmese resistance from this considerably larger framework, making Ghosh's contribution a welcome addition to Burma Studies as well as to the field of anti-colonial resistance movements in Southeast Asia. Drawing mainly on secondary sources and British colonial documents, Ghosh restates the familiar argument that resistance in the nineteenth century was shaped by the particularly decentralised nature of the pre-colonial state and antagonised by the increasingly intrusive administration of the British. Local autonomy, centre-periphery tensions and traditional notions of boundary, politics and religion shaped the character of resistance strategy during the Anglo-Burman Wars, while the socio-economic experience of direct colonisation produced a host of alternate but connected modes of, and reasons for, disaffection and protest.

Organising the work's chapters chronologically and geographically, Ghosh takes the reader 'northward' and 'forward' through time: from the annexed territories of Lower Burma in the mid-1820s to the eventual seizure of the Mandalay Court in 1886; from the socio-economic conditions of a weakening Burmese kingdom to the highly centralised and market-driven environment of British Burma; and from indigenous expressions of protest to the nationalist movements of the twentieth century. Although exploring the history of resistance and rebellion in Burma as it corresponded to the narrative of British annexation is the primary focus of the work, Ghosh provides an analysis of colonial economic policy as well, illustrating how the commercialisation of agriculture and the expanding demands of the colonial administration created new concerns for peasants and elites alike, resulting in the development of alternate forms of political mobilisation and vocabularies of protest. This study attempts to establish more closely the relationship between the shapes of resistance in Burma and the particular socio-economic context within which it emerged. Specifically, the decentralised structure of the pre-colonial state produced the conditions for, and the local terms through which, rebellion would be expressed; local leaders harnessed their supporters with little or no coordination with the centre or other localities. In contrast, the more centralised environment of the colonial state produced a corresponding response that reflected the concerns of a more integrated and organised political consciousness that sought to link urban concerns with rural ones.

Within this framework, the first two chapters set out to demonstrate these characteristics of 'local autonomy' in the pre-British period by describing the nature of leadership in the villages, the oddly 'decentralising' tendencies of Buddhism, and the economic flexibility that would soon face the systematic changes of the colonial

administration. Ghosh suggests that this orientation towards rural autonomy provided the 'logic of resistance' facing the British once leaders from the top (the King and the Court) were removed. While most scholars of Burma agree that the nature of the pre-colonial polity was less centralised compared to the administration employed by the Europeans, the Burmese state did initiate regular and systematic programmes designed to improve administrative, economic and cultural integration. Thus, the assessment of these earlier expressions of resistance in nineteenth-century Burma as 'locally autonomous' or 'locally conceptualised' can go only as far as this assessment of the Burmese polity is convincingly demonstrated. Reference to indigenous-language materials and a more substantial handling of the secondary sources might provide a clearer picture as to the nature, shape and orientation of the pre-colonial state and the resistance movements it may have witnessed.

Chapter 3 reviews the circumstances surrounding direct rule and the commercialisation of the Burmese economy that ultimately led to the Saya San Rebellion of 1930-32. Focusing on figures describing rental rates, revenue demand for paddy land, tenant profit margins and land ownership percentages, Ghosh establishes the now familiar argument that places economic hardship and steadily declining social conditions as the precursor for armed rebellion. These developments, combined with boycott programmes initiated by urban political groups, further intensified the growing hostilities between colonial authorities while fostering new political linkages between urban and rural leadership.

Chapter 4 deals exclusively with the Saya San Rebellion and restates the story of Saya San, his relationship to the Greater Council of Burmese Associations (GCBA), the growing importance of the *wunthanu athin* (village associations), and their alleged role as the organisational arm of the rebellion. Relying heavily on official British documents (in fact the chapter itself resembles the structure of one such report), the standard narrative of the rebellion is closely retold, describing the political motivations behind the uprising, the sequence of events associated with Saya San and the counter-insurgency tactics employed by the British. Unfortunately, no substantially new argument or insight is offered: Saya San is once again cast in the traditional vocabulary of protest while utilising contemporary forms of organisation, a position that has been considered by scholars in the field for some time. The work's departure from previous scholarship is handled only superficially (p. 174), while numerous arguments pertaining to Saya San's motivations are left completely unfounded (pp. 172-6), and problems in the sources remain untouched or unresolved. On one occasion, the rebel leadership's attempt to construct an expansive network is described – as if it were original analysis – as demonstrating 'hard-boiled practical political sense' when in fact establishing that such a network existed was precisely the position that the British had hoped to argue in their reports.

The strength of the work resides in the conclusion, where Ghosh synthesises the material within the longer framework of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Here, issues of what constitutes resistance and revolution are considered in the context of the Anglo-Burman Wars, the Rebellion and the shift from local interests to national. Pursuing this latter issue more closely in Burmese-language sources may be the next step, as British rebellion reports actually sought to deny the Burmese peasantry a national

consciousness by relegating political expression to instances of superstition, gullibility and irrationality. In addition, exploring what appear to have been the author's initial misgivings about the narrative itself might also be a site for future study, as he frequently describes Saya San as having 'seemingly' been at such and such a place or 'reportedly' done this or that. In fact, a closer reading of the legal sources upon which the narrative about Saya San is based (these sources are oddly missing from the bibliography) reveals that much of the historical narrative relies on an extremely tenuous evidential foundation. Perhaps it is time we question the nature of our sources and the contexts in which they were produced in order to provide new questions and new interpretative models.

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### Thailand

*Woman, man, Bangkok: Love, sex and popular culture in Thailand*

By SCOT BARMÉ

Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002. Pp. vii, 273. Figures, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

DOI: S0022463403310306

Scot Barmé's new book animates early twentieth-century Bangkok, a raucous urban space and population trying to find its sea legs in the wake of massive economic and social change in Siam (Thailand). Unlike any other English- or Thai-language history, Barmé's study puts you on the ground in the always scintillating and often overstimulating Bangkok, a city characterised by moral and economic extremes as early as the 1910s. His book offers the first urban social history of Bangkok that also chronicles the formation of Siam's burgeoning middle class and its ideological stances. The sheer amount of detail Barmé gleaned from Thai-language newspapers, political cartoons, magazines, film booklets, novels, short stories and other documentation makes his book a cornucopia of the quotidian.

As such, *Woman, man, Bangkok* is distinctive in two ways. It is the first published source in English to return the fledgling middle class to Thai history, thus offering an alternative to elite reconstructions of this period. The middle class has been written out of Thai history for both intellectual and logistical reasons. Whereas newspaper and magazine sources expressing the views of the common classes from the period have disappeared or are extremely difficult to access, the writings of Siam's kings are readily available and perennially reprinted. Barmé remonstrates that the ease of access to royal texts enables scholars to invest 'the king's work with a wholly unwarranted degree of significance', that 'promote[s] a highly selective view of the past, one that dovetails neatly with official royal-centered history while obscuring the far more complex, innovative, and contentious realities of the period' (p. 254). He seeks to correct this by rehabilitating the middle classes who helped develop that city's hybrid, cosmopolitan culture and who created a crucial space in the print media for anti-absolutist opinions. Following Matthew Copeland's unpublished but well-known dissertation ('Contested nationalism

and the 1932 overthrow of the absolute monarchy in Siam' [Ph.D. diss., Australian National University, 1993]), Barmé shows how the absolute monarchy, contrary to official narratives, 'came to be regarded by growing numbers of politically aware commoners as an archaic, repressive institution which impeded Siam's progress, while the social order fostered by absolutism was seen as moribund and profoundly corrupt' (p. 2).

In addition to offering an alternative history, this book is a distinctive and welcome addition to Thai studies because it reveals how gender issues were integral to broader political transformations, including the transition from royal absolutism to post-1932 politics. Barmé genders the public debate raging in the 1920s and 1930s about the continued relevance of the absolutist regime. He argues that the middle class believed that the way in which Siam would prove itself a modern, progressive and civilised nation was by providing women greater educational, employment and social opportunities. Increasingly, middle-class men and women identified the practices of polygyny and prostitution with royal-noble men, who were subjected to devastating lampoonery in the local press. Because of their behaviour as rampantly heterosexual men, royal-noble elite – and by extension the political and social regime they represented – were regarded by the middle classes as licentious degenerates who contributed nothing to the broader national community. Barmé explains, however, that despite middle-class discursive disavowal of polygyny and prostitution, middle-class men in fact contributed to an increase in both practices. Men in the new salaried bureaucracy, drawn from the middle class, were in a position to avail themselves of the services of prostitutes. He concludes that in practice the gender double standard remained fairly consistent across class lines.

*Woman, man, Bangkok* covers new and old ground in its nine substantive chapters, which are organised around themes and sources. He provides readers with original material about the early Thai film industry, sex manuals, and national heroine prototypes, and also treats familiar themes such as the issues of polygyny, prostitution, female education and employment, and romantic love. Barmé devotes entire chapters to particular sources such as filmic representations, newspaper cartoons, women's magazines, and romantic fiction. He mines these sources for their information about gender issues as they relate to morality and class struggle from the perspective of the middle class.

Barmé, however, cannot possibly cover all the ground necessary to explain the development of modern Bangkok and the middle classes. His use of the categories 'class' and 'modernity' is commonsensical rather than theoretical. There is unfortunately and perhaps egregiously no sustained analysis of ethnicity despite the frequent surfacing of Chinese in all the sources and despite the fact that the population in Bangkok was at least half Chinese during the early twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> There is, similarly, no discussion of the Sino-Thai population which must have at least stimulated, if not constituted, the growing middle class. His treatment of the development of feminist consciousness is atheoretical and requires a more rigorous discussion of 'protofeminism' – represented by the writings of a commoner man (Thianwan) and conspicuously similar to ideas

1 In 1910, there were approximately 800,000 Chinese in Siam, most of whom congregated in and around Bangkok, which itself had a population of somewhere between 300,000 and 500,000. David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 217; *In Search of Southeast Asia*, ed. David J. Steinberg, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, rev. edn, 1987), p. 258.

espoused by King Vajiravudh – and of its successor, referred to simply as a ‘more robust, self-confident type of feminist consciousness’ (p. 133). It is still a relevant question today to ask about the degree to which ‘women’ as a category has the capacity to unite women from vastly different social and ethnic backgrounds, particularly in a country that has maintained a deep and daily sense of class-based hierarchy despite adopting ‘modern’ values of social and gender equality. Finally, there is no coverage of Buddhism or how Thai religious and moral values might have structured local middle-class adaptations of modern morality, which in Barmé’s account was based largely on a Western (Christian) heterosexual, middle-class prototype. Despite these shortcomings, Barmé performs a monumental task. He ‘peoples’ Siam, bringing it to life with a vibrancy and immediacy by parading before us the issues and images that roused the population of early twentieth-century Bangkok.

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*The politics of ruins and the business of nostalgia*

By MAURIZIO PELEGGI

Bangkok: White Lotus, Studies in Contemporary Thailand No. 10, 2002. Pp. x, 100.

Bibliography, Index.

DOI: S0022463403320302

In the first part of this short book, Maurizio Peleggi traces how some of the numerous relics of the past found in Thailand have been made ‘emblems’ of heritage of the Thai nation (*moradok hāēng chāt*) through state-supported archaeological research, preservation and restoration. In the second part, Peleggi considers implications of the more recent promotion of international and domestic tourism focused on heritage sites and on festivals and celebrations linked to these sites.

In premodern Siam (as elsewhere in premodern Theravāda Buddhist Southeast Asia), the only monuments that were taken as indicators of a past that remained relevant to the present were stupas. These *cēdī*, as they were termed in Thai (from the Pāli *cetiya*) were ‘reminders’ of the Buddha. Beginning in the nineteenth century, as a concomitant of increasing Western influences, several Siamese began to ‘discover’ other links to the past among the ruins in the kingdom.

The shift in how the past is remembered by Thai can be said to have begun in 1833 when a young princely monk on a pilgrimage to the north of the country found among the ruins of Sukhothai a stele with an inscription dating to the late thirteenth century and attributed to a ruler who called himself Ramkhamhaeng. By 1851, when this monk ascended to the Siamese throne as King Mongkut (r. 1851–68), his intense interactions with Protestant missionaries and Western diplomats led him to develop a new historical consciousness. From this perspective he came to see the Ramkhamhaeng stele as establishing the beginnings of the future Thai nation.

The view that some relics of past eras found in Thailand are reminders not of the legacy of the Buddha, but of the heritage of a nation was promoted even more



strongly by Mongkut's son, King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910). In 1912 under Chulalongkorn's successor, King Vajiravudh (r. 1910-25), the work of selecting certain ruins to be linked to the national heritage was institutionalised through the creation of the Fine Arts Department. The Department not only survived the transition from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy in 1932, but actually gained in significance in subsequent periods.

Peleggi discusses how through the selection of particular historical sites for archaeological research and conservation, the Fine Arts Department transformed these sites into symbols of Thai national identity. He gives primary attention to the politics of the past surrounding the ruins in Central and North-Central Thailand of the two premodern kingdoms of Sukhothai (thirteenth-fifteenth centuries) and Ayutthaya (fourteenth-eighteenth centuries) that figure in the national genealogy as the ancestors of modern Thailand. He also focuses on the ruins in Northeastern Thailand associated with the Angkorean empire (ninth-fifteenth centuries), the legacy of which is claimed as much for Thailand as for Cambodia.

Since the 1970s the Fine Arts Department's role in linking the pasts of Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and the northern Angkorean sites with the dominant national narrative has been contested in several ways. Some have questioned the way the Fine Arts Department has 'restored' these ruins and situated them within national historical parks. This questioning has, however, been restricted to a small academic circle and has had little public impact. Others have launched attacks on the meanings ascribed to relics of Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, or the Angkorean-era monuments for the national narrative. The most dramatic of such attacks was launched by the art historian, Piriya Krairiksh, over the question of the authenticity of the Ramkhamhaeng inscription. Despite the heat this attack generated within academic circles, it again attracted very little public attention. A far more significant challenge has been mounted by scholars associated with the project of local history 'in reaction to the dominant historiography' (p. 33). Since the early 1990s this academic project has been reinforced by the state support for regional museums, festivals and commemorations.

This 'decentering of the official historical narrative' (p. 34) is also a product of the promotion of tourism. Since its founding in 1959, the Tourist Organisation of Thailand (today the Tourist Authority of Thailand or TAT) has, in effect, competed with the Fine Arts Department in promoting the national heritage. Because international tourism generates more foreign exchange than any other sector of the economy, what TAT selects for its promotional campaigns is shaped by the market as well as by nationalist interests. Such places as memorial sites dedicated to the Allied prisoners-of-war who died at the 'Bridge over the River Kwai' (Kwae Noi river in Kanchanaburi province) or villages inhabited by hill peoples in Northern Thailand figure prominently in TAT promotions even though these are marginal to the national narrative. Even the red-light district around Patpong Road in Bangkok, Peleggi notes, 'can be regarded as a heritage site' since it has been such a significant draw for international tourists (p. 74). The domestic tourist market targeted by TAT, however, is quite different to the international tourist market. Domestic tourists are primarily urbanites who travel within Thailand in search of 'authentic' culture

presumed to be found in local places outside of Bangkok and even outside of the rather sterile historical parks.

Peleggi's book, which discusses the commercial shaping of nostalgia for the past and especially the politics of ruins in, is a worthy addition to the growing literature on the politics of the past in Thailand and the rest of Southeast Asia.

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*Bangkok*

By WILLIAM WARREN

London: Reaktion Books, 2002. (Southeast Asian edition, Singapore: Talisman Publishing, 2002.) Pp. 160. Photographs, Bibliography.

DOI: S0022463403330309

A resident of Bangkok since 1960, biographer of Jim Thompson and Prem Tinasulanon, long-time lecturer at Chulalongkorn University and author of the text of several dozen coffee-table books on Thailand's palaces, waterways, gardens and arts, William Warren is something of an institution in his adopted city. Having treated that city in a different pictorial book in each of the past three decades, Warren takes a different approach in his latest work.

The introduction to this short and ultimately very personal consideration of Bangkok, presented in a tone of unflinching grace and simplicity, offers a number of distinguished foreign writers' passing impressions of the city. Warren quickly acknowledges that the reactions of Conrad, Maugham, Theroux and their sort are unlikely to be 'very meaningful to the ten million or so Thais' who make Bangkok their home (p. 10). Why quote such observers, then, the reader asks himself. The remainder of the book, divided into chapters on 'Bangkok in time' and 'The city today' makes the answer clear.

For the subject of William Warren's *Bangkok* is his own Bangkok and that of his predecessors and contemporaries among Western residents of the city. Building on the lives of, the writings of and the writings about such figures as the French bishop Jean-Baptiste Pallegoix, the British envoy Sir John Bowring, the Scottish merchant Robert Hunter, the American missionary doctor Dan Beach Bradley and the rather more obscure Belgian legal advisor to King Chulalongkorn Emile Jottrand, Warren has written a book whose pull mimics that of the city itself. Anna Leonowens and the Oriental Hotel receive their due, as do Warren's late friend Thompson and a woman named Carol Hollinger. The latter's time in Bangkok during the 1950s resulted in *Mai pen rai means never mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965, and Bangkok: Asia Books, 1993), which Warren calls 'a passionate, book-length love letter' to the city (p. 91). A scattering of black-and-white photographs and of major episodes in Thai history since the 1780s serve the book well. So, too, do Warren's understated reminiscences of his own four decades in Bangkok. Nor does Warren see this work as the last word. He notes the continuing draw of life in Bangkok and suggests the likelihood that more recent and future arrivals from far away will make the city their own as did he and those who preceded him.

While *Bangkok* surely suffers from the lack of even a single map, Warren handles the city's topography and its evolution across space with typical deftness. He offers, to be sure, the familiar accounts of its beginnings in the 1780s on a bend in the Chao Phraya River as a new royal centre after the Burmese sack of Ayutthaya. He narrates the construction in the 1860s of New Road (*Thanon Charoen Krung*), following that river's bank and emerging by design as 'the principal center of *farang* trade' (p. 51). But these narratives are as dutiful as they are inevitable. More pointedly, Warren notes that today's Rama IV Road actually predated New Road. He smuggles into his text a reference to having lived on Rama IV during his first years in Bangkok. Later references are made to his homes on a pleasant lane off Phloenchit Road and, finally, down Sukhumwit Road's Soi 49. Warren's life as a Bangkok resident has, he thus makes clear, retraced the path of the city's expansion eastward, away from the river. The Phloenchit area resulted, in the 1920s, from the vision of Loet Setthabut (or Lert Sresthaputra, the famous 'Nai Lert'). Subsequently, Sukhumwit emerged in an area hitherto known as the 'Sea of Mud' (p. 84).

Warren does not confine his talent for observation, selection, and description to matters topographical. He informs us of the quadripartite structure of Bangkok's Western element in the time of Anna Leonowens: diplomats, missionaries, 'traders of questionable background' and seamen (p. 47). He notes the curious – and persistent – habit among Thai royals of serving their guests complete Thai and Western meals in a single sitting. He captures perfectly the essence of King Chulalongkorn's version of a new Bangkok, Dusit: 'now used as offices for the government and the military, and the pavements are largely empty after dark' (p. 67). (For a superb treatment of Dusit's creation, see Maurizio Peleggi's new *Lords of things: The fashioning of the Siamese monarchy's modern image* [Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002].) He stresses that, in its inner core as in its sprawl, Bangkok is above all a city of shop-houses (*hong thaew*, which Warren rather curiously calls 'row-shops') and, not coincidentally, 'really a southern Chinese creation' (p. 105). He traces the career in the capital of 'Tongkham', a perhaps imagined migrant from a northern village. And, gently but tellingly, Warren notes the utter disconnect between the life of his adopted city and the vigorously promoted but ultimately hollow and trivialised concept of 'Thai identity' (p. 110).

In all its detail, *Bangkok* is not without a number of minor errors. The Bo Be Market is not in Thewet (p. 127). Translator and literature scholar Susan Kepner uses the middle name Fulop rather than Fuller (p. 46). The Thai neologism for 'identity' is *ekkalak* rather than *ekkalot* (p. 110). And most of the Indonesians murdered in the wake of the events of 30 September 1965 in Jakarta were not in fact of Chinese extraction (p. 109). Too, the bibliography omits several works discussed in the text: the memoirs of *Bangkok Post* founder Alexander MacDonald, Dr Kepner's writings on Anna Leonowens, and Peter Jackson's article on the 1965 death of *Bangkok World* editor Darrell Berrigan and the consequent entry of the English word *gay* into Thai as a term for male homosexuals. But to mention these matters is to quibble about a book whose only true flaw is its brevity. The latest in Reaktion Books' stylish, idiosyncratic Topographics series, *Bangkok* is not meant to be an academic work. Still, William Warren's contribution to the rich body of Western accounts of the city is one that many a Thailand-focused academic will envy and all ought to appreciate.

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## Vietnam

*A world transformed: The politics of culture in revolutionary Vietnam, 1945-1965*

By KIM N. B. NINH

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002. Pp. 317. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

*Culture, ritual and revolution in Vietnam*

By SHAUN KINGSLEY MALARNEY

London and Honolulu: RoutledgeCurzon and University of Hawaii Press, 2002. Pp. 253.

Illustrations, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

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The nearly sixty years that have elapsed since the August Revolution of 1945 have brought about dramatic changes in Vietnam's cultural landscape. Two recent books offer insight into these cultural changes, one from a 'top-down' perspective and the other with a 'grassroots' focus. Together these two studies considerably enhance our knowledge about the cultural impact of socialism at various levels of Vietnamese society.

Kim N. B. Ninh's *A world transformed: The politics of culture in revolutionary Vietnam, 1945-1965* concentrates on the fate of artists and intellectuals during the first two decades of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). She has made extensive use of published materials, including the dissident journals of the mid-1950s, as well as archival documents from the Ministry of Culture to chronicle the evolution of cultural policy in the DRV. The bulk of the study focuses on the period through 1960, with some brief observations on educational developments in the subsequent five years.

The book's strongest chapters are those analysing official policies and the struggles of the literary and artistic world to conform to these policies. (The chapter on education, though interesting and useful and certainly not irrelevant, seems rather a diversion from the main thrust of the book.) Ninh meticulously analyses the successive Party pronouncements on cultural matters, emphasising their 'preoccupation with organisation' (p. 8) and their determination to articulate a definitive vision of socialist culture. Her use of archival sources enables her to pay particular attention to the Ministry of Culture which – tellingly – inherited the work of the wartime Ministry of Propaganda and 'came to have formidable power over the social and intellectual life of the country' (p. 165). Ninh chronicles the internal difficulties faced by the Ministry in trying to develop socialist culture and makes the astute observation that it often evaluated its success in quantitative rather than qualitative terms, a tendency which at times allowed it to sidestep questions about the degree to which it actually changed people's thinking.

One of the key themes of the book is the increasing 'contraction of private space' and 'the heavy weight of the state upon society', to which intellectuals were particularly subject. The period of the anti-French Resistance (1946-54) is still considerably under-researched, and Ninh's study makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of these years. It is well known that over the course of the struggle, the gradual consolidation of the Party's strategic position resulted in a weakening of its united front approach and a concomitant hardening of its Marxist ideology. This change was most clearly manifested in its policies towards landowners and intellectuals. Ninh chronicles the transition from the rather heady early days of the Resistance – when writers and

artists flocked to the DRV-held liberated zones, driven by a sense of patriotism and loyalty to the Party which had led them to independence in 1945 – to a time of increasingly heavy-handed indoctrination (from around mid-1948 onward) and subjection to ideological control. This change, she shows, produced polarisation within the ranks of intellectuals between those who acquiesced to Party control and those who resisted it. The resulting ferment and frustration boiled over (after the defeat of the French) in the *Nhân Văn–Giai Phẩm* affair, named for the two short-lived publications which served as forums for criticism from artists and writers. This Vietnamese version of the ‘Hundred Flowers’ movement in China lasted for only a few months before being quashed by the Party.

This is an extremely interesting book, but it will not be easily accessible to those without a fairly firm grasp of political developments in the 1945–55 period in particular. A few extra paragraphs to provide an overview of the August Revolution and the subsequent war would have helped contextualise the study for a wider readership. Similarly, while the author briefly mentions the important work of David Marr (*Vietnamese tradition on trial* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981]) and Neil Jamieson (*Understanding Vietnam* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993]) in her discussion of twentieth-century Vietnamese intellectual history, there are very few references to these books in her footnotes. Understandably, she is citing the Vietnamese texts that she has used, but it would be useful if the footnotes included references to the appropriate sections of these English-language sources so that interested readers could find out more about the individuals and ideas she is discussing. (For readers of Vietnamese it is also worth noting that a selection of *Nhân Văn–Giai Phẩm* pieces, originally published in Sài Gòn, has been reprinted overseas: *Trăm hoa đua nở trên đất Bắc* [A hundred flowers bloom in the North] [Paris: Sudasie, 1983].)

The other criticism that can be raised is that the book is a bit, well, soulless in its treatment of what was a very anguished and bitter struggle for many intellectuals. This reviewer remembers watching a video produced by overseas Vietnamese some years ago in which the well-known composer Phạm Duy movingly described how he shed tears when he left the Resistance zone in the jungle to return to French-controlled Hà Nội, having permanently broken with the Party. How many other artists made this same painful decision? We get some understanding of the tensions between various groups and factions of intellectuals, but perhaps not enough sense of the inner turmoil many individuals experienced. In this respect the author has somewhat limited herself by relying almost exclusively on materials published in Hà Nội. Sources published in the former Republic of Vietnam and the post-1975 diasporic community would surely offer some additional insights from a different ideological perspective. To take one example, *Đêm giữa ban ngày: Hồi ký chính trị của một người không làm chính trị* [Night in daytime: The political memoir of a non-political person] by Vũ Thư Hiên (Westminster, CA: Văn Nghệ, 1997) contains considerable first-hand information about the DRV literary and artistic community in the late 1950s and 1960s. Ninh’s study tells us relatively little about what happened to these people after the crackdown on literary dissent in 1956–7.

Shaun Malarney’s *Culture, ritual and revolution in Vietnam* is an anthropological case-study of Thịnh Liệt, the commune (*xã*, a cluster of village units) outside Hà Nội where he first did his dissertation fieldwork and where he continued to do research over

the course of the 1990s. Like Hy Van Luong's *Revolution in the village* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1992) and John Kleinen's *Facing the future, reviving the past* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1999), Malarney's book examines revolutionary and post-revolutionary change at the village level. His work nicely complements these two studies in that its focus is more heavily ethnographic, with less emphasis on changes in social and political structure.

At first glance, Malarney's title may seem overly ambitious, particularly since he is talking largely about one small group of villages. However, one of the strengths of the book is the extent to which he is able to describe the changes which have taken place in Thịnh Liệt as a microcosm of broader cultural transformations in socialist Vietnam. He is interested not only in the rituals themselves (marriages, funerals, propitiation of spirits of various kinds) but in the world-view which informs them and the ways in which this world-view has and has not changed after decades of socialist rule. One of the finest chapters in the book, 'Defining causality', analyses the conflict between the generally materialist perspective propagated by Party cadres since the Revolution and the traditional spiritual beliefs of most villagers. Parallel to the efforts described by Ninh to redefine Vietnam's literary and artistic culture in more 'socialist' terms was the more subtle campaign to redefine people's most primordial beliefs about the natural and supernatural.

As Malarney shows, this campaign had very mixed results. Certain proscribed activities, like Buddhist chanting for funerals and the production of votive offerings for the dead, went 'underground' within the village but never disappeared entirely. Other practices condemned as 'feudal' – the Marxist catchword for undesirable cultural elements – were in fact eliminated, such as female family members attempting to block the way of the procession carrying the coffin. Even very pragmatic policies such as the reduction of feasting for marriages and funerals met with considerable resistance; Malarney cites government statistics for Hà Bắc province in 1970 (thus in the middle of the war) showing that the amount of money and food spent for this purpose could have fed an entire district for a year.

One of the main themes of the book is the extent to which formerly proscribed beliefs and practices have reappeared and re-emerged with the implementation of *đổi mới* (renovation) in Vietnam since the late 1980s. Large-scale feasting and increasingly lavish religious ceremonies, to name just two, have once again come to characterise village life. Most telling, perhaps, are the 'before and after' pictures of the communal houses (*đình*) in two of Thịnh Liệt's villages. As late as 1991, they were rather drab and anonymous structures stripped of any external decoration. By 1998, they had been rebuilt, repainted and decorated in grand style with columns of Chinese characters – physical changes which reflect the revitalisation of traditional ritual activity at the village level.

As Malarney shows, one of the most important developments of the *đổi mới* period has been a shift in the boundary between practices stigmatised as *mê tín* (superstition) and those legitimised as *tín ngưỡng* (beliefs). (To the latter term one might also add the broader concept of *văn hoá dân gian* or popular/folk culture.) A number of the ceremonies and rituals described in the book have moved from the first to the second category over the last fifteen years; others, such as those related to spirit mediums,



remain in a rather grey area between the two but are increasingly tolerated as long as they are not perceived as disruptive or politically subversive. There are several reasons for this shift. Malarney emphasises the climate of greater official tolerance since the 1990s, as well as the subtle psychological resistance from many villagers which made it much easier to reinstate such activities than it had ever been to eliminate them. At the same time, it can be argued that official support for 'popular culture' is partially due to high-level concerns about the detrimental impact of Western culture to which many Vietnamese are increasingly exposed. (In some ethnic minority areas, there are parallel efforts to promote traditional culture as a bulwark against the encroachment of evangelical Christianity.)

Malarney makes it clear that the revival of traditional ceremonies is not merely a return to the *status quo ante*. One of the most interesting themes in his book is the rearrangement of gender boundaries where ritual and ceremony are concerned. Historically, most villages had a male-dominated ritual centre (the *đình*, linked to the guardian spirit cult and meetings for the male leadership) and a female-dominated counterpart (the *chùa* or Buddhist temple). In recent times women in Thịnh Liệt have rather aggressively pushed beyond the boundaries of their traditional ceremonial roles, encroaching on the male ritual space of the *đình* – a development vigorously contested by male villagers. Malarney also shows how the traditionally rich ritual role of Vietnamese women has in some ways been strengthened even more as membership in the Party and adherence to its beliefs have somewhat marginalised male participation in spiritual matters.

The book's style is very readable, with a minimum of anthropological jargon. (At times it is even overly colloquial; the misuse of 'lay' for 'lie', for example, is jarring in an academic text and should certainly have been edited out along with the non-existent word 'their's'.) Malarney's presence in his own study is considerably less intrusive than the self-conscious tone of some anthropological writing; his occasional wry asides will ring true with anyone who has experienced life as a Westerner in Vietnam. He has an extremely good ear for the way Vietnamese people talk and think. For example, he does not just analyse their world-view in terms of the traditional Confucian concepts such as *hiếu* (filial piety) and *lễ* (ritual or ceremonial propriety), but also emphasises the importance of *tình cảm* (feelings, sentiments, emotional obligations), a key term in everyday Vietnamese discourse.

If one compares the two studies with reference to present-day Vietnam, a striking fact emerges. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Party's impact was equally significant on both 'print culture' (including art) and 'grassroots culture' (the issues studied by Malarney). With *đổi mới*, however, the two kinds of culture have considerably diverged in terms of the extent to which they are influenced by socialist ideals. The relaxation of controls over ritual and other forms of popular culture has not been matched by literary *glasnost*, which is why writers such as Nguyễn Huy Thiệp and Dương Thu Hương have a semi-dissident status and more severely critical views are suppressed completely.

Historically, popular culture (particularly folk Buddhism and Daoism) generally had greater subversive potential than the Confucianised culture of the elite; errant monks and mediums were more likely to articulate anti-government messages than scholars. At present the situation is more or less reversed. As Malarney shows, the

tensions caused by the Party's attempts to regulate ritual and promote a materialist world-view have been resolved more or less peacefully – though not completely – through a series of compromises. Some of the most egregious 'feudal' excesses have been left behind, while others are being tolerated once more, not least because many of them involve issues of face and status which engage local Party cadres no less than their neighbours. As long as manifestations of culture at the grassroots level do not become overly provocative reminders of economic and social inequality or subtle channels for politically subversive messages, it is likely that the climate of tolerance will continue.

Conversely, the tensions so ably described by Ninh resulting from Party cultural policies towards intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s have not abated, but rather have reappeared among a younger generation of writers and artists. In some respects the scope of what the Party will allow in print culture and the media has been considerably loosened; the availability of Danielle Steel novels in Vietnamese translation and MTV videos on television testifies to the fact that 'socialist culture' no longer reigns supreme. Even so, the literary and artistic space for alternative political discourse remains only somewhat less limited than it was several decades ago. Dissident voices critical of everything from corruption to the recent border agreement with China continue to emerge from intellectual circles, now using the Internet and overseas publishing houses as a channel for their grievances. Marxists have tried hard to replace the traditional cyclical conception of history with one which is progressive and thus linear, but one cannot help but be struck by the extent to which modern history is repeating itself, and the writings of the *Nhân Văn–Giai Phẩm* generation continue to resonate nearly half a century later.

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