

products. Based on its view of Southeast Asia as both a huge market and a strategic destination for investment, China is keen to further strengthen ties with the region.

The chapters illustrate how democratic governments and military regimes alike are constantly reminded of China's growing power and influence as reflected in its economic prowess and military might. Both maritime and mainland Southeast Asian nations are aware of an asymmetrical relationship that might swing in China's favour. The authors, however, have crafted a view that Southeast Asian countries have adopted a sophisticated hedging strategy to reap the benefits of economic cooperation while maintaining independent foreign policies and avoiding economic overdependence.

This book details the various countries' differing views on China's economic and political influence and their relations with China. China under Xi presents both opportunities and threats. On the one hand, as discussed in the chapters on Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia, Chinese investment is an important source for accelerating local infrastructure development. On the other hand, as the chapters on Vietnam and the Philippines indicate, there is a concurrent perception of China's rising influence as a threat to sovereignty and national security given its aggressive actions in the South China Sea. China's increasingly assertive unilateral actions have undermined its attempts to mount a charm offensive in the region.

In fact, many Southeast Asian nations try to safeguard their national security by deploying a 'balance of power' strategy to keep China's growing influence in check. Thailand's protracted negotiations with China on a railway project and Vietnam's reluctance to finalise infrastructure deals with China under the BRI are cases in point.

Nevertheless, an important omission in this book is its inadequate coverage of the historical, cultural and security dimensions of relations between China and Southeast Asia. Although an examination of contemporary trade, infrastructure development and economic ties is important to understanding bilateral relations between the region and China, it is not the whole story. History, culture, and national security are all indispensable factors that have influenced Southeast Asia's perceptions and engagement with China. Southeast Asian states never have and never will structure their relations with China solely on the basis of economic interest.

From research and professional perspectives, this book is a joy to read. Despite the abovementioned omission, this volume deserves the attention of students of Southeast Asia's relations with China, as well as observers of domestic and foreign policymaking in the region.

HONG YU

East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore

Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia's modern architecture: Questions of translation, epistemology, and power

Edited by JIAT HWEE CHANG and IMRAN BIN TAJUDEEN

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Confronted with the title *Southeast Asia's modern architecture*, one might expect a volume of essays about renowned twentieth-century architects and their works — Vann Molyvann, perhaps, or Rangsang Torsuwan. This new collection, edited by Jiat-Hwee Chang and Imran bin Tajudeen, has rather a different intention. It comprises essays concerned less with so-called 'capital-A Architecture', and more with the complex and problematic status of buildings as spaces of cultural projection. Some of these are typical or quotidian; others are symbols of national aspiration, political dominance, or contestation over fraught histories. In a few, the physical structure seems less important for-itself than as a medium of presentation and mis-translation (this is the case, for example, in H. Hazel Hahn's analysis of architectural tours of Saigon organised for celebrated Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore).

It is a diverse and rich collection, and reminds one of the value of focused scholarship on less well-trod architectural subjects. Laurence Chua and Koompong Noobamjong, for example, consider the difficult negotiation of vernacular forms, modernism, and state power in Thailand's tumultuous twentieth-century political history. Gerard Lico brings a Foucaultian lens to the nexus of hygiene and modern housing aesthetics in Manila. Peter Scriver and Amit Srivastava analyse the concoction of 'Bali Style', showing how the design languages of Geoffrey Bawa and others were used to create a touristic architectural currency, and to reinforce myths about the island's ethnic homogeneity. Eunice Seng's essay is perhaps more what one expects from the volume's title: a study of Singapore's famous brutalist People's Park Complex that elucidates the tactical development of an urban site that had long been a magnet for colonial (and post-) preoccupations with the control of Chinese informal urbanism. By contrast, other authors work to expand what might be considered 'modern' architecture. Tim Winter's chapter on 'Conservation diplomacy' in Myanmar's Bagan region makes a compelling case for the modernity of ruins — much as Tutin Ariyanti's study of Muslim women's prayer spaces attempts to re-situate these older architectures within a contemporary feminist critique. These subjects may not fit an orthodox definition of the subject; for many, though, they will serve to broaden the field in unexpected and insightful ways.

There is clearly a sense that this book is trying to do two distinct kinds of work. On the one hand, as noted, most of the authors present detailed case studies of Southeast Asian architectures and their shifting identities. On the other, the editors (alongside contributors Anoma Pieris and Mark Crinson) seem rather more concerned with the status of *region* or *nation* as an analytical frame. This engages less with the content of particular chapters, in favour of a critique of area studies and other Eurocentric approaches that privilege colonial histories and knowledge-systems. Pieris' astute intervention, titled 'Thinking beyond the nation: Repositioning national and regional identities through architectural discourse', also raises a series of larger disciplinary issues surrounding the ongoing biases of the state as a theoretical construct. This essay marks a rather abrupt shift in tone — positioned, as it is, among analyses of particular historical-cultural instances. And while the chapters' authors do much to connect specific sites with broader issues, Pieris interrogates the question of architectural historiography via problems of disciplinary approach. Crinson takes a

similarly high-level view, proposing a fluid and contemporary understanding of regionalism that moves beyond the influence of the national or the territorial.

The fact that this collection appears to operate at two quite distinct discursive levels — a grounded analysis by most chapter authors, and an editorial concern with theoretical and academic scaffolding — suggests, perhaps, other potential structures for it. It is possible that broader academic considerations would have worked well at the end, by way of giving the last words to Pieris, Crinson, and the editors themselves. While the editorial intervention is well taken, the concern with regionalism could have been given less room, with more attention paid to common themes that emerge among the chapters. I am unsure whether the ‘rigid, bounded and essentialist continental imaginaries’ of area studies need lengthy repudiation in 2021. A perhaps more original contribution of the volume (which the editors note) are histories of influence and connection within ‘Southeast Asia’, and to India, China, and other bordering cultural and financial powers. Another common theme, impossible to ignore among these national contexts, is the uneasy embrace of democracy and a creep toward modes of illiberalism. Presently, the text is organised under the more general themes of ‘translation’, ‘power’, and ‘epistemology’. These feel rather diffuse, and many of the essays could arguably fit into all three.

Regardless, many issues organically link the book’s micro-histories, and suggest an emergent agenda for architectural historians and theorists that might move beyond the limitations and *aporia* described in Pieris’ essay and in the introductory chapter. *Southeast Asia’s modern architecture* lacks the canonising orientation suggested by its title, and — for the better — offers a glimpse into broader and more heterogeneous territories.

JOSHUA COMAROFF
Yale-NUS College

Southeast Asia

Negotiating governance on non-traditional security in Southeast Asia and beyond

By MELY CABALLERO-ANTHONY

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One of the dangers books and scholarly publications in International Relations face is that of being overtaken by the reality of events. This is certainly not the case with Mely Caballero-Anthony’s book, *Negotiating governance on non-traditional security in Southeast Asia and beyond*, which despite being published more than two years before Covid-19 shook the foundations of the international system, seems to greatly anticipate current debates and reflections about what security is, and how in such a dynamic, interdependent and complex world to address a plethora of non-traditional security threats (NTS), which are no longer ‘limited to the balance