

merely accidental side effects of colonialism in Southeast Asia, but essential to its functioning' (p. 77).

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Southeast Asia

Empires of vice: The rise of opium prohibition across Southeast Asia

By DIANA KIM

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020. Pp. xvii, 309. Figures, Tables, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463422000492

It has become an accepted truth that opium taxes funded the British, French, and Dutch imperial projects in Southeast Asia. Diana Kim's new book, *Empires of vice*, answers an important follow-up question: How did these opium-addicted colonial administrations get clean? In Kim's telling, the transition from opium taxation to prohibition involved a two-part process: reconfiguring the institutional and fiscal foundation of the colonial state to compensate for lost revenue, and reframing the moral and ideological connotations of opium into a problem that colonial subjects needed help solving.

Instead of following the familiar figures of opium's history—missionaries, activists, and diplomats—Kim's story is one of local administrators, the 'minor agents of imperial rule' (p. 4). Local officials were the people on the ground charged with the actual work of regulating opium, whether for the purpose of revenue collection or prohibition, or some combination of the two. This is a story about their anxieties, both moral and fiscal, and the policies that they pursued as a consequence. It is a bureaucratic history, from the bottom up.

Kim argues that scholars should take the words of these 'weak actors' seriously, in a historiographical context where long-standing assumptions about their motives have bordered on cynical. Around the turn of the century, colonial governments across Southeast Asia (and the Qing state) began transforming privatised opium tax farms into centralised revenue bureaucracies. The officials who enacted these reforms described the transition as 'prohibition', but in the subsequent decades most of those same states continued to collect conspicuous amounts of opium revenue. Consequently, scholars have largely declined to accept the term 'prohibition' as useful in describing this period of mass-scale state opium distribution and revenue collection. Kim argues, however, that we should reconsider why actors at the time used the word 'prohibition'. Controlling the opium trade, for them, was the first step towards the reduction and eventual elimination of the drug. It is this process, from the first years of the twentieth century to the dawn of the post-Second World War era, that makes up the historical narrative of this book.

Empires of vice is divided into three parts. Part I includes three introductory chapters: a general introduction, an extended discussion of the conceptual framework

and argument (chapter 2), and a summary of the historical and historiographical background (chapter 3). Chapter 2 outlines the book's contributions to ongoing conversations about symbolic power, the construction of official problems, and the nature of bureaucratic discretionary power. This is also where Kim makes the argument for taking the actors' term 'prohibition' seriously. Chapter 3 should be a stand-alone reading about opium regulation in courses on Southeast Asian or Global History, offering a wide-ranging, revisionist summary of the literature on opium and empire both in and outside of Southeast Asia, framed to convince the reader that 'there was so much more going on' beyond mere avarice, and arguing instead that the history of opium policy is a story better told as one of 'administrative anxiety' (p. 84).

Part II consists of the three case studies that make up the foundation of Kim's claims. Chapter 4 analyses the initial reforms to opium policy in Burma during the final years of the nineteenth century, tracing a genealogy of the term 'morally wrecked' through the colonial bureaucracy to demonstrate how officials constructed a problem based on patchy information and stereotypes, and subsequently set about trying to 'solve' that problem. Chapter 5 stays within the British Empire, and analyses how officials in the most opium-dependent colonial outpost, Singapore, created an opium reserve fund to plan for the eventual elimination of opium revenue. It was an 'incomplete' solution, and one that involved creative bookkeeping and the careful suppression of information about the continued collection of opium revenue (p. 152). Chapter 6 then shifts to the French colonial sphere and appraises opium policy in Indochina during the 1930s. Here, Kim develops a fascinating conversation about bureaucratic discretion and corruption based on the actions of some hapless French officials who bought bad opium that they were unable to sell and then cooked the books, for the benefit of state finances, and not personal enrichment.

Part III rounds out the story with the aftermath and legacies of colonial opium revenue bureaucracies. Chapter 7 explores those legacies chronologically and thematically, beginning with the oft-forgotten and short-lived postwar opium monopolies themselves. Intriguingly, Kim suggests a connection between the heavy-handed role of the state in the opium business during the early-twentieth century and the particularly harsh stance of contemporary Southeast Asian states towards the drug trade. Much like the British authorities in Burma that Kim analyses in chapter 4, late-twentieth-century Southeast Asian states have continued to justify drug policy with paternalism, citing what Kim calls 'exceptional obligations to protect people' (p. 199). The chapter also analyses a collection of photographs to demonstrate a second legacy of the colonial opium monopolies: that they have structured our understanding of history, and that we 'remain captured in an imaginary of the colonial state' (p. 215). These photographs, Kim argues, can help us break out of the constraints of the colonial archive, as they offer tantalising clues about lives and actions that 'misalign with the official problems that states define' (p. 213).

Empires of vice should find enthusiastic audiences across geographic fields and disciplines. The book is a powerful example of the value of interdisciplinary, transnational research, because the central arguments actually hinge on these strategies. By telling the story in a translocal way, Kim highlights the different timelines and processes by which colonial governments moved from revenue collection to prohibition. The transition happened differently in different places, at different times, and the

timing matters. Writes Kim: 'Such variations complicate conventional understandings of colonial opium policies as following metropolitan regimes that medicalized drug control or as a response to religious actors and transnational activists who altered the moral conscience of the world' (p. 4). And by approaching colonial bureaucracy from a background in political science and sociology, Kim builds what historians should view as a novel (and convincing) argument about how change over time happens: through the construction and solving of official 'problems' by local administrators.

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Southeast Asia

Living standards in Southeast Asia: Changes over the long twentieth century, 1900–2015

By ANNE BOOTH

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019. Pp. 317. Tables, Bibliography, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463422000625

Did Southeast Asian societies prosper during the 'long twentieth century' (1900–2015)? Were Southeast Asian societies impoverished under colonial regimes? Did poverty persist after independence into the present? Did all boats rise with tidal waves of growth? Did growth alone solve poverty? Did government interventions help the poor—and if so, which interventions? And most centrally—how can we answer any of these queries with certainty? These are the questions that Anne Booth addresses in *Living standards in Southeast Asia: Changes over the long twentieth century, 1900–2015*. For scholars whose fields concern economic history, Southeast Asian societies, poverty and inequality, and economics this book and several of its key points need to be an essential part of one's domain knowledge.

In *Living standards*, Booth's focus is as much on understanding *what* we know about livelihoods, poverty, and prosperity in Southeast Asia, as it is on explaining *why* Southeast Asia has prospered or remained poor. Too often, scholars jump to the second question—that is, explaining *why* economic conditions are what they are—before carefully demonstrating *what* sort of conditions in fact prevail. In this book, Booth analyses at length the available data and types of measurement used to be able to say with any certainty what prevailing living standards are in particular societies at particular times as well as comparatively across societies. Chapters 3 and 5, for example, are fully devoted to discussion and analysis of various measures of living standards, poverty, and inequality in colonial and post-colonial Southeast Asia.

Chapters 2 and 3 examine the development of exported-oriented colonial economies and measures for evaluating their impact on indigenous living standards. For the late colonial period covering the first four decades of the twentieth century, Booth considers a range of monetary and non-monetary measures. The former, in