

comparative work with other regions (and see her postscript, 'State of the field: Studying women and gender in Southeast Asia', *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 4, 1 [2007]: 113–36). It serves in addition as a very good introduction to the social history of the region.

JOHN K. WHITMORE
University of Michigan

Nationalism in Southeast Asia

By NICHOLAS TARLING

New York: Routledge, 2004. Pp. 273. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463407000306

There has been, in the last few decades, a proliferation of academic works that seek to examine the history of 'nationalism': its origins, evolution, propagators, opponents, inheritors and victims in the Southeast Asian context. From the magistral works of William Roff and Reynaldo C. Ileto to the more recent and highly acclaimed monograph by Thongchai Winichakul, the history of nationalism in Southeast Asia will, for certain, persist as a topic of scholarly interest and debate in the many years to come.

With that said, preceding historical studies on nationalism in Southeast Asia have suffered from two key inadequacies. There have been very few notable attempts at transcending the political boundaries of the nation-states towards the narration and analysis of nationalist movements and counter-movements within a wider conceptual category known today as 'Southeast Asia'. Admittedly, such scholarly inertia is expected given the diverse ethnic landscape of the region which necessitates the mastery of several languages – an enterprise that will require several lifetimes. The second inadequacy is the lack of a sustained endeavour to engage with the theories of nationalism. Indeed, scholars of Southeast Asia have, in general, been dependent upon ideas that were manufactured and continually re-formulated by theorists whose data were derived largely from the studies of European, African, American and South Asian histories.

These are the crucial gaps which the author of *Nationalism in Southeast Asia* hopes to address. In doing so, Nicholas Tarling duly admits that the book is '[a]bsurdly ambitious' (p. 3). To be sure, he has gone further to situate nationalist developments in Southeast Asia within an international context so as to open up possibilities for comparisons with similar movements that were pursued in other parts of the globe. Scholars of the histories of what are currently known as Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia, Brunei, Singapore, Burma and Vietnam may find Tarling's text rather amateurish due to the author's over-reliance upon secondary works. Be that as it may, I would argue that the vital contribution of the book is to be found not in the unearthing of obscured facts but in the manifestly skilful ability to provide an integrated synthesis of established arguments. The spread and sustenance of

nationalist notions, as Tarling maintains throughout the book, are based, in most instances, upon capricious intentions which have in turn led to capricious outcomes.

The book begins with an elucidation and critique of primordialist, instrumentalist and situationalist explanations of the genesis and progress of nationalism as a modern ideology. The constructionist theory of nationalism, in Tarling's perspective, provides the most instructive, albeit tentative, framework for the study of Southeast Asian nationalist movements for the reason that 'it leaves room for the activities of elites and masses, for individuals. They have to make choices within whatever range of options they perceive to be available, seeking help, following example, using resources, in their endeavour to build nations, states or regimes' (p. 27).

In Chapters 2 to 4, the author provides a chronological description of the social, economic, religious and political factors which had brought about the transplanting and permutation of nationalist ideas from Europe to different parts of Southeast Asia. Such a process began with the collapse of traditional kingdoms which gave way to the establishment of colonial states. It is but ironic that in the course of consolidating power, defining boundaries, promoting formal education, transforming pre-modern economies into capitalist forms and embedding highly developed technologies, colonialism generated new imaginings of the Self and the Other amongst Southeast Asians. Elites that had succumbed to the sway of nationalist ideas struggled 'to define the ambit of their action; was it all or part of the colonial state? Was it more? The process of definition would be influenced by their education, their understanding of the concept and their analysis of the circumstances in which they were operating' (p. 86).

Shaped by experiences of the Japanese Occupation whereby the myth of Western superiority had been laid bare, nationalism in the post-Second World War era traversed radically different trajectories. Chapters 5 to 8 document these developments in a most lucid way. Although the narratives of the struggles towards independence are generally known, Tarling identifies a common thread, namely that the newly declared nations 'faced similar tasks, building states and building nations. Too often, their leaders fell back on building regimes' (p. 161). Most, if not, all of the power elites in post-independent states of Southeast Asia resorted to authoritarian rule garbed by the rhetoric of democracy. In countries such as Malaysia and Singapore, the voices of opposition were effectively silenced or co-opted by the ruling party. The fates of geographically extensive and ethnically diverse states like Indonesia, Burma and Philippines were, however, different. Popular sovereignty was seldom achieved. Violent and non-violent resistance of minorities and marginalised groupings to the imposition of national identities was unsuccessfully suppressed. Tarling concludes his narrative with the argument that Southeast Asian leaders have, by far, proved to be ineffective in fostering the spirit of nationhood.

The book ends with a critical exposition of historical writings which sought to construct teleological and mythical – often anachronistic – depictions of events which culminate in the making of nations in Southeast Asia. By way of concluding this review, although cursory in scope, *Nationalism in Southeast Asia* forces the reader to reconsider the modern history of the region. Indeed, it poses a direct challenge to historians of Southeast Asia to rethink and reconceptualise terminologies such as

‘nationalism’, ‘nations’ and ‘nation-states’ towards new definitions that are informed by indigenous experiences.

SYED MUHD KHAIRUDIN ALJUNIED

School of Oriental and African Studies, London

Indonesia

History in uniform: Military ideology and the construction of Indonesia's past

By KATHARINE E. MCGREGOR

Singapore: NUS Press, 2007. Pp. 330. ISBN Glossary, Notes, Bibliography, Index.
doi:10.1017/S0022463407000318

This work confirms Katharine McGregor's status as the leading thinker and writer on the political use of history for nation-building in Indonesia. She examines the role of the Indonesian military under the New Order (1966–98) and in particular that of Nugroho Notosusanto, the leading official historian in the New Order period, who peaked his career by becoming the Minister of Education in the Suharto government.

History in uniform shows the author's scholarship on the manner in which the Indonesian military tried to monopolise the construction of official history following the abortive coup in September 1965. Not only did this validate the military's role in politics, it also led to the creation of nationalist history throughout the period of Suharto's rule. In the era of post-Suharto *reformasi*, this period has become identified with crass anti-communism, authoritarianism, setbacks for democracy, promotion of military values and militarisation. Suharto's regime could not have been sustained without the broader international setting of the Cold War, especially the support and endorsement of the West. In particular, the support of the United States was vital, as it emerged as the key player in Indonesia following the collapse of Sukarno and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). The period is also marked by gross violations of human rights, with deaths of more than half a million Indonesian communists and the dehumanising internment of thousands.

For anyone interested in the politics and history of the New Order, this book is a must read. It shows succinctly how the key leaders moved very quickly to establish their legitimacy by gaining control of the content of how the immediate past – namely, President Sukarno and his closest ally, the PKI – was to be represented in the minds of the public. This was undertaken by blaming them for the brutal murder of the leading Army generals, while Communist ideology was portrayed as the source of most evils and something alien to Muslim Indonesia. This approach was intended not only to strengthen regime security but also with an eye to the international political landscape, where the Cold War was being fought with renewed vigour in Indochina. Such a situation created a ‘natural alliance’ between the New Order and the global anti-communist forces. This ‘natural alliance’ played a critical role in the sustenance of the New Order, which survived for 32 years until May 1998, when Suharto was forced to resign.

The author analyses the role of Nugroho and the Armed Forces History Centre. With the object of producing a new nationalist ideology that legitimised the New