

## Book Reviews

### Asia

#### *Ramayana in the Arts of Asia*

GARRETT KAM

Singapore: Select Books, 2000. Pp. xi, 292. Illustrations, Appendices, Bibliography.

The *Ramayana* has long fostered a specialised field of 'Ramayana Studies', and international conferences are held regularly. The largest body of work focuses on comparison of the *Ramayana's* textual and narrative manifestations within Asia, but more recent attention to its transmission as performance, primarily as oral tradition, has positioned textual versions of the *Ramayana* as a few written recordings within a myriad of varied performance traditions rather than as original Indian texts fostering performed derivations. Amin Sweeney's studies of orality, focussing on Malay performance traditions, *The Ramayana and the Malay Shadow Play* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1972) and *A Full Hearing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) are seminal, of course, and Paula Richman's *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) is a valuable contribution, with a wide-ranging collection of writings drawing the study of the *Ramayana* away from 'the epic' to performance, performers and audiences.

Strangely, however, there has been much less comparative study of the *Ramayana's* visual representation in Asia, perhaps because academic attention has been so focused on textual comparison. There has been detailed work on specific aspects or places, such as A. J. Bernet Kemper's study of Prambanan temple reliefs in *Ancient Indonesian Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959), and various articles about a recent Indian television series (Philip Lutgendorf, 'Ramayan, the Video' *The Drama Review* 34, 2 [1990]: 126-76; Purnima Manekar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1999]). Many general studies of South and Southeast Asian performing arts also give generous coverage to visual depiction of characters from the *Ramayana*, such as Natthapatra Chandavij and Promporn Pramualratana, *Thai Puppets & Khon Masks* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), on *Khon* masks. However, there has never been a single book that juxtaposes various kinds of visual representation from various countries. The publication, therefore, of Garrett Kam's *Ramayana in the Arts of Asia* is a most welcome event for all involved in study and teaching of the *Ramayana* and visual, performing and literary arts in Asia. However, Kam is not so concerned with presenting *Ramayana* as visual art. The visual images illustrate summaries of various narrative traditions over many countries in Asia.

A starting point for this book was an exhibition held in 1997 at the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore, with which Kam was involved. It was a small but exciting exhibition, which deserved to tour widely. It displayed puppets, paintings, book

and manuscript illustrations, miniatures, comics, and video and television from South and Southeast Asia. The juxtaposition forcefully displayed the vividness of the *Ramayana* as a cultural language in this part of the world. The catalogue of that exhibition, *Ramayana: A Living Tradition* (Singapore: National Heritage Board, 1997), is an excellent introduction and supplement to Kam's book.

The book is organised in thirteen chapters according to a summarised linear narrative, divided into thirteen major episodes, each then further subdivided with subheadings of incidents or themes within those episodes. The narrative is formed from major texts, storytelling, folklore and performance versions including little-known versions; they include Khmer, Javanese, Balinese, Sundanese, Malay, Myanmar, Thai, Lao, Tibetan, Vietnamese, Maranao, Japanese, Chinese and various Indian versions.

But the presentation of narrative is still confusing. Kam chose the Thai *Ramakian* as his linear narrative framework, interspersing and juxtaposing this with other textual, storytelling and performance versions. While the idea is good, there is too much detail and not enough summary and comparison of the main points of similarity and difference, making it difficult to read. And yet, simple and clear narrative outlines of the complex versions of the *Ramayana* and comparisons of narrative summaries are possible, as in S. Singaravelu's 'A Comparative Study of the Sanskrit, Tamil, Thai and Malay Versions of the Story of Rama with Special Reference to the Process of Acculturation in the Southeast Asian Versions' (*The Journal of the Siam Society* 56, 2 [1986]: 137–85). Just as the *Ramayana*, as a storytelling tradition, can be reduced to a few paragraphs or expanded into a month-long performance, the versions here could still have been summarised much more radically, referring readers to fuller versions and highlighting points of comparison. The most helpful comparative summary in the book is the list of names of important characters in the various countries.

The strength of this book lies in the visual images. The book is packed with over five hundred colour illustrations showing temple relief, puppets, masks, dancers, paintings, murals, carvings, postage stamps, folk art, and photographs of performances. This juxtaposition of visual imagery is stimulating and challenging. Usually, books cover only one aspect – temple reliefs, or murals, or performances, etc. Here, seeing a masked Ravana next to a shadow puppet, a Balinese painting next to Thai dance drama, a relief from *Angkor* next to rod puppets from India, draws attention to conventions of seeing and viewing, and highlights questions such as the significance of three dimensionality versus two dimensionality, or the perception of movement and stillness, and of human bodies and performing objects. It also makes immediately apparent the need to appreciate the visual and the textual as utterly entwined narrative worlds when approaching the aesthetic and religious realms in many traditions of Asia, a point made eloquently by Anuradha Kapur in his study of the Ramlila, 'Raja and Praja: Presentational Conventions in the Ramlila at Ramnagar' (*Ramayana and Ramayanas*, ed. Monika Thiel-Horstmann [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991], pp. 153–68).

Yet while the visual images juxtaposed in this inventive way stimulate such questions, the text of the book does not, in fact, comment on them. The visual images are used primarily to illustrate the linear narrative of the *Ramayana*. This is a pity, as one senses that the author would have a lot to say on the subject. Perhaps he will go on to write more.

I made this book required reading for my undergraduate course on performance in Asia, primarily for the rich visual material. It is an essential book for any courses dealing with the *Ramayana* in literature, architecture, visual art and performance, and it is a welcome addition to the field of *Ramayana* scholarship.

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*Rents, Rent-Seeking and Economic Development: Theory and Evidence in Asia*

Edited by MUSHTAQ H. KHAN and JOMO K.S.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pp. xiv, 338. Tables, Illustrations, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

This book examines the economic effects of government-created rents – opportunities to acquire income in excess of what would be received in a fully competitive market. The broad question running through most of the chapters is in some ways a familiar one: if rents and rent-seeking are inefficient, how is it that so many countries in Asia sustain high rates of economic growth despite pervasive rent-creation and rent-seeking?

Two comprehensive theory chapters, both by Mushtaq Khan, explore a range of possible explanations. First, various types of rent are shown to be conceptually different, with a wide range of theoretical implications for growth and development. Not all rents are bad for economic growth and some may well be growth-enhancing. Khan argues that we need to go beyond the comparative statistics that prove a given rent creates inefficiency, to models that take into account the dynamic gains that certain types of rent generate. Some rents, for example, provide for beneficial learning, innovation or capital accumulation that would be unlikely to occur otherwise.

The conceptually distinct category of rent-seeking is discussed in the second chapter. Rent-seeking is the process by which public and private sector actors attempt to capture available rents or to have new ones created. If rents themselves have variable effects, extensive rent-seeking is more uniformly harmful. One argument advanced here and echoed in later chapters is that rent-seeking is most economically damaging when the costs are high – that is, when actors have to spend a lot of resources on otherwise unproductive (and often illegal) activities necessary for securing the licences, loans or other privileges that fall into the general category of rents. A major concern of this chapter is thus to specify the particular institutional and political contexts that make rent-seeking more or less costly.

The rest of the book applies and expands these ideas in chapters that focus on particular Southeast Asian countries. Overall, we find little evidence that rents have had positive economic effects in the four countries surveyed. Writing on Thailand, Richard Doner and Ansil Ramsay ask why Thailand registered several decades of impressive growth despite high levels of rent-seeking, clientelism and corruption. Their explanation is that the costs of rent-seeking were limited by both the structure of political clientelism and the structure of state institutions, which allowed for the entry of new firms, ensured

a degree of economic competition, had some capacity to solve collective action problems and, very significantly, placed firm limits on government spending. Limits on government spending also figure in the explanation for good economic performance given in Michael Rock's analysis of Thailand. However, he also elaborates several cases of government intervention that yielded economic benefits, suggesting that Thai political and state institutions were more coherent and conducive to the creation of 'productive' rents than admitted by studies of Thailand's 'soft' or clientelistic state.

Rents and rent-seeking in the Philippines have had more consistently negative effects, as portrayed in Paul Hutchcroft's account of the 'politics of privilege' in that country. The chapter develops a set of theorised reasons for why corruption and rent-seeking seem to have been particularly economically harmful in the Philippines. Among the many factors put forward, the degree of overlap between formal and informal power structures stands out as a particular contribution of this chapter.

The contrast with Indonesia is intriguing. As in the Philippines, rent-seeking and corruption have been at high levels but the effects did not seem to be nearly as damaging, at least until 1997. One standard explanation for this is that during the Suharto years Indonesia stuck to a strict balanced budget policy, something like the hard budget limits identified in both of this book's chapters on Thailand. However, Andrew MacIntyre's chapter on off-budget activity in Indonesia reveals that this does not fit the Indonesian case: there were limits to rent-seeking but actual government spending was not subject to hard limits. While the fact of substantial off-budget activity in Indonesia is not news, the chapter unearths details that will be new to most readers. Rather than budgetary limits, political centralisation under Suharto is advanced as the reason why rent-seeking in Indonesia was consistent with positive growth outcomes for thirty years.

The two final chapters look at rents and rent-seeking in Malaysia, both in general and in the specific case of financial sector rents. They document relatively high levels of rent-creation in the country and argue that inter-ethnic redistributive goals have in practice been more consequential than any developmental agenda behind the creation and administration of rents. They also, like the chapter on the Philippines, argue that liberalisation does not necessarily diminish rents and rent-seeking opportunities. The authors are more concerned with showing that rents in Malaysia have tended not to be productive in economic terms than they are with the puzzle that this generates: why then did Malaysia sustain such high growth rates over such a long period? Although not elaborated, two factors are mentioned: the security of existing property rights and the comparatively low costs of rent-seeking as a process in Malaysia's increasingly centralised political system.

This book is likely to be most useful for those interested in theories of rents and rent-seeking rather than political economists looking for original research on Southeast Asia. Not only is nearly half the book taken up with explicitly theoretical overviews, the country cases primarily function to develop and explore analytic models. Much of the empirical evidence comes from familiar English-language secondary sources. While most of the authors try to extend their analyses to take into account the financial crisis of 1997–98, developments since then are not covered.

The book serves as an overview of current thinking among political economists on the issue of rents. While some of this thinking appears to revisit old debates about

government intervention using the language of rents and institutional economics, the book does take a significant step towards specifying the political, policy and institutional contexts which determine the effects of rents and rent-seeking. Since, as the book also makes plain, rents of some sort are unavoidable, work of this type is worth pursuing.

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*Women in the New Asia: From Pain to Power*

YAYORI MATSUI

Bangkok: White Lotus, 1999. Pp. x, 194. Illustrations, Index.

This work is the sequel to the author's earlier book *Women's Asia* (London: Zed Books, 1989) and the Japanese original was written before the 1997 economic crises across the region. The preface to this 1999 translation, however, refers to some of the issues raised. The book shows a healthy scepticism about the supposed economic miracle of the 1990s in looking at the contradictions of its impact on women's lives across Asia. Writing from the vantage of a journalist and activist against sex tourism, Yayori Matsui describes a series of agendas that will be familiar to feminists engaged in the Beijing and earlier conferences. The increasing polarisation of rich and poor with recent international growth patterns in the 'New Asia' has been widely documented, and this account is a useful summary of some of the gendered dimensions of these processes. The main emphasis of the discussion is the 'development dictatorship' – the state-led modernisation process that has been such a marker of East and Southeast Asian development. It is argued that in the midst of economic growth and prosperity Asian women suffered from a series of resultant changes: the feminisation of poverty and international migration; an unprecedented environmental destruction of the region; an increase in violence; the effects of the HIV/AIDS tragedy sweeping the region; trafficking in women; and from many other violations of human rights.

Although it documents these developments in a vivid and direct way, this book is not for those looking to explore some of the complexities of the present globalising order across Asia and the intricate relationships between those changes and gender relations. It is widely accepted that global inequalities are increasing, in some cases dramatically. But the recent UNDP report on human development for 2001 suggests a more tangled picture, with economic growth raising life expectancy, education rates and age at marriage, and improving infant mortality rates. These complexities, of course, have been especially marked in parts of the 'New Asia'. There is no discussion here, for example, of the relationship between gender relations and the rise of new classes on the one hand and the impact of the profound re-ordering of economic orders and new gender-based movements on the other. Thus there is little about the roles of the increasing numbers of women within the state bureaucracies, and their involvement in some of these processes. Nor does the book address the spectacular growth of new identities, new selves and new subjectivities with the massive growth of consumer society across the region that has made the gender landscape complex. An account of the mechanics of local resistances

could also have been useful. Thus the main account in one section centres on a Negros campaign for alternative aid (Japanese Committee for Negros Campaign) and its Filipino partners who were active in presenting a workshop at Beijing on Asian Women's Alternatives in Action. Founded by 'Japanese people who had been involved in Filipino issues [who] had organized the Japanese Committee for Negros Campaign' (p. 123), it supports 50 poverty reduction and self-sufficiency projects. But we do not hear who the local activists are and how they came to their political positions. There is however, some helpful documentation of various women's organisation initiatives in several different countries.

Matsui's account also links the trafficking in women and girls to the ongoing processes of economic development. While there is absolutely no dispute about the human rights issues involved in the trafficking of under-age girls and the enforced trafficking of older women, it might have been helpful to separate more carefully these issues from the human rights issues surrounding the working conditions of adult women migrating to become sex workers. There is always a danger in such accounts of tending towards the essentialisation of 'prostitution', which writers like Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema have warned against. Conflating various dimensions of prostitution can be seen as failing to acknowledge the admittedly problematic issues of female agency surrounding such migration.

In summary, this is a highly readable introduction to some aspects of gender relations in contemporary Asia. As such it will be useful background reading for students, academics and wider publics interested in the unfolding new Asian order.

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### Southeast Asia

*Other Pasts: Women, Gender and History in Early Modern Southeast Asia*

Edited by BARBARA WATSON ANDAYA

Honolulu: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2000. Pp. xviii, 347. Maps, Notes, Index.

The twelve succinct essays in *Other Pasts* provide evocative fragmentary evidence about gender relations in Southeast Asia between the fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries. In so doing, the volume offers to the gender-parched field of Southeast Asian historical studies refreshingly saturating details about the relations between men and women. As Barbara Watson Andaya acknowledges in her comprehensive introduction, anthropologists have contributed theoretically to understandings of gender in the contemporary period, but historians have yet to integrate gender into existing or new scholarship on the pre- and early modern period. As a result, the nationalist-based historiography of Southeast Asia remains more or less intact. *Other Pasts*, which developed out of a conference sponsored by the SSRC (Social Science Research Council) in Honolulu in 1995, begins to redress this omission.

Significantly, only a minority of the scholars who contribute to the volume work



specifically on women or gender, a fact that has two consequences. First, the authors complement current scholarship on gender, which is well-substantiated but contemporary in focus, by supplying historically grounded essays. The arguments and descriptions provided in each chapter are thoroughly substantiated through references to impressively difficult historical primary source material. For example, Ashley Thompson's innovative study of the social meanings of a temple complex in Cambodia relies on a linguistic analysis of a sixteenth-century stone inscription written in a version of Pali and Khmer that is inaccessible to modern Khmer speakers.

The second consequence is that the volume is not theoretically innovative in terms of its conception and treatment of gender. The majority of the authors consider normative gender ideologies and tend to focus on women and femininity rather than non-normative sexualities or masculinity. Constructing new theories of gender, however, is not the objective of the collection. Richly specific and contextualised historical evidence rather than theoretical concerns drives the analysis. For example, Gerrit Knaap's chapter on seventeenth-century Amboina makes an important first step in relating a wealth of information about Amboinese society, especially gender relations, to an English-reading audience. The contributors acknowledge theoretical shortcomings and the enduring problem of 'finding' women in indigenous sources that are nearly always written by men, yet they forge ahead in these pioneering essays. As with all collections, some essays are analytically stronger than others; however, each of these fragmentary histories is solidly researched and often exposes original evidentiary material.

Rather than repeat the thorough summary of each chapter by Barbara Watson Andaya in the introduction (which should be consulted), I will discuss the essays as they relate to two themes that surface repeatedly throughout the volume. First and most evident is the connection made in nearly every essay between gender relations and early modern conceptions of rule, a link Tony Day has argued as well ('Ties that [Un]bind: Families and States in Premodern Southeast Asia', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 55, 2 [May 1996]: 384–409). The essays fall roughly into two categories: those that consider this connection in the context of religious and political change and those that concentrate their analysis on a specific, domestic polity. The second theme, addressed by far fewer essays but worth singling out nonetheless, concerns miscegenation and commerce in two urban societies.

The introduction of Islam and Christianity to the region and the formation of modern state institutions, including most importantly colonial rule, fuel the analysis of gender relations in the majority of the collection. Many of the authors substantiate the decrease in women's authority in spiritual and political arenas as a result of the introduction of Christianity and Islam locally and of the formation of modern state institutions. Leonard Andaya's essay on South Sulawesi Buginese *bissu* and Carolyn Brewer's chapter on female *baylan* – shaman women – in the Philippines evidence the gradual usurpation by men of spiritual and ritualistic authority once possessed by women. Brewer demonstrates that female *baylan* held authority as Animist 'priestesses' until Hispanic Catholicism gradually deprived them of their respected status as spiritual practitioners. They were replaced by male *baylan* who had formerly been subservient to them. With the Spanish Catholic conquest, she concludes, came new and unequal gender relationships.

While L. Andaya and Brewer examine gender relations in spiritual contexts, other contributors consider the political and social effects that Islam, Christianity and modern state formation had on pre-existing gender relations. The chapters by Ruzy Hashim and Barbara Watson Andaya on the influence of Islam on gender and political rule contribute to our understandings of this dynamic between indigenous and Islamic practices in the Malay world. B. W. Andaya's wide-ranging essay on female space, seclusion and the state in premodern maritime Southeast Asia, considers how Islamic polities re-ordered gender relations. She attenuates the generalisation that women's authority declined with the rise of the state by revealing the ways in which Islamic ideas about female seclusion drew on pre-Islamic associations between femaleness and innerness. In other words, Islam did not impose wholly new and inequitable practices, but imbued pre-existing inside/femaleness and outside/maleness dichotomies with a moral dimension. B. W. Andaya's theory about these associations is class based: the higher the rank of the woman, the more important she be concealed, and the higher the rank of the man the more important he prove his virility in public ways. This argument, which is the broadest one in the collection, raises questions about the relevance of this association to lower-class men and women. Like B. W. Andaya, Ruzy Hashim carefully distinguishes between Islamic proscriptions regarding women and indigenous attitudes as expressed in the Malay court chronicle, the *Sejarah Melayu*. She refuses to romanticise Malay *adat* as benign towards women by comparison to Islamic tradition, and instead suggests that the interests of male elite might similarly be served through silencing women.

Gerrit Knaap and John Whitmore also document the empowerment of men in economics and politics as a result of colonialism and Confucian state formation respectively. Knaap describes how the arrival of Christianity, Islam and Dutch colonialism enhanced patriarchal power in Amboinese society rather than altered it. Similarly, John Whitmore argues that the rise of the Confucian literati as a powerful group in Vietnamese political circles narrowly confined roles for women who had hitherto commanded greater authority.

The essays by Ann Kumar, Helen Creese, Thompson, and Junko Koizuma focus on the undeniable relevance of gender to political rule in the context of a specific polity rather than in the context of contending outside influences. Kumar heeds Tony Day's call to consider as inextricably interrelated religion, gender and rule in her essay on goddesses, queens, consorts and other women in Javanese religious traditions. She shows that in Javanese literary sources, kings consistently depended on the benevolent power of goddesses, queens, and wives as an essential element in the ruler's legitimacy and the kingdom's prosperity. Creese examines Balinese court women through *kidung* poetry written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This essay, like several others in the volume, details the political significance of the exchange of women to cement political alliances. Creese's essay also stands out for its exacting refutation of Tony Reid's generalisations about gender relations in *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). None of Reid's conclusions about sexual relations – that virginity was relatively unimportant prior to marriage, for example – is corroborated by *kidung* texts about upper-class women in Bali. Without their virginity intact, the value of elite women as political 'gifts' decreased and the potential disruption they posed to the social order increased because of paternity issues this raised. Creese,



though challenging Reid's work, joins several other authors in acknowledging his contribution. Koizumi similarly challenges mainstream historical interpretations of King Mongkut's proclamations that improved women's legal rights in nineteenth-century Siam. Koizumi pushes readers to reconsider other issues at stake for King Mongkut, such as the regulation of women more strictly in terms of class, when he issued laws that, on the face it, are directed at the betterment of women's status. Thompson brings to life a sixteenth-century stone inscription from Vat Nokor in Cambodia. Her theoretical manipulations of various texts lead to insightful interpretations about the transmission and reproduction of family in the genealogy of Cambodian tradition and historiography.

The second theme of the collection concerns economics, rather than politics, and looks intently at mixed race unions and their progeny. The essays by Hendrik Niemeijer and Dhirivat na Pombejra provide excellent contributions to this topic in the contexts of seventeenth-century Batavia and Ayutthaya, respectively. Niemeijer's article on Batavia joins a relatively rich literature on miscegenation under the VOC in the Netherlands East Indies. His study is unique for its ability to convince readers that slavery, bondage and debt-relations are essential to understanding miscegenation in seventeenth-century Batavia. Dhiravat's essay is as finely argued and substantiated as Niemeijer's but focuses much more narrowly on a wealthy merchant woman of Mon ethnicity who single-handedly monopolised VOC trade in Ayutthaya.

In all, *Other Pasts* provides an unusually well-documented set of short essays about gender relations in early modern Southeast Asian history that will inspire more extensive research.

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*Defense and Decolonization in Southeast Asia: Britain, Malaya and Singapore 1941–1968.*

KARL HACK  
Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001. Pp. xiv, 341. Maps, Figures, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

This book is an important addition to the growing literature on decolonisation in Malaya and on British policies towards Southeast Asia from the 1940s to the 1960s. Based upon a thorough reading of the secondary literature and a wide variety of American, Australian, British and Singaporean published and unpublished sources, this well-written study analyses the relation between defence and decolonisation from three perspectives: the international, the metropolitan and the local.

Defeated and humiliated by the rapid Japanese occupation of Malaya and Singapore in early 1942, the British government embarked on a long-term policy of decolonisation. This, however, implied a 'second colonial occupation' (p. 43). Economic interests, intentions to project global power, a perceived power vacuum in Southeast Asia and the onset of the Cold War motivated policymakers in 1945/46 to pursue a regional approach to stability and 'orderly' development in Southeast Asia. Due to inadequate military forces, the unwillingness of Dutch and French colonialists to cooperate with nationalists,

and the aloofness of the United States, British designs to foster intra- and inter-regional cooperation (within Southeast Asia and between Southeast Asian and European countries) could not be realised. Hack argues convincingly that by early 1948 London recognised the need to adapt its continuing interest in projecting influence in Southeast Asia (and elsewhere) to Britain's shrinking resources. The successful resistance of the Malay sultans and politicians to the 'Malayan Union', a project designed to integrate the colonial possessions in order to facilitate eventual decolonisation, likewise highlighted Britain's diminishing ability to project power and influence. The British government responded to these local, regional and international challenges in several ways: it concentrated its military presence in Malaya and Singapore; encouraged the French to fight the Viet Minh; enlisted the cooperation of the United States and successfully managed to establish itself as a (junior) partner, rather than a subservient actor of the American colossus; and it spurred regional cooperation as well as the transformation of the old 'Empire' into the new Commonwealth by creating the Colombo Plan. The author, Karl Hack, is sceptical about the outcome of these efforts. In his assessment, the Colombo Plan 'must be judged only a small success' (p. 65). Anglo-American cooperation revealed a high degree of common threat perception (international communism), but was compromised by differing policies towards Communist China (British recognition and limited cooperation versus American non-recognition and bellicosity). With regard to the 'Malayan Emergency', Hack concludes that while British military tactics were important for the eventual suppression of the insurgency, the main reason were the 'inter- and intra-communal divisions and characteristics of Malaya's population' (p. 129).

In the region as a whole, Britain continued to play a leading role. As co-chairman of the Geneva Conference on Indochina (1954), Britain was able to uphold its prestige as a global power, and secured its basic strategic aims: 'to keep a screen of non-communist countries as far to the north of Malaya as possible; and to avoid committing its own resources' (p. 173). On the other hand, Britain was not able to influence future developments, in particular the American and South Vietnamese determination to obstruct the Geneva Accords (nation-wide elections in Vietnam and reunification). With regard to the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), the British design could not be realised *in toto* either. London's efforts to avoid 'commitments by means of American deterrence' (p. 174) were successful. However, non-participation by key Asian countries (India, Indonesia) and American unwillingness to accept more than a token organisation made SEATO look like a Western-dominated paper tiger. A change in threat perception – decrease in the likelihood of a war in Europe – coupled with the newfound conviction that atomic weapons deterred possible Chinese Communist expansion helped to reconcile the discrepancy between British self-perceptions and abilities in 1955. Global and regional military assessments influenced decolonisation in Malaya: because the local military situation remained under control, British politicians responded pragmatically to Malayan demands for a rapid transfer of power. Decolonisation thus revealed an 'overlapping of British and Malayan interests' (p. 225): power in the new state resided in a British-oriented elite while Britain remained militarily involved. Cooperation proved equally fruitful in the case of Singapore, where London overturned Australian concerns of a possible communist take-over and proceeded towards self-government for the city.

In a final chapter, the author discusses the developments leading up to the British withdrawal from 'East of Suez' in the late 1960s. Rather than interpreting this as a belated realisation of an 'imperial overstretch', as Phillip Darby has suggested, Hack implies that it was a pragmatic solution to economic and military requirements and that the timing was right. He concludes that by then British decolonisation in Southeast Asia had been successfully completed: 'not as a severing of links, but as transferring power to a successor elite both well-disposed to Britain, and stable enough to strengthen rather than weaken both the Commonwealth and the West in the Cold War' (p. 290).

Hack's broad approach necessarily invites criticism. For instance, Australian perceptions of British decolonisation in Southeast Asia are not treated systematically but only insofar as they relate to Britain's role. Also, American policies towards the region appear somewhat stereotyped by the notion of a conciliatory Britain trying to contain a potentially bellicose United States. Moreover, the implicit 'realist' design of the study precludes more detailed discussions of cultural aspects, i.e. the problem of transfers of values or the influence of belief systems (e.g. racial hierarchies) on politics.

These criticisms aside, this is an important study. It weaves together international, regional and local perspectives, provides new insight into the dynamics of decolonisation in Southeast Asia, and raises important questions about an analytical framework for British decolonisation. This book will be highly appreciated by scholars of international history, British decolonisation and contemporary Southeast Asia as well as Malaysian and Singaporean history.

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*Southeast Asian-Centred Economies or Economics?*

Edited by MASON C. HOADLEY

Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, NIAS Report Series, No. 39, 1999. Pp. 147.

This is a small book that makes big claims. The rather clumsy title has been chosen deliberately. Discussions among the authors in late 1997, at the height of the Asian financial crisis, revealed a shared dissatisfaction with Western approaches to the study of Southeast Asian economies. The discussions led to a workshop at Lund University in 1998, and the resulting book contains revised versions of the papers and summaries of the discussions at the workshop. The aim is 'opening up a challenging and provocative field of research ... rather than making a complete or definitive research statement' (p. 9).

The 'economics' of the title is neoclassical economics, and the authors believe that its influence has led to a serious misunderstanding of the ways in which Southeast Asian economies actually operate. Although many of the external forms of Western 'economic instruments' (for instance joint stock companies, central banks) have been adopted, they do not function as they do in the West. Although socialist command models are being abandoned, this does not mean that these economies will now move towards the liberal Western economic model. Mason Hoadley's introduction ticks off a list of the structural features which do not fit the Western model: the disproportionate economic power in the

hands of ethnic Chinese minorities, the role of family conglomerates, the financial role of 'tame' banks, the continued dominance of state-linked enterprises, the financial regulators often in the hands of those they are intended to control, 'crony' and 'ersatz' capitalism, the personal economic interests of political and military leaders, and the large areas of the economy where market forces do not or are not allowed to operate (pp. 11–2).

Hoadley offers a system of classification of Southeast Asian economies, ranging across traditional, command-plan, market, and cooperative structures. Each of these typologies reflects aspects of overall structures. In addition, within each of the broad areas there are further divisions between a large-scale sector and a local or peasant economy. History also plays a role, but Hoadley insists this is not a linear history moving smoothly towards a modern or Western future, but rather a history marked by episodes of colonial exploitation. Not surprisingly, then, the 'generic model' favoured by the International Monetary Fund is found seriously wanting in a balanced assessment by Anders Danielsson (p. 109), and Ramses Amer and David Hughes find the possibilities of cooperation among Southeast Asian nations to be somewhat limited (pp. 128–30).

In addition to the chapters offering comparative analysis, there are three papers dealing with specific traditions. Mubyarto describes the 'Pancasila economy system' in Indonesia, Shamsul A. B. looks at the economic role of Islam in Malaysia, and Apichai Puntasen presents the Buddhist view of economics in Thailand. Mubyarto insists that 'the *Pancasila* Economy is the national economic system', and that 'in order to correct uneven development, the rules of the game of the system of western liberal capitalism must be exchanged for rules of the game which are more appropriate to the ideology of the Indonesian people, namely Pancasila' (pp. 37–8). Shamsul bases his analysis of the role of Islam on the overwhelming need to avoid a repetition of the ethnic conflict of 1969, and believes 'the presence of Islamic financial institutions has provided an economic alternative to the Malaysian public, both to Muslims and non-Muslims' and along with other elements of Malaysia's 'framework of conservative forces' has 'served them well during the recent crisis' (p. 57). Apichai believes 'Asian-centred economics needs to be re-conceptualised.' Based on the arguments of King Bhumibhol and Phra Dhamapidoke he concludes that 'Buddhist economics appears to provide a much more explicit concept of "happiness" and "suffering" and provides a basis for overcoming the current crisis and for 'long term sustainability' (p. 82).

The papers are programmatic and exhortatory. Hoadley believes we will not understand the workings of Southeast Asian economies until we accept that their histories and structures lead them to operate under different rules from Western economies, while Danielsson, Amer and Hughes believe that international agencies will continue to be ineffective until they absorb the same lesson. Mubyarto, Shamsul and Apichai all share a dual perspective. Each argues that his particular tradition is superior to Western economic values and to Western economic analysis. But at the same time each presents his tradition as an ideal towards which the people of his country should strive, not as a description of present behaviour. Mubyarto says 'the *Ekonomi Pancasila* as a whole has not yet been applied as an active policy within the Indonesian economy. If it had been then we wouldn't be in such a mess today!' (p. 39). Shamsul notes that the positive role of Islamic financial institutions is a recent phenomenon, indeed largely attributable to the effects of

the New Economic Policy (p. 47) and the efforts of Ungku Aziz in establishing the Pilgrim's Management Fund Board, a savings institution to promote the pilgrimage to Mecca, obligatory for Muslims who possess the means to undertake it (p. 52). And Apichai concludes that the ideas of King Bhumibhol and Phra Dhamapidoke 'serve only as examples' although 'some of the concepts have already been experimented with in Thailand for more than a decade now, especially by small farmers' (p. 79).

I believe therefore that there is an inconsistency here to which the authors of the volume have not given sufficient weight. It may be true that Southeast Asian economies do not operate in the same manner as Western economies. But it also appears to be true that national traditions and values are neither uniform nor fixed. Structures, beliefs and behaviours can change. Further, many of the factors cited as defining the uniqueness of Southeast Asian economies are also clearly the result of a failure to follow the precepts of Pancasila, Islam, or Buddhist economics. Thinking of Hoadley's list of structural attributes, it is not only Western economists who would deplore their negative effects. Prejudice, nepotism, and corruption clearly have no place in the ethical systems described by Mubyarto, Shamsul and Apichai. But their systems clearly do not embrace all of the people of their respective countries. Not all Indonesians follow Pancasila, not all Malaysians are devout Muslims, and not all Thais accept the precepts of Buddhist economics. We have also learned that not all Indonesians supported Golkar, we are fairly certain that not all Malaysians support UMNO, and we may suspect that not all Thais support the monarchy. What would those others choose if they were offered alternative economic and political systems? It is at least conceivable that they might choose open democratic systems and free market economies. If this is so, then economics may not be irrelevant to Southeast Asian economies after all.

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#### Cambodia

*Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison*

DAVID CHANDLER

Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999. Pp. xiii, 238. Photographs, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

In 1999 the infamous head of the Khmer Rouge's secret police (Santebal or S-21), Kang Keck Ieu, or 'Duch', resurfaced as a medical orderly who had converted to Christianity a few years earlier. Duch, during most of the Khmer Rouge years, ran the Tuol Sleng prison – also known as 'S-21' after the department that operated it – where more than 14,000 inmates entered and only a handful survived. S-21 kept meticulous documentary and photo records of their activities, many of which have been preserved. This has allowed David Chandler to go through the plethora of material from the prison. The result of his extensive poring over this evidence – combined with his analysis of an important body of literature examining parallel crimes against humanity by, *inter alia*, Nazi Germany, Stalin's USSR and the authoritarian regimes in Latin America – is the

book *Voices from S-21*. The confessions recorded by S-21 are brokered into a thematic narrative by Chandler. Chandler does not just seek to explain and analyse S-21, but he also places it within a far broader picture of man's inhumanity to man.

Reading *Voices from S-21* brings with it a host of emotions. The book is fascinating, but its subject material is at times sobering, incredulous and very often disturbing. Chandler explains from the outset that the value of the study into S-21 is to provide a means of 'entering the collective mentality of the Khmer Rouge' (p. ix), or Democratic Kampuchea (DK) as the regime called itself, who in a few short years of power were responsible for the deaths of one in five Cambodians (p. vii). The S-21 prison, as it emerges from these pages, is both Kafkaesque and Orwellian. This is an institution that Chandler suggests might have been inspired by the Red Queen in *Alice in Wonderland* (p. 48), who, as any school child will tell you, is a capricious bully drunk on power, with a penchant for yelling 'off with her head' for even the smallest perceived slight. Arrest meant guilt, and guilt meant execution. Many lower-ranking inmates were executed in a relatively short period of time, while the higher-ranking cadres were kept considerably longer in order to obtain information. As the Pol Pot regime became ever more paranoid, a number of the prisoners were from the upper ranks of the Khmer Rouge. Accused of being members of the CIA or KGB, or in the employ of Vietnam (one was even accused of not watering plants!), the vast majority of victims confessed to the most fictitious and bizarre events and encounters with agents of foreign powers. Once a prisoner was brought in, it was assumed that he or she was guilty of something (whether that was known to the authorities or not), and torture was necessary to find what must inevitably be an act of treason. Everything that went wrong under the Khmer Rouge was the fault of 'wreckers'. Chandler relays a story of Khieu Thirith (Ieng Sary's wife and the sister of Pol Pot's wife), who, on seeing the awful conditions of the northwest in mid-1976, chose to blame 'agents' working against the state (p. 67) rather than the morally bankrupt regime that she unblinkingly served. Once guilt had been established, either through false confession under torture, or possibly the imprinting of a false memory, then the ultimate sanction resulted: 'The facility served primarily as an ante-room for death' (p. 16). But before that, the officials at S-21 would play on inmates' worst fears. Near the end of George Orwell's classic novel, *1984*, the main character, Winston, is threatened with a punishment that he cannot bear – rats in a cage – and he breaks. One cannot help but compare this to the heartbreaking story of Siet Chhe, who is accused of sexually abusing his daughter – his denial, which is featured in the book's appendix, shows just how devastating this was. Siet Chhe's daughter was clearly the most important person in his life.

One wonders what the ultimate purpose of this facility was. Surely it was not to establish that Democratic Kampuchea was right – tragically, that seems to have been beyond all doubt in the minds of its functionaries. In fact, inconvenient confessions were put aside for those that matched the preordained truth. In this surreal world of the Khmer Rouge, Chandler concurs with the conclusion drawn by Steve Heder, that the DK was attempting to use this material for a history of the party. Ironically it is this same documentation that will now turn the tide of history against the Khmer Rouge, as Chandler's work is able to shed considerable light on the rest of the killing fields (largely undocumented) through this documentary source.



Only three survivors have come forward to tell their stories, and only six staff, including Duch, have been located (the minister in charge of S-21, Son Sen, the Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister of DK, was killed in 1997 by Pol Pot loyalists in what Chandler quite justly calls 'poetic justice'). But Chandler is very clear that the problem that S-21 represents is a human condition rather than the work of a few murderous individuals. Although the Khmer Rouge have entered Cambodian Buddhist teachings as demons and representatives of hell (p. 118), the question that comes through the narrative quite explicitly is the same question asked at the Nuremberg trials: 'would I have behaved differently?' The staff members of S-21 were not movie caricatures of sociopaths, but on the whole only notable for being unnotable, for 'their ordinariness and banality' (p. 147).

This last phrase will immediately bring to mind the famous work by Hannah Arendt on the Adolf Eichmann trial, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1963), in which she found that Eichmann was not quite the sadistic monster that many had expected. He simply followed orders without question, and sought to further his own career, as did the routinised staff at S-21. Chandler's book is not only a great history of the DK period, but it is as equally seminal as Arendt's book in speaking to the human condition in the aftermath of genocide in the modern era. *Voices of S-21* concludes with the line: 'To find the source of the evil that was enacted at S-21 on a daily basis, we need look no further than ourselves' (p. 155). Tuol Sleng (S-21) itself now stands as a museum and a reminder of Cambodia's past. Nearly all would accept the crucial importance of such reminders. Thanks to this remarkable volume, the lessons of S-21 are available to a far wider audience, lest we all forget.

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## Indonesia

### *Bugis Navigation*

GENE AMMARELL

New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies (Monograph 48), 1999. Pp. xiv, 299. Maps, Tables, Illustrations, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

On the backside of the cover it is written that this book is, 'one of a small handful of truly distinguished, astute, and searching studies', and this reviewer's judgement is not far from this opinion: Gene Ammarell's study on the navigational knowledge and practice of traditional Indonesian trader/sailors and its social and cultural background is the best (English) monograph on the topic yet. The book is divided into (roughly) four parts: a description of the ethnographic setting; a discussion of indigenous concepts of space and time; topics related to orientation at sea; and finally, a description of the social role of navigators, the transmission of knowledge and the adaptation to recent changes caused by the ongoing motorisation of Indonesia's traditional trading vessels – a reasonably plausible division, which covers a wide range of aspects in between the general and specific history of the area of research, indigenous systems of knowledge about the sea

and its features, procedures used for finding one's way on sea and the handling of ships, and recent technological changes and their social and cognitive impacts. In this context, Ammarell's remarks about the history of settlement and the development of trade and navigation are a good example of the intense dynamics that rule nearly all maritime societies, where a certain 'openness' to adopt technological improvements (like switching from sail-only to motorised vessels in less than a decade) and a strong willingness of certain individuals to further adopt and develop 'new' cognitive means often lead to fast economic and social changes – a point clearly indicated in the idea of a 'undeviating heart' that is believed to be necessary to 'acquire the knowledge and skills of navigation' (p. 217), the essence of social status in a trader/sailor society.

This monograph is based on research done from 1990–92 on the small coral island of Balobaloang, roughly 120 nautical miles to the south-southwest of South Sulawesi. The island was settled around 1870 by Bugis migrants from the district of Maros on Sulawesi's mainland, and in the four generations since turned to long-distance trade for a living: in 1990 nearly a third of the male population was employed in sailing some 30 trading vessels operating from Balobaloang. Compared to the traditionally built inter-island motor-sailors with loading capacities of up to 300 metric tonnes, commonly known as *pinisiq* (though differing far from the schooner-ketch rigged original that was abandoned in course of motorisation policies in the 1970s), the vessels of Balobaloang are rather small – the biggest ship seen by Ammarell in 1992 was only 70 tonnes, and the average loading capacity of the vessels of the island was 34 tonnes (p. 59). The main area of operation is confined to runs between the Lesser Sundas and the major ports in southern Kalimantan and Sulawesi, unlike the PLM (*perahu layar motor* – 'motorised sailing *prau*'), which ply their trade throughout the entire archipelago.

On board most Balobaloang vessels Ammarell found that 'there are one or more non-Bugis crew members' (p. 34) – on first view, surprising for boats that originate from a fairly isolated and self-contained island. Nonetheless, sailors and their ships are an international breed: on any boat travelling in long-distance trade around the world one would find members of many ethnic groups; techniques of navigation, boat-building or handling of ships tend to float as far the vessels themselves. This becomes most obvious in the terminology and associated knowledge found in the names for the parts of the ships drawn on pp. 48 and 70/72 which show a blend of Makassar, Konjo and Bugis terms, possibly deriving from the Konjo boat builders that – as Ammarell rightly mentions – are widely employed in construction of vessels all over the eastern part of the Archipelago, including those of Balobaloang. In these drawings there are some inconsistencies in an otherwise generally flawless book: spelling of some of the terms differs between the two sets of drawings (e.g., pp. 70–72 *pamarang* versus p. 48 *pamarung*, 'stem' – the latter being the proper Konjo term), and some of the terms have probably been mistaken (e.g., *tajonna*, 'its frame head', derived from the term *tajoq*, 'frame head' + possessive particle */-na/*, or *daung guling*, 'rudderblade' instead the usual *kamudi*, 'centre rudder'). Apropos mistakes: a funny one is Ammarell's translation of the acronym *Posyandu* into 'Pos Pelayaran Terpadu', 'Marine Station' instead of 'Pos Pelayanan Terpadu', 'Public (Health) Service Post' (p. 32; compare with Lukman Ali *et al.*, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* [Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1997]).

Moreover, a considerable number of navigational terms (especially names of winds,

currents, islands and landmarks) derive from Malay, Makassar or Indonesian, and the Bugis names for the points of the compass show an astonishing similarity to the Malay designations. Ammarell on Balobaloang even recorded the Makassar *timoroq* instead of the 'original' Bugis *timoq* for 'east', and cites R. Blust who 'cautions [...] that [these] terms may have a common origin in... Proto-Malayo-Austronesian' (p. 97, fn. 8). The same could be said for the expressions used to identify the different headings of a sailing vessel in relation to the wind, which can be traced throughout all languages of Indonesia (and probably beyond) and quite probably derive from a common Austronesian source that divided the points of sail into upwind (*\*biluq*) and downwind (*\*turut/q*) movements (see H. H. Liebner, 'Remarks about the Terminology of Boat Building and Seamanship in some Languages of Southern Sulawesi', *Indonesia Circle*, 59/60 [1993]: 18–45).

A third indigenous system of orientation mentioned by Ammarell refers to a land-sea/coast up-down axis that again is found throughout the Archipelago. Though none of these terms is precise enough for use in navigation, the terms 'to the sea' versus 'to the land' and 'up' versus 'down' are widely used as basic directionals for movements on sea as well as on land. As his informants dwell on a rather small island, where 'there is no substantial "interior"', the system expressed in these terms can only be explained as a 'product of past migrations' (p. 92), referring to the Bugis 'eventual homeland' along the shores of the Gulf of Bone: *olau*, 'to the sea', denotes east or southeast, remarkably inconsistent with the topography of Maros, where the sea is on the west. The second axis, up/down (the shoreline) is even more puzzling, but surprisingly consistent with the usage of these terms by other ethnic groups in South Sulawesi. For nearly all inhabitants of the peninsula, be 'their' sea in their east, west, or south, any movement on sea or on land which can be associated with following the coastline into a generally northern direction is associated with the term 'going down', while the opposite move is named 'going up' – just as the sailors of Balobaloang orientate a chart by using south as the 'upper side', placing it according to 'the wind compass direction of south derived from the current direction of the ship', or 'with reference to the indigenous *maniang* [upward direction] of the island' (p. 99, fn.11).

On the other hand, the people of Balobaloang are an example of South Sulawesi navigation only in the sense that they stand for their own practices – other villages like the Konjo village of Bira on the southern tip of the peninsula, the Bugis trading villages in Barru, Bone and Wajo, or the trader/sailors of Mandar have a longer tradition of settlement and maritime trade and would produce more detailed data on traditions of navigation than the inhabitants of an island that admittedly was settled only four generations ago. This becomes clear in Ammarell's remarks about 'taboos, ritual and magic' (pp. 111ff, 181ff) that refers to only a limited number of proscriptions. Among Konjo and Mandar sailors, for example, there are a much larger number of taboos on board ship (or at home while family members are at sea – a point not mentioned at all by Ammarell), including language taboos and a strict avoidance of contact between objects related to the cooking fire – such as ash, pots and pans used for cooking – and seawater.

Ammarell's major discovery is the various techniques of using stars for navigational practices: the Bugis of Balobaloang use the points of rising and setting of specific stars and star patterns (which he names 'asterisms') as proxies for compass directions, and

apply these as directional aids for finding their ways to specific destinations. This technique became known as ‘star-path navigation’ through David Lewis’ research on Micronesian navigation (*We, the Navigators* [Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1972]) – though Lewis himself refuted claims that Indonesian navigators use that technique.

As most of the routes of the sailors of Balobaloang follow northerly or southerly courses, we should not be surprised that the ‘star-paths’ Ammarell could find are not numerous. Naturally, setting or rising stars are much more useful for guiding a ship when sailing along an east–west axis. Accordingly, their Mandar neighbours do mention star-paths only for those routes, and use celestial bodies as a general means of orientation when sailing to the north or south - e.g., by using Orion’s Belt and Sword as an ‘asterism’ called *tallu-tallu*, ‘three-three’, which forms a kite like sign whose tail – Orion’s Sword – and corners denote the major celestial directions when the sign is in its zenith (a technique probably indicated by Ammarell’s informant who stated that ‘all directions can be known’ by Orion [p. 137]).

However, ‘within much of insular Southeast Asia, if a sailing ship travels ... for more than a few days, it will likely be within sight of a nearby island’ (p. 149). Thus, navigation by stars as precise as that used by Micronesians is not necessary for Indonesian sailors. Consequently, the navigators of Balobaloang utilise a wide variety of other signs, both on land and at sea: wave patterns, wind, birds, and clouds, and – if land comes in sight – any known island, landmark, mountain or navigational light will be employed for determining the ship’s course. In addition, as Ammarell confirms, magnetic compasses and nautical charts play an ever-increasing role in the navigation of the sailors of Balobaloang – in the bigger centres of inter-island trade like Bira, compass and charts have been standard equipment for at least two generations, and ‘star-paths’ play only very rudimentary roles in navigating.

Though Biran and Mandar sailors make an obvious differentiation between navigation and ship handling, for a traditional navigator there is no separation between ‘components’ of the navigational process itself: though the means of orientation on open sea differ from those used for making landfall or cruising along a coast, they are not particular ‘categories’ in the whole concept of setting a course, entering a harbour, or finding an offshore fishing spot. Signs on or of land and signs at sea or in the heavens are used for the same purpose as the compass heading, i.e. taking a boat safely from A to B. Therefore, Ammarell’s distinction between ‘Navigation’ and ‘Piloting’ (following the author and his technical Western sources, the former dealing with establishing a ships course via compass or stars only, the latter relying ‘on “frequent and continuous reference to landmarks, aids to navigation, and depth soundings”’ [p.154]) to me seems too much an ‘ethic’ approach, as his example of steering a boat following a compass course only shows [p.120]. For the Bugis captain the SW or SSW reading of the needle (the ‘navigational’ part if we follow Ammarell’s terminology) is not the central moment, but an amalgamation of bearings on landmarks, estimations of wind, current, and lee drift as well as the intended track of the vessel are considered and then pronounced in the form of a compass bearing which could guide the helmsman – whom he also would expect to share these computations, as it must have been in this case where the ship was on one of the most familiar headings for Balobaloang sailors.

The example above and several others (like almost completely omitting the problem of lee-drift in his descriptions of navigational computations) sometimes give rise to a feeling that Ammarell himself is not enough of a sailor to fully appreciate and acknowledge the intricacies of handling and navigating a traditional vessel, a point which occasionally makes his discussion irritating for someone with a maritime background. However, 'Ammarell's impressive achievement ought to find a broad and lasting audience' (back cover), and hopefully provide a bearing for more research on the maritime traditions that shaped Insular Southeast Asia.

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*Secrets Need Words: Indonesian Poetry, 1966–1998*

Edited and Translated by HARRY AVELING

Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2001. Pp. xiv, 375. Notes.

There are still among us people who would argue that literature, in one way or another, reflects the society in which it is produced. Make a good analysis of a society, so this argument goes, and then every form of art can be explained, and every human product for that matter. But what is a society in these confusing days of globalisation and diasporas? And has it ever been possible to fully analyse the interactions within any group of people, driven by conflicts and tensions, and then describe them in terms of the fullness, coherence, borders, and order, which the notion of a society presupposes? The 'in one way or another' seems a good way out: causal connections between groups of human beings and their products are manifold and varied, yes. But then, the exploration of reflection does not work without introducing so many refinements that it may be too unruly a notion to work with. Too arbitrary. Too many variants.

The possible connection between society and literature has been expressed in another way: literature should reflect society in its progressive development and show new possibilities to its public. The unruliness of the notion of reflection and the haziness of the idea of society remain problematic all the same. And what is literature but a middle-class construct that emerged in Western Europe in the eighteenth century to become a deconstructable concept towards the end of the twentieth century?

In *Secrets Need Words*, Harry Aveling suggests the relevance of yet another causal relationship, which may produce more rewarding results: introduce the concept of the state, and try to explore literary developments as a reflection of and reaction to that state and its efforts to control language, thinking, money, art and labour within distinct geographical and political borders. 'Some of the shifts in style and subject matter', we are told about Indonesian literature in the introduction to *Secrets*, 'may also be understood as successful strategic responses on the part of writers to the power of a "strong state" intent on controlling any diversity of opinions'. Here literature is pictured in the role of reaction rather than its complement, literature as reflection, after the breathtaking lines in a poem by Subagio Sastrowardjo, 'secrets need words, spoken in silence'. The state needs no definition, so it seems. And how and why certain forms of literature – not

defined either – react to the state and others do not, is not made clear either.

*Secrets Need Words* offers only a picture of the developments in poetry, the form of language that Suharto's New Order had allegedly greater difficulties in controlling than prose. Starting in 1966 with the so-called Generation of 66 (why are the students of Indonesian literature still so eager to think in terms of Generations?), the book ends with poetic developments around President Suharto's resignation in 1998 (and save us from the invention of a Generation of 98!). *Secrets* is organised in eight chapters; in each of them a short description of events and actions in the Indonesian state is followed by some very intriguing remarks about particular poets and their work and a series of allegedly responsive poems (originals and translations). A reader who starts on page 1 and ends on page 375 has been kicked to and fro like a ball, between effects and causes, between samples of modern and post-modern (if it is allowed to use these terms in a non-European context) Indonesian poetry and a history of the Republic of Indonesia, or rather: of Jakarta, plus an overview of developments in intellectual and artistic life in Indonesia, or rather: in Jakarta. The causal relationships between literature and society remain implicit; those between a strong state, intellectual life, and the arts are suggested. The poems may have been responsive in the Indonesian context and they may not; be that as it may, they should make us think just as they made Indonesians think. Aveling has produced an exciting and challenging book, full of the holes and biases that make every effort of survey and overview questionable and open to responses and new insights – and hopefully it will attract the interest of many.

In the eight introductory fragments to the poems, Aveling shows himself a clear and persuasive writer of prose; the overviews of political and cultural developments are well documented and in one way or another they make the poems more accessible, societal developments more comprehensible. Of course, the selection of relevant poems (the true heroes of the book) raises many questions. It could be wondered if Taufiq Ismail's work really deserves so much attention in terms of 'strategic responses'; why Zawawi Imron, Wiji Tukul, and Wowok Prabowo are passed over in silence; why more attention is not given to the oral aspects of modern Indonesian poetry; and why regional poetry has been largely ignored in favour of the work of poets in Jakarta and Yogyakarta – and those are questions that arise with great urgency and immediacy within the framework of the idea that Indonesian poetry's relevance and quality should primarily be judged in terms of 'strategic responses to the state'. The translations are, as always in Aveling's publications, open for discussion. Those who know Indonesian and prefer a careful word-for-word or line-for-line translation will read them with a frown or two. Those who believe in the possibility or even the necessity of recreation in the act of translation will enjoy what they find. Perhaps Aveling – an *éminence grise* in the study of Indonesian literature – could have written some words about the criteria he has used in his acts of translation, about the task of a translator. The English poems are often as poignant as the Indonesian ones, but as imitations they are sometimes hard to follow and may lead to wrong responses.

The Ohio University Center for International Studies Press should be praised for its willingness to have the Indonesian texts printed and for its capacity to produce such a good-looking book. Its presentation strengthens not only the readability but also the persuasiveness of Aveling's main argument: the poetry that has been produced in New



Order Indonesia is worth reading, reflection, imitation, and memorisation. Long live Indonesian poetry!

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*Parthayana: The Journeying of Partha, an Eighteenth-Century Balinese Kakawin*

HELEN CREESE

Leiden: KITLV, 1998. Pp. x, 504. Appendices, Bibliography, Indexes.

For the publication of the *kakawin Parthayana*, Helen Creese has chosen an admirably complete philological edition. She has surveyed the history of research on *kakawin* and Old-Javanese–Balinese literature in general, with a greater concentration on Balinese texts. Looking into the contents, we see the historical approach of which no part seems to have been forgotten.

In the Introduction, Creese provides a summary of this particular *kakawin*, showing what may be called the ‘classical’ philological style as has been done throughout history, recognising the interrelationship between the variants, but being aware of the problems of this system of research as well. While there may be the tendency to publish any variant that agrees with the taste of the researcher, Creese has not done so. She examines all variants and recensions of the *Parthayana kakawin*, choosing to mention the interrelationship of the various manuscripts and publishing the text in a ‘diplomatic’ way (p. 16). While she had numerous recensions and variants to choose from, she has chosen the *kakawin* in the possession of the Dewa Agung of Klungkung, the last of the two recensions of the *kakawin* to be composed.

Because she started by recording the history of research on *kakawin*, Creese was able to focus on the problem of differences between Old Javanese and Balinese *kakawin*. She remarks on the absence of any Islamic influence on this text of the eighteenth century, although the Dewa Agung did in fact acknowledge the presence of Islam in the archipelago. Nevertheless, since the court of Majapahit was the model for courts in Bali, the composition of other *kakawin* according to the Majapahit style still indicates the importance of the Javanese example. This example, basically composed in the classical *mahakavya* convention, remains the measure of *kakawin* composition. As we know, the Old-Javanese Ramayana *kakawin* is acknowledged as the standard for this style of writing. Creese mentions the first researcher, C. Hooykaas, who through his analysis of the *kakawin* has provided the measure for *kakawin* poetical norms. It was also Hooykaas who proved that Old-Javanese authors had sufficient knowledge of Sanskrit literary conventions of the time. As definite proof he mentioned the use of the *Bhattikavya*, a grammatically very difficult Sanskrit text, as an example for the writing of the Ramayana *kakawin*.

Helen Creese’s discussion of ‘Stylistic influences’ in Chapter 4, starting on p. 42, clearly shows the importance of the Ramayana *kakawin* as a source of inspiration for further poetical composition. Thus a Balinese *kakawin* such as the *Parthayana* should be considered to be written according to the long tradition and development of *kakawin*

writing.

Nevertheless, in Bali the *kakawin* is accorded a very high ritual place in its own right. Composing, and even reading or copying a *kakawin*, is a ritual act, even a mystical experience. We may see it at present in the activity of *mabasan* (or *papaosan*, a more refined word, as Creese writes on p. 20), which is always organised as a very important ritual. In fact, the Old-Javanese *kakawin*, even after Islam was introduced in Java, was accorded a higher mystic explanation, naturally not as part of Islam, but on its own.

Nevertheless, as the dating of the *Parthayana* is set in a period no earlier than the beginning of the eighteenth century, questions remain as to the prior development of the *kakawin* in Bali, as Creese points out on p. 143. She extensively explains the influences of Indian as well as Javanese forms. But independent traditions, naturally, may well be expected. The author mentions the court of Gelgel in its 'golden age' as a possible source. Nonetheless, the tradition of Nirartha as a poet and priest of the time, who is said to have come from Java, still points to Javanese influence, although of Nirartha's work not too much is actually known.

Creese also does not overlook the internal evidence of the *Parthayana kakawin* itself. She discusses its themes and functions, of which she has made a deep study (Chapter 4, Poetics and Language). In this examination she discusses the creative freedom inherent in the art of writing. *Kakawin* are composed in a very formalised literary form, which is normal in the classical style. But she shows how the author of the *Parthayana* followed his own concerns, his own creative fulfilment, of which the story of Partha's journey is the allegorical basis. The author sees himself as Partha, going on his journey of personal development, and this creative fulfilment for Partha in the Balinese *kakawin* is set right within the world, involving Partha's *dharma* as a *ksyatriya*, never letting him leave the world. Thus the author, by remaining in his field as an artist, hopes to find his life fulfilment through the composition of the *Parthayana* as a way to reach *moksa*.

Personally I find this part of Creese's publication very interesting. She follows her analysis with discussions on the development of poetics of the time, connecting it not only with the popularity of the Arjuna stories as a widespread example of writing literature, but also with discussions on the education of literary authors.

The difference of outlook in the Javanese and Balinese styled *kakawin* is carefully studied and explained throughout the story. Creese has therefore provided a clear picture of the various styles. Nevertheless, she does not overlook the basic story, which is the *Adiparwa*, popular in Bali as well as in Java. As Hooykaas has pointed out, it was already studied in the Sanskrit original. Partha's journey and banishment is, in fact, a popular subject for poetical composition, forming a basis in the mystic ritual of *kakawin* writing. For Bali specifically, as she explains on p. 83, the story of Partha's (Arjuna's) pilgrimage and marriages attracts great interest. In the course of history we naturally find divergences from the main form, and Creese discusses this starting on p. 69. Tracing the four Balinese recensions and their relationship to the Old Javanese *Adiparwa*, as well as their interrelationships, she sees the possibility of tracing the development of one tradition of stories in the Balinese period.

Any text edition and translation is in fact a personal experience and based on personal choices and feelings. We see that Creese's choice of her edition is very strict, not overlooking the lexical variants which may give a different understanding. Her

translation in her native language, of the text written in an old language and of a different culture, is as good as any we may find. She has not made it easy for herself in choosing to keep close to the *Parthayana's* poetic form and using the four-line stanza in her translation. This choice was done, in fact, with an eye to the reader. Nevertheless, as a native speaker of English, she does not want to sacrifice the English forms and coherence. Readers may thank her for this lack of pedantry (as she mentions herself), for a more literary translation of the poetic language of the time with all its repetitions for the sake of the usual literary style, would be unreadable at present.

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*Forests of Fortune?: The Environmental History of Southeast Borneo, 1600–1880*

HAN KNAPEN

Leiden: KITLV, 2001. Pp. xviii, 487. Figures, Tables, Maps, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

This book deals with a breathtaking array of issues that affected the past not only in Southeast Borneo, but also in Southeast Asia as a whole. In *Forests of Fortune?*, the author, Han Knapen, attempts to apply the theories and approaches of environmental historians to Southeast Asia, and doing so, has provided a template for future environmental histories of the region. This is an important development, particularly since this book was written under the auspices of the EDEN (Ecology, Demography and Economy in Nusantara) project at the Royal Institute for Linguistics and Anthropology (KITLV) located in Leiden, the Netherlands. Participants in the project also produced a collected volume of articles based on their research a few years ago, published as *Paper Landscapes: Environmental History in Indonesia*, edited by Peter Boomgaard, Freek Colombijn and David Henley (Leiden: KITLV, 1998). This work, however, is the first book of research on a specific area to come out of the project.

In the introductory chapter, Knapen provides an excellent overview of the problems that face environmental historians in Southeast Asia, particularly in relation to resources for the early modern period. He refutes notions of a pristine pre-colonial environment in Southeast Borneo, which he defines as the drainage basins of the Barito, Kapuas and Kahayan Rivers; there has always been a varied landscape on an island as large as Borneo, and this is often forgotten. Knapen also points out that many plants native to the Americas, such as sweet potatoes and chili peppers, had already become important parts of the diet prior to the nineteenth century. With such ideas in mind, he wants to look at Southeast Borneo not as perfect rainforest destroyed through colonial greed, but as a vibrant environment that went through its own changes and cycles.

Knapen then proceeds to focus each chapter of the book on a larger issue, which he subsequently breaks down into subsections. The topics of the chapters are: the natural environment, history and peoples of Southeast Borneo; fertility and population growth; subsistence agriculture; commercialised agriculture; animals; and forest and sea resources. The amount of detailed information in each chapter is remarkable. For example, Chapter 5 focuses on mortality and morbidity, and has detailed sections on

smallpox, cholera, malaria, warfare and headhunting, death during childbirth, and famine. In each of these sections Knapen thoroughly discusses the literature, often refuting long-held concepts, and then proceeds to discuss the issue based on his reading of a wide array of records from the region, ranging from archives and oral histories to soil samples and nutritional data. For those interested in a particular topic, but not necessarily Southeast Borneo, it is recommended that they use the index to look up these sections that make up approximately 90 per cent of the book. Although typographical and grammatical errors appear occasionally, the mass of material being dealt with is presented well. In addition, there are two very interesting appendices describing 'disasters' in Southeast Borneo and 'introduced species of plants and animals'.

The final two chapters of the book, 'Uncertainty, diversity, and adaptation' and 'Population–environment interaction' bring together much of the information in the previous chapters to ask questions about Southeast Borneo prior to direct colonial rule. In the first of these chapters, Knapen discusses whether or not the residents of the region were risk-averse due to the uncertainty in their environment. His conclusion is that the ethnic groups in the region generally would support Samuel Popkin's 'rational peasant' thesis as they worked to increase the diversity of their lands to provide more opportunities to avoid uncertainties in life. The second chapter focuses on the question of why there was little population growth prior to 1800 in Southeast Borneo and rapid growth in the nineteenth century. The author's answer, in broad terms, is that the *Pax Neerlandica* provided more opportunities for increased trade, reduction of warfare and headhunting, and greater accessibility to vaccinations and medicines.

Throughout his discussion of travellers' tales, tables, maps, and various agricultural practices, Knapen wants the reader to think of the basic question in the title: was Southeast Borneo a region of untold wealth as many early travellers saw it? The answer would depend on which eco-niche is being described and the goals of those who viewed it. Southeast Borneo in the period under discussion was never an 'Eden'; foreign plants, animals and diseases were continually being introduced and environments continually changed. It is the vibrancy of this environment that makes it interesting, and an important component of understanding the region's past.

It is often stated that Southeast Asia needs more local works before we can write broad histories of the region. This is an excellent start for the environmental history of Southeast Asia, and hopefully other authors will use Knapen's work to look at other parts of the region and raise questions about its past.

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*Grandchildren of the Ga'e Ancestors: Social Organization and Cosmology among the Hoga Sara of Flores*

ANDREA KATALIN MOLNAR

Leiden: KITLV Press, 2001. Pp. ix, 306. Figures, Maps, Plates, Tables, Index.

Anthropologists interested in eastern Indonesian social organisations and their rich ritual and cosmological contexts have enjoyed a steady trickle of first-rate ethnographies over the past couple of decades. Andrea Katalin Molnar's monograph is devoted to four traditional domains (with some 1,100 inhabitants whose self-designation is the Hoga Sara of the book's title) in the highlands of central Flores, located on the border between the far more numerous Ngadha to the west and the Nage to the east.

Readers familiar with concepts such as 'origin structures', 'orders of precedence' and 'house societies' will be well prepared for what Molnar offers. In particular she specifies the emergence of the clans, named houses and villages in the distant past, their shifting coalitions, geographical relocations and elaborate gender symbolism – aiding the reader with numerous figures and tables, supplemented by photographs (botched, unfortunately, by the KITLV Press). Anyone who has attempted to make sense of half forgotten, often contradictory recollections of aging informants will be impressed with Molnar's lucid exposition. She also has a firm grasp of the intricate workings of a system of marital alliance linking social units, some of which operate with an asymmetric (indirect exchange) logic, others with a symmetric (direct exchange) one. The analysis of these arrangements and their ritual underpinnings is Molnar's greatest achievement; here lies her theoretical contribution. Explaining the several ways in which men and women are recruited to and maintain the named houses (and clans), pointing out how these operations defy both descent theory and alliance theory, and how Durkheimian presuppositions of homogeneity in units that are linked in solidarity are challenged by her own findings, Molnar concludes by perceptively considering the transformations Hoga Sara clans and houses may have undergone.

But a price is paid for this persistent pursuit of the morphological aspects of the social system: the men, women and children presumably peopling it are absent. Anyone who has spent time in the region knows that Florenese tend to be assertive, emotional, forceful, sometimes troubled and violent, often scheming and politicking, never boring. Reading Molnar's text one would not know it. Thus in her comprehensive discussions of marital alliance, for example, one never encounters a real case of premarital sex and subsequent pregnancy – perhaps pushing enraged parents and other relatives into accepting a marriage otherwise not contemplated, perhaps prompting adoption or fosterage. The usually messy consequences of extramarital affairs, and of incestuous unions, pass equally unnoticed. It is as if every marriage is contracted according to a programme. That said, Molnar's informants, and the next generation (to whom the book is dedicated) now have an excellent account not only of how their social apparatus works, but also of how it evolved.

Apart from the value this meticulous ethnography has (in itself and comparatively), Molnar also aspires to establish the inhabitants of the four villages the book deals with as a separate ethnic group distinct, especially, from the Ngadha, with whose material culture, ritual life and conceptual propensities the Hoga Sara evidently have so much in

common. Despite the contrasts in matrimonial practices she points to, this proclamation of a 'new culture' is likely to be received with caution, primarily because there is minimal linguistic support for it, perhaps even more so precisely because some Hoga Sara so ardently insist on it – the politics of which Molnar ignores. Although a brief book review is hardly the place for assessing the matter, I shall advance a couple of points relevant to social structure.

(i) Molnar claims that Hoga Sara 'clans' are more complexly differentiated than are the corresponding Ngadha units (p. 59). It is hard to see how this is the case, unless the designation 'subclan' is taken to represent such complexity. The term might well be apposite. But since informants refer to the subclan and the clan by the same word (*woe*), and since either unit may be accorded definite ritual responsibilities and may erect 'clan symbols' in the village plaza, readers may be tempted to dismiss the distinction. If, on the other hand, Molnar refers to specific ritual duties on specific occasions ascribed to certain houses and not others, then the Ngadha have that, too (*viz.* the many varieties of house-specific obligations during the annual *reba* village festival cycle).

(ii) Molnar mistakenly asserts that in contrast to most Hoga Sara clans, those in Ngadhaland possess only two named houses (p. 110). This error is puzzling since in a footnote to the paragraph where it occurs my own dissertation on the Ngadha is cited; in it I make it quite clear that Ngadha 'clans' (*woe*) have multiple, differentially ranked named houses. What I also state is that a Ngadha *woe* cannot in my experience have less than two of them, which is to emphasise the dual definition of the *woe* (its 'tip' and 'trunk' divisions) and the minimal possible manifestation of this fact.

(iii) According to Molnar, Hoga Sara 'trunk house' and 'tip house' have equal and interchangeable status (p. 112) as opposed to the corresponding Ngadha units, which are ranked. But since we are also told that these two Hoga Sara houses are related to each other as 'ka'e-azi, or elder-younger sibling' (p. 95) and that the trunk house is associated with femininity and the tip house with masculinity (pp. 96–7) – femininity here, just as in Ngadhaland, being accorded priority (p. 208) – one wonders if Molnar here confuses equality with complementarity, thus positing difference where there is none.

But these are inventorial particulars. The more fundamental issue is what words such as 'a culture' and 'a society' are assumed to signify. Here, Molnar disappoints. There is neither discussion of ethnicity, nor indeed any trace of the heated debates over terms such as 'society' and 'culture', over their significance, applicability, and analytical value. Nowhere does she present a principled view on how criteria for distinguishing one 'society' ('culture') from another should be determined.

These objections aside, Molnar must be congratulated for her unwavering inquiry into an unusually complex social reality and for suggesting a more differentiated categorisation of ethnic groups in central Flores. Whether her ambition on behalf of the Hoga Sara will be accepted is another matter. As she herself states at least three times (pp. 18, 28, 260), much research in the region remains to be done.

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## Malaysia

### *Chinese Business in Malaysia. Accumulation, Accommodation and Ascendance*

EDMUND TERENCE GOMEZ

Richmond: Curzon, 1999. Pp. xxi, 234. Tables, Figures, Bibliography, Index.

This meticulously researched book breaks new ground in its deep and empirically based exploration of some of the largest Chinese businesses in Malaysia. It highlights key aspects relating to such businesses, including patterns of ownership and control, modes of business growth, relations with government, connections with other business-people and overseas links. All its analyses are underpinned by systematically undertaken case studies, which together provide an in-depth picture of this significant sector of the Malaysian economy. The book, which largely covers the period from the 1960s to the present day, is a major contribution to knowledge, and a landmark in scholarly work addressing the sector.

The book commences in Chapter 1 with a general review of Chinese business in Malaysia, indicating its major significance and addressing mistaken beliefs about such business stemming from various sources. It explores the theme of ownership and control, showing how the latter can be exercised even in the absence of majority ownership and in situations of apparent prominence of *bumiputera* stakeholders. Attention moves in Chapter 2 to the theme of 'accumulation' over the last four decades, showing mainly through case studies how major players addressed successive political and policy changes, including the New Economic Policy (NEP) and increase in prominence of government-supported Malay business players.

Then in Chapter 3, Chinese 'accommodation' to the NEP and other official initiatives is addressed, showing from the case study perspective how relations with government were approached and illustrating the part played by Chinese politicians and especially the Malaysian Chinese Association in its often unfortunate business dealings. Next in Chapter 4, the largely positive effects of liberalization pursued by Prime Minister Mahathir from the mid-1980s are examined, as is the growth of patronage with Chinese business support for Malay politicians in return for concessions. Finally in concluding Chapter 5, the small perceived significance of Chinese intra-ethnic co-operation is scrutinized, along with the relative importance of patronage and entrepreneurship to corporate growth.

The case studies of this book are assuredly its most attractive feature, setting out in more detail than this reviewer has previously seen the fascinating initiatives of figures ranging from the silently astute 'rubber and pineapple king' and initiator of the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation, Lee Kong Chian (p. 31), to the enigmatic and audacious Robert Kuok with his wide interests in sugar, hotels, shipping and the media (pp. 40–9). While the mode of case analysis is concise, the reader can extract the underlying flavour of each individual and sense crucial elements in the style of the major actors. The essential and attractive 'Chineseness' of it all is very evident, and inimitable elements of the *taukeh* conduct of affairs emerge again and again. But beyond his immediate descriptions, the author ably marshals his main themes and conclusions from the case studies, utilizing their implications to the full rather than including them in the all-too-common position of largely unexplored appendix items.

The only disappointing feature of this fine book is the brief concluding chapter, which barely does justice to issues raised in preceding sections. Thus although the broader significance of main aspects enumerated in the first paragraph of this review is explored in other parts of the book, considerably more should have been made of them at this juncture. The examination of these aspects should also be related more firmly to their treatment in the international business literature, and to a broad theoretical frame. Hence the question of ownership and control has been addressed by scholars in many contexts, but nothing is done in Chapter 5 to extend the limited discussion of this in Chapter 1.

These are minor criticisms, however, and this path-breaking volume is highly recommended to a wide audience.

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### Myanmar

*The Folk-Tales of Burma. An Introduction*

G. ABBOTT and KHIN THANT HAN

Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill (Handbuch der Orientalistik III vol. 11), 2000. Pp. xiv, 392. Illustrations, Bibliography, Ethnological Notes, Index.

The authors/collators of the folktales in this book are preoccupied with classification. In Part I of the book (pp. 3–50), entitled 'Frame of Reference', they distinguish between folk tales and other types of stories (e.g. myths, legends, fairy tales); next they create a typology for Burmese folk tales (phenomena tales; wonder tales; trickster tales; guidance tales [lay, clerical]; compound tales; human origins). They describe classification schemes proposed by scholars from different disciplines, but do not discuss the function of classifying, or even studying folktales. The closest they come to doing so is when they cite Edmund Leach's *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954, p. 279 ff), which states that in a Burmese context, ritual performances do not necessarily denote or even encourage group solidarity. But the authors here agree that 'folklore is an important mechanism for maintaining a group's culture'.

The next step in the analysis presented here is to assert that the cross-cultural comparison of folktales is 'a very desirable pursuit', because 'we think [our choice of tales to be told in this book] places Burma's tales in global context by demonstrating that they fall into categories that appear to be universal' (p. 29), although they note the existence of some unusual categories. They identify four main types of folktales in Burma, according to the functions which the authors believe they fulfilled: mythic explanatory, entertaining, didactic and compound.

Part II of the book contains a selection of folktales recorded in Burma. By category, these are: human origin (13), phenomena (18), wonder (19), trickster/simpleton (16), guidance (lay) (12), guidance (clerical) (5), monk's tales (6), Jatakas (6), compound (6). There is no explanation for the proportion of tales chosen for each category.

The authors' principal paradigm consists of comparing folktales cross-culturally by category, i.e., the percentage of stories in specific categories in different cultures. This procedure entails the assumption that folktales can be divorced from their social, linguistic and historical contexts. While this procedure is very old, embodied in such classic studies as Frazier's *The Golden Bough*, many contemporary scholars would dismiss it as outmoded. The procedure by which the folktales here were collected is also arguable; many different published sources were used, of varying quality: e.g. the tale of the were-pig may have been edited for a Western audience by its British translator (p. 129). Story 49, 'The silver hill' (p. 204), a Manohara legend found in the Avadanas, and in the reliefs of Borobudur, is here reproduced in 1878 British style, in the form of a dramatic script. The tale has obviously been retold from a non-Burmese perspective; it is impossible to calculate how much it differs from a Burmese original. Thus the utility of using these stories for linguistic, thematic and motif analysis must be judged dubious. A related difficulty is that the folktales in this volume are not only derived from the Bamar ethno-linguistic group; many other groups living within the political boundaries of modern Burma such as the Padaung, Lahu, Kachin and Lisu also contributed folktales found here. The origin group of individual folktales is noted, but no further analysis of differences between groups is attempted.

The authors indicate a distinct tendency to form their principal comparisons with Europe, rather than other parts of Asia. For example, Grimms' fairy tales are often cited. Among trickster tales, one (p. 220) is compared to a Jataka tale, the next to David and Goliath, the following one to East Africa. The significance of these similarities is not enunciated. What do we conclude, other than similarities in folklore exist cross-culturally?

The authors evince some ambiguity about the viability and heuristic utility of their classification scheme several times. For example, they note that the tale of the Padaung scholar does not fit entirely into either trickster or wonder tales (p. 221). In the concluding section they acknowledge that their classification scheme is simplistic (p. 336), but they do not propose any solution; they do not give a reason why they are using any system at all. What is the function of classifying folktales: to facilitate cross-cultural comparison? Is that goal productive or logical? What insights can it produce, unless one adopts a psychoanalytical approach to culture? One suggestion the authors propose is that comparison can trace communication between groups (p. 45). In respect to Jataka tales, they quote a 1964 Western source to support the idea that Jataka tales in Burma are syntheses of orthodoxy and folk tales. As an example, they cite the common story of the monkey and the crocodile to show that folk tales and Jataka have common story lines (p. 315). Apparently they do not consider the probability that this similarity is not the result of coincidence, but that the Jataka originated from a folk tale, or vice versa.

The book does contain suggestions for potentially more fruitful lines of inquiry on this subject (pp. 41–4). Possibilities listed include genre analysis; situation-specific practices; communicative purposes; and socio-linguistics. If classification were indeed the goal, one could attempt to compare the qualities or types of categories in each culture. For example it might be more useful to emphasise the unique categories found in Burma rather than attempt to create universal types. It is more likely that folklore

studies will be useful in the context of the study of Burmese literature or anthropology than as a separate field of study.

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*The Making of Modern Burma*

THANT MYINT-U

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Pp. 284. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

While progress in the historiography of Burma is slow, the last few decades have seen the emergence of new and stimulating research agendas. This includes contributions to the structure of early Konbaung (1752–1819) state and society, processes of commercialisation, political and cultural integration, the reforms of King Mindon after the British conquest of Lower Burma (1826–52), British ‘informal empire’ and the annexation of Upper Burma (1886), as well as changes in government and administration. Thant Myint-U weaves these new strands of research into his own narrative, which is an ambitious attempt to explain historical processes in both Konbaung and early colonial Upper Burma as some of the main factors contributing to the instability of independent Burma and its propensity for military rule. The collision of Burma with the imperialist British and the loss of Lower Burma, he argues, forced the kings to execute drastic domestic reforms that, combined with foreign economic penetration, undermined Burmese institutions. After annexation, the British created entirely new structures that were ‘unrooted in local society’ (p. 254). The author supports his argument using both Burmese and English published sources as well as a select range of archival material.

In the initial chapters, he portrays a differentiated society and expanding polity in the first half of the nineteenth century, which he describes as being marked by political, economic and cultural centralisation. Then, confrontation with British imperialism in two wars (1824–26, 1852–53) radically changed the terms of Burma’s existence. The shock of the British annexation of Pegu ushered in the reign of King Mindon, who initiated a series of far-reaching reforms. Rearrangements of the revenue administration allotted a larger share to the central government, while local headmen, Thant Myint-U argues, came under firmer control and lost their hereditary prerogative of office. However, the evidence suggests that the latter process was more uneven than the author allows, since many documents of this period testify that hereditary rights for office were confirmed.

Thant Myint-U continues by discussing how Mindon, compelled by internal rebellion and external pressures, surrendered his control over the economy to the mechanisms of Britain’s ‘informal empire’. Under his son Thibaw, the destructive effects of both internal reforms and external economic influences made the government lose control over the countryside to disobedient local chiefs or bands of outlaws. The author’s argument would have been more convincing if he had elaborated in more detail how unrest in Thibaw’s reign was rooted in earlier developments.

According to the author, the British eventually felt unable to accept a regime that defied their attempts at controlling foreign affairs yet at the same time was too weak to protect commercial exchange. Therefore, the king was deposed, and Upper Burma was annexed. Thant Myint-U strongly emphasises administrative defects inside Upper Burma as responsible for the British decision to install direct administration. The discussion of British policies before 1886 could have been improved by a wider use of archival sources and monographs offering greater detail. This would have shown that concerns about the security of traders played only a minor role in the decision for intervention. Similarly, in order to explain the administrative changes after the annexation and the emergence of modern Burma in general, Thant Myint-U should have given more space to developments in British-ruled Lower Burma, where both socio-economic trends and administrative patterns set precedents for later policies.

British rule then reshaped Upper Burma's society and turned the economy into a British market. In the most thoroughly researched and most convincing parts of the book, Thant Myint-U traces the transformation of land ownership and revenue structures in the initial years of colonial rule. Former social gradations were abandoned; some established notables and more recent newcomers managed to transfer their resources into the colonial era, while others failed.

In several other parts of the book, however, the author has not established a factual basis sufficient to support his argument. For example, he has not proven his claim that the integration of Upper Burma into a contracting global economy triggered downward economic trends and contributed to the fall of the kingdom (esp. pp. 142–8, 178–85, 248–9). He lays much emphasis on worsening terms of trade, but uses isolated and inaccurate price data. In fact, the depreciation of the silver rupee from 1873 helped to support high prices for domestic (export) produce in both India and Burma while prices for imported textiles fell. The author further argues that Upper Burma's textile industry collapsed. He cites one source in support of his point (p. 181, n. 108) that actually, beside other evidence, testifies against him. He presents shrinking imports of fish paste, a widely used condiment, in 1881–82 as indicating a decline in popular income (p. 183). Later figures – the existence of which the author denies – show a recovery in 1884–85, and all figures of the 1880s were well above the level of the 1870s. Finally, higher imports of silk textiles, one reads, did not indicate rising consumption by the common people since sumptuary laws only allowed the elite to wear silk (p. 147). At this point, Thant Myint-U should have discussed evidence to the contrary, including statements describing silk clothes as 'almost universal in Burma among all but the poorest of both sexes' (Henry Yule, *A Narrative of the Mission to the Court of Ava in 1855* [Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1968], p. 144). Furthermore, one finds a surprising number of spelling mistakes, missing or wrong references, and factual errors throughout the book.

Such deficiencies diminish the quality of the book. Its greatest strength lies in connecting hitherto separated research agendas on precolonial and colonial Burma. Thant Myint-U's thoughtful account raises fruitful questions and will stimulate the debate on modern Burmese history.

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## Singapore

*The Politics of Policy Making in Singapore*

HO KHAI LEONG

Singapore: Oxford University Press, 2000. Pp. xi, 258. Figures, Tables, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

This work is timely and a welcome addition to the international literature of public policy making, to which Singapore Studies has been slow to contribute. The author, Ho Khai Leong, is concerned with tracing the formation of policy making in Singapore, its political antecedents and its entry into the public sphere. Ho begins his book by noting that it has 'a modest objective' of providing a structure for analysis rather than supplying 'a set of definitive answers' (p. 2). It is his intention to start the ball rolling on the study of policy making in Singapore. This is certainly a worthy project. Whether Ho has provided an appropriate structure for analysis, however, can only be determined by further scholarship.

Two questions are posed by this work – 1) 'What are the roles played by political institutions in policy-making?' 2) 'What are dynamics with the policy making process that would enhance an understanding of Singapore's politics?' (p. 1). The first of these questions is amply answered through an examination of institutions and elite participation. He begins with the transparent point that policy making is political, yet he conceives of 'political' in a narrow framework. Ho then turns to the role of elite policy makers and poses representation as the solution to bureaucracy. This is an interesting contention in the light of his argument that the high levels of bureaucracy in Singapore have led to a heightened politicization of bureaucracy. In many ways, the strength of this book lies in his discussion of the machinations of Singaporean bureaucracy; the research is also strongest in this area. It is institutional formations that fascinate Ho, rather than the perhaps more loaded question of policy implication and response.

What is fundamentally absent from this book is a discussion of policy outcomes; by focusing on policy objectives, Ho obscures rather than illuminates his subject. This is the cause of his failure to answer his second question. The dynamics of policy making must include outcomes – our understanding of Singapore's politics is not enhanced by incomplete discussions. There are many missed opportunities for analysis in this work; Ho allows several critical issues to remain at the fringe of his study, perhaps inviting others to pick up the gauntlet. A case in point is the discussion of statutory boards. Ho argues that the creation of statutory boards has led to an increase in the scale of government – an absorbing area for further comment. In a similar vein, Ho comes close to making a significant statement about the failure of the bureaucracy to allow people to voice grievances and seek redress, but hides it in comments about the role Members of Parliament play in representation and access to feed-back.

*The Politics of Policy Making in Singapore* reads more like a series of articles woven together than a discreet thesis. It is unclear at times who the intended audience is, as Ho vacillates between addressing a Singapore-savvy reader and a general international reader. There are several examples of repeated information whereas with a more directed approach the book would be more rewarding. Much of the work is devoted to charts,



diagrams, tables and models – an attempt to clarify the specifics of the Singaporean context. Ho seeks to devise a series of models to understand and predict policy making in Singapore; by doing so, he oversimplifies what is a highly complex and specific society and system. Despite these failings, *The Politics of Policy Making in Singapore* makes an important contribution and opens the way for further appraisal of Singapore Government policy.

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### Vietnam

*Vietnamese Villages in Transition: Background and Consequences of Reform Policies in Rural Vietnam*

Edited by BERNHARD DAHM and VINCENT J. H. HOUBEN

Passau: Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Passau University, 1999. Pp. xiv, 224. Maps, Notes, Tables, Bibliography.

The *doi moi* reforms since the 1980s have transformed rural Vietnam, and this book sets out to examine their impact. Based on recent ‘microscopic’ research, it provides background and context to processes that have brought sweeping change to the countryside. The result is a coherently structured volume of essays on different aspects of life in villages, offering answers to a number of questions while raising many others.

The book’s aim is to present research on ‘developments in Vietnamese villages’ under reform (p. vii). While this seems a broad remit, the scope of the book is no less extensive. Historical background is presented in the first three chapters. Two of these (by John Kleinen and Nguyen Quang Ngoc) offer literature surveys on the village. The third (by Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet) examines the establishment of cooperatives in the late 1950s, revealing the object of reform: a system of collectivised agriculture that was unpopular from the start. The second half of the book presents the findings of research into contemporary rural change. The return of farmland to households is the subject of the fourth chapter (by Martin Grossheim), followed by an examination of developments in craft villages (by Annette Spitzenpfeil). The final chapters describe transformations experienced by women (Kirsten W. Endres), the health and education sectors (Grossheim and Endres) and the practice of ritual (Endres). The research was sited in northern and southern Vietnam, achieving a balance of geographical perspective and allowing for comparative analysis.

The book’s historical, geographical and thematic range is derived from fieldwork conducted in four villages. The chapters move from theme to theme in a neat progression. On the way, we are led into the dilemmas of collectivisation. Reports of jubilant masses jostle with observations that they participated only after official invitations to explain their objections (pp. 67, 77). We learn how work on the cooperatives aggravated local resentments. For example, the villagers of Ngoc Xuyen scorned those of Doan Bai, who ‘didn’t know anything about growing vegetables’ (p. 93). We discover how decollectivisation prompted land disputes. The inhabitants of Trinh Xa

complained of small, scattered fields and the impossibility of equal distribution (p. 105). We hear of challenges posed by competition for markets previously guaranteed by state procurement. In the case of the village of Long Dinh, craft workshops sold their mats directly to Korean buyers. And, in a fascinating vignette, we see how new freedoms reinforced old fractures: the Tran patrilineage of Da Hoi village hijacked the state restructuring of ritual, replacing defunct forms of public worship with a new 'village tradition' consecrated to their own ancestors (pp. 206–7).

The success of reform in Vietnam's villages is an important question implied by the research. Many things changed, and freedoms created multiple opportunities. But there were costs and difficulties too. Access to loans, for example, emerged as a major worry (pp. 113–5, 150, 161–5), and Grossheim ends his chapter with advice to the government to accelerate the issue of the land titles for use as collateral. Transportation of goods to market has remained a challenge, as Spitzenpfeil notes in a discussion of the 'annoying problem' of a village road (p. 128). Data from her craft village study show how the opportunities and costs of market development challenged pre-existing patterns of organisation. Some of the villagers of Da Hoi responded by establishing factories in Hanoi, pitting mechanised manufacture in the city against traditional methods in the village (but no interviews were conducted with Da Hoi villagers working in Hanoi). The villagers of Binh My were forced to improve the quality of their production, and while some succeeded, the majority sought alternative employment. The book's coherence would have been enhanced by an editorial decision to include a conclusion evaluating 'the success of *doi moi* policy since 1986' (p. 89). Different people reacted to reform in different ways. Many reactions involved a change in profession, and even a change in place of employment – 2,000 workers from other communes (how far away?) are reported in the workshops of Da Hoi (p. 127). Data presented here show how the structural economic changes and the networks created by these reactions challenged the position of 'the village' as the dominant unit of economic and social activity in the countryside. In the 1950s, a dream of socialist village organisation was put together, and in the 1980s it started coming apart. The dismantling of the cooperatives launched an erosion of the village's role as a focus for rural life in Vietnam.

The role of the village is questioned by Kleinen in the opening chapter. 'The Vietnamese countryside', he reassures us, 'is not just an aggregation of villages' (p. 26). However this book confirms his observation that scholarly attention focused on the village is 'not yet out of fashion' (p. 4). In his literature survey, he takes us through the history of the village study, from colonial, socialist and US-sponsored studies to the resurgence of foreign anthropology in the 1990s. This book is also a product of the 1990s, reflecting – in an era of multiple linkages between academia and aid work – the concerns of both scholarship and development. However, the project's preoccupation with the village underlines its reliance on an academic tradition in Vietnamese studies, in which the "blurring" of village boundaries' is still in its infancy (p. 4).

The editors offer no synthesis of Kleinen's insights with the findings of the empirical research on reform. The main question raised by the book, as a result, is not how teachers have used the market to improve their 'lot' under reform (p. 192) (through practices of exam rigging), nor what lies behind Vietnamese stereotypes of male laziness and female drudgery uncritically presented in the chapter on women (p. 158, 170). It is how the

project's empirical findings link up with theoretical understandings of the transformations brought about by *doi moi*. In the absence of a formal synthesis, the last line of Kleinen's essay must stand as the book's conclusion: 'expanding market forces will change this society sooner than expected' (p. 27).

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*The United States and Australia in Vietnam, 1954–1968: Silent Partners*

RONALD BRUCE FRANKUM, JR.

Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001. Pp. vi, 344. Tables, Notes, Annotated Bibliography, Index.

In recent years, the most common memory of the Vietnam War in both the United States and Australia seems to be one of increasingly strident opposition at home and failure in the field. Americans rarely remember there were any Australians in Vietnam, but Australians seem often to see their Vietnam experience as one in which weak governments in Canberra danced like a puppet to an American tune. At first glance then, this sentence in Ronald Bruce Frankum Jr's study seems to suggest his research confirms this perception: 'When [Australian Prime Minister Harold] Holt proclaimed that he was "all the way with LBJ", he simply restated the basic tenet in Australian foreign policy since the Coral Sea – the United States was the major guarantor of Australian security' (p. 279). But in fact Frankum's study is more nuanced. Indeed, it directly challenges the view that Australia was a captive mercenary fighting a distant war against its own interests and judgement. This study of how and why Australia became involved as such a close ally in the long American involvement in Vietnam does succeed in clearing up some old arguments and raising some fresh points.

Frankum's overriding concerns are the relations between governments and Western involvement in Southeast Asia. There is very little discussion of wider Australian or American views of events and policies, nor much about Asian reactions, not even the South Vietnamese. This produces some weaknesses. The argument that Australia was seen as a useful bridge between the region and the West because it was untainted by colonialism and generous with aid should at least be qualified by consideration of the controversial 'white Australia' policy that prevailed beyond the period studied here. At times the reader can nearly drown in the day-to-day flow of diplomatic comings, goings and discussions, in what some will see as 'old style' diplomatic history. There is also not much very new added on the American side, other than their views on the Australians. But regarding the Australian government and its policy towards the region, there are some insights to be gained within.

Frankum argues that the French defeat in Vietnam in 1954 and the British reluctance to intervene provoked an American decision to take over the waging of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, and an Australian decision to adapt to this turn of events. This logically extended an Australian policy of relying primarily on the US for defence support that dated back to the dire days of 1942. Australian policy from this point was

conceived and determined primarily on concrete and rational geopolitical grounds. Australia needed a great power ally to survive in a turbulent region, and the US was now the only real choice, so Australia did what it could to foster close ties with the US without compromising or overextending itself. The policy was 'forward defence', but the only way it could work was by encouraging the US to take the lead. That meant Australia must always provide the kind of help most likely to keep the US committed to defending the region. This was a 'made in Australia' decision. It reflected a view of Southeast Asia as a volatile and alien neighbour liable to be swallowed by communist expansion, which would leave Australia in the front line. That was why Australia supported the Dutch in New Guinea until it became clear they would not stay, then abandoned them in return for an American guarantee. It also explains why Australia shifted emphasis from supporting the British and Malaysians in the Confrontation with Indonesia to supporting the Americans in Vietnam. Australia could not stand alone.

Frankum offers interesting portrayals of Robert Menzies and Holt (both Prime Ministers of Australia), and Percy Spender and Richard Casey (both Australian diplomats). He makes a convincing argument regarding why the Labour Party failed to offer effective criticism of Australian policy on Vietnam before 1968 that will give some readers a long overdue pause for reflection. On the other hand, there is interesting criticism of the unwarranted secrecy by which the Menzies government decided to escalate the commitment in Vietnam, a theme that deserved more attention. The discussion of the non-American 'third country' role in the war is a bit narrow, but does raise one or two useful points of comparison. An annotated bibliography that includes both archival and secondary sources is a nice touch, if revealing an obvious intent to outdo the official histories sponsored by the Australian War Memorial. Some Australian readers will probably find themselves wishing their foreign policy was as coherent and rational as depicted here, but this is a well-documented analysis. Outcomes and intent should not be confused, and they are not here. There are some delightful insights on the bilateral relationship, for instance confusion over the meaning of the expression 'feet to the fire', that actually indicate how much more the area of mutual perceptions might have been explored. Indeed, there is a certain excess of rationality and lack of colour throughout the study. It is not for the general reader and it does get too close to the day-to-day arguments of the diplomats, at the expense of the broader picture. Yet it does succeed as a study of how and why a smaller power can make up its own mind to ally with and support a larger patron for its own reasons, and be junior but not slavish. In this cynical time, that is a theme worth some consideration.

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*Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900–1931*

TRUONG BUU LAM

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. Pp. viii, 328. Plates, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

Scholars of Vietnam have produced few textbooks in English on Vietnamese history and regularly lament the lack of translated source materials for the period before 1965. It is thus a pleasure to review Truong Buu Lam's source book of primary texts from the colonial period in Vietnam. By providing three introductory chapters to frame the collection, and annotations on each of the readings, Lam has provided an excellent resource for Vietnam studies.

Students of Vietnamese history have long been aware of Lam's classic monograph, *Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention* (New Haven: Yale Southeast Asian Studies, 1967), in which the author presented selected translations of Chinese, Vietnamese and French documents on the period from 1858 to 1900. This book, then, is a fitting sequel. Lam has made a judicious choice of documents to illustrate the transformations Vietnam underwent in the first three decades of this century. For example, he has provided excerpts of writings by well-known anti-colonial activists such as Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chau Trinh, Nguyen An Ninh, and Tran Huy Lieu. He has also included documents from individuals who collaborated with the French regime.

Truong Buu Lam prefaces his translations with three analytic chapters. In the first chapter, he lays out the character of the colonial administration and its appendages. My only quibble with this chapter is that it may leave the reader with the impression that the colonial state was well-ordered. In practice, this state could be surprisingly chaotic and ill-organised. A second chapter addresses an important issue: what were Vietnamese perceptions of colonial rule? Lam discusses French repression, illustrating his points with a raft of anecdotes. Anyone who has read Vietnamese newspapers from 1920s and 1930s will find these accounts familiar.

Truong Buu Lam then turns to discuss the rise of anti-colonial movements. Among other topics, he argues that many theories on peasant discontent and rebellion, such as those on millenarianism, moral economy and the rational peasant, should not be extrapolated to explain anti-colonial movements. He suggests that leaders of anti-colonial movements relied on anti-foreignism, on the one hand, and the desire to free Vietnamese from their 'colonial bondage', on the other (p. 40). There is a clear logic to this argument, but I am not convinced that theories that explain peasant rebellion are completely irrelevant to the study of national movements.

The third introductory chapter, entitled 'The Vietnamese Description of Colonialism', overlaps in content with the second. It is unclear at times if Lam is simply recounting Vietnamese descriptions of colonialism, or if he is providing his own interpretation as well. He writes, for example, that '[i]t is clear that French colonisation removed from the Vietnamese all rights, human and otherwise. The freedom of religion or of conscience constituted one of those rights' (p. 83). Given that the vast majority of Catholics and Buddhists were free to practice their religion, and that Vietnamese had a certain limited leeway to use the press to express opposition to the colonial regime, such comments deserve to be clarified.

The heart of the book, of course, consists of the translated documents. Truong Buu

Lam has chosen his documents well. Thus, he has provided the reader with documents by an anti-colonial prince (Cuong De), a Westernised youth (Nguyen An Ninh), the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang or Nationalist Party, a reformist Confucian (Huynh Thuc Khang), two famous collaborators (Hoang Cao Khai and Pham Quynh), communists (Tran Phu), and more. Each translation is prefaced with a short historical introduction to situate the excerpt. (While the preface to Pham Quynh's selection might strike some as polemical, it is also true that passions ride high about this famous collaborator with the French.) The translations are quite readable. Given that the collection is entitled 'colonialism experienced', however, I would have liked to see a few documents that described in greater detail the social impact of colonial rule: for example, memoirs or reports on plantation labour, the prison experience, women's lives, or the experience of daily life.

The University of Michigan is to be commended for publishing this important work by a pioneer of Vietnamese studies in the United States. The book will be of use both to specialists on Vietnam and to those needing primary sources to teach classes on Southeast Asian history or on colonialism. Many of these texts are not available anywhere else in English translation.

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