

## Book Reviews

### Asia

*Pelayaran Zheng He dan Alam Melayu*  
(The voyages of Zheng He and the Malay World)

By KONG YUANZHI

Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2000. Pp. 209. Tables, Maps, Illustrations, Bibliography, Index.

*Hubungan Empayar Melaka-Dinasti Ming abad ke-15*  
(Relations between the Melakan Empire and the Ming Dynasty in the fifteenth century)

By LIANG LIJI

Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1996. Pp. 145. Bibliography. Index.

Almost regardless of the quality of their content, these two volumes are worthy of note. In what are two of the first Southeast Asian history volumes written in Malay by PRC scholars, we have examples of Chinese scholarship being presented in a form accessible to readers of Malay. Both Liang Liji and Kong Yuanzhi have spent time as visiting professors in the Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu (Institute of Malay World and Civilization – ATMA) at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, allowing them to complete the two volumes under review, and it is under the auspices of ATMA that they are published. The 1996 volume, authored by Liang – a linguist born in Indonesia but long employed by Peking University – attempts an overall review of links between the ‘*Alam Melayu*’ (Malay World, which at ATMA includes the Peninsula, Java, Sumatra and virtually all the rest of insular Southeast Asia) and successive Chinese states. Liang begins his account with references from the *Han Shu*, compiled in the first century CE, which he claims as the first reference to links between ‘China’ and ‘*Alam Melayu*’. The account continues with mentions in classical Chinese texts of a range of early (mainly unidentified) Southeast Asian polities, and their links with successive Chinese polities. These and later references have already been brought to wide attention through the work of Wang Gungwu and Paul Wheatley, neither of whom is noted in this book’s bibliography.

By Chapter 2, Liang moves into territory better documented, exploring the links between the Ming court and the Melakan empire in the fifteenth century. In this, he employs both Ming sources and the *Sejarah Melayu* chronicle, but there is a marked predominance of Chinese textual references, with a useful chronology and *précis* of the *Ming Shi-lu* references to Ming–Melaka relations over the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (pp. 63-76). The most valuable part of this work, however, is its third chapter, comprising a study and revision of the Chinese–Malay word-list first published by Edwards and Blagden in the early 1930s (E.D. Edwards and C.O. Blagden, ‘A Chinese vocabulary of Malacca Malay words and phrases collected between A.D. 1403 and

1511(?)', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, 6, 3 (1931): 715-49). By providing southern Chinese dialectal readings of some of the characters and pointing out scribal errors, Liang has offered a number of generally convincing renderings of some of the terms unidentified or misidentified in the earlier study. This revised listing will be invaluable in any further research on the Malay language in the fifteenth century.

*Pelayaran Zheng He dan Alam Melayu*, authored by Kong Yuanzhi, has a quite different focus. While also concerning itself with historical interactions between China and Southeast Asia, the work concentrates on the maritime voyages of the eunuch admiral Zheng He in the early fifteenth century and the vestiges of his influence in, again, *Alam Melayu*. Kong is a specialist in Malay linguistics and literature at Peking University and has also worked in universities in Indonesia, the Netherlands and Malaysia. His other works on Zheng He (*Sam Po Kong dan Indonesia* (Jakarta: Haji Mas Agung, 1993) and *Muslim Tionghoa Cheng Ho, misteri perjalanan muhibah di Nusantara* (Jakarta: Pustaka Populer Obor, 2000)) contain some of the same material found in this volume. He is also well-known for his studies of Chinese loanwords in the languages of Southeast Asia. This volume addresses many of the questions that have long drawn the attention of scholars in China and elsewhere: Zheng He's background in Yunnan, his voyages, the origin of the name San-bao (Sam Po) the roles of other commanders who led the Chinese fleets together with Zheng He, the number of times the eunuch admiral visited Malacca, the 'princess' Hang Li Po, and the role of Islam in these voyages.

Kong's work also includes a very useful collection of the legends circulating in Malaysia and Indonesia relating to Zheng He, the modern dramatic representations of the story of Hang Li Po, exhibitions on the eunuch and his voyages and details of other Zheng He temples and legends throughout the archipelago. There is however, no attempt to synthesise the ways in which the stories of Zheng He and Hang Li Po have been utilised by various parties and the purposes thereof.

What is also missing in the two volumes is a critical assessment of the textual sources they draw upon. Neither of the authors was trained in the craft of history, and this has resulted in some citations and assessments which are less than well founded. Kong Yuanzhi, for example, quotes without caveat from *Xishan Zaji*, purportedly a local history from Fujian but generally regarded as a text of questionable origin. He also goes much further than his sources support, suggesting a close connection between the Ming rulers and Islam and asserting undocumented connections between Zheng He and Malacca's hilltop cemetery Bukit Cina.

These issues are intimately linked with the agendas of the two books. ATMA is interested in publicising the Melaka Sultanate in the fifteenth century, promoting Zheng He as a prominent regional Muslim, and stressing the range of '*Alam Melayu*'. While providing materials to endorse these views, the authors also couch their work within the framework provided by the official PRC views of China's historical relations with its neighbours. We thus read of the role of '*ren*' (benevolence) in Chinese foreign policy, are reminded repeatedly about '*persahabatan antara bangsa Melayu dan bangsa China*' (the friendship between the Malay and Chinese nations) and are assured that '*kuatnya China tidak akan mengancam Malaysia dan negara-negara lain*' (Chinese power will never threaten Malaysia and other nations). These representations are in accord with both long-standing PRC official historiographical conventions and the needs of contemporary diplomacy.

Even within these restraints, the works do provide useful materials for studying both Southeast Asia in the fifteenth century and Ming foreign policy, as well as for examining historical and contemporary popular Chinese culture in Southeast Asia. There are so few publications in these fields that any new contribution should be welcomed. As an aside, ATMA needs wider distribution channels for its publications than those which currently exist, as some people who have tried to purchase these works have been stymied in their efforts. Perhaps an on-line bookshop is needed.

GEOFF WADE

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### Southeast Asia

*Pollwatching, elections and civil society in Southeast Asia*

By WILLIAM CALLAHAN

Singapore: Ashgate, 2000. Pp.xiii, 200. Appendix, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

For students of either elections or civil society, this book offers a study of a fascinating topic. The author has focused on Poll Watch in Thailand and the National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) in the Philippines, showing how they attempted to mobilise civil society to improve the democratic quality of elections.

The section on Thailand is well-researched, the product of visits to several provinces during election campaigns and the accumulation of considerable documentation. The author tracks Poll Watch from its origins in 1992 until its head was appointed to the newly created Election Commission of Thailand in November 1997, and notes the variety of ways it has acted in different provinces. There are citations of press criticism as well as praise. Unfortunately, the coverage of the Philippines is much thinner and not always accurate.

Nevertheless, interesting comparisons are possible. Callahan points out that both election watch movements attempted to create an 'alternative political culture vis-à-vis patronage politics' (p. 125), and that both were essentially conservative, refraining from the promotion of socio-economic or even political change other than cleaning up elections. In fact, more radical NGOs in both countries criticised them for this.

But differences were perhaps more important. For instance, while the Catholic Church was the main backer of the movement in the Philippines, religious institutions played no role in Thailand. Nor was business backing found in Thailand as it was in the Philippines. Furthermore, while 'GONGOS' (Government Organised NGOs) were in disrepute in the Philippines, Poll Watch was proud of its government backing from the start. In fact, the author suggests that it could not have been successful without such backing, implying a deep divide between the political cultures of Thailand and the Philippines. However, structural differences were also important; he sometimes fails to remind the reader that 'government backing' in Thailand was in the first instance from a non-partisan Cabinet appointed by the King which was not running for election – an impossibility in the Philippines.

Perhaps the most significant difference is found in the priority given to the fight

against vote-buying in Thailand, which receives little emphasis in the discussion of the Philippines, even though the phenomenon is widespread – though illegal – in both countries. The attack by Poll Watch was moralistic and educational, but also involved presenting evidence of law violations to the police, who very seldom brought charges (p. 108). Nevertheless, there seemed to be some success. Irate voters would often call Poll Watch offices complaining about vote-buying; some even handed in the money they had received. In a rare case a group of canvassers were caught with 11 million *baht* packaged for vote-buying. Their conviction was finally confirmed by the Supreme Court, where they were sentenced to a year in jail and forfeiture of the money (p. 137). This has never happened in the Philippines. (Cardinal Jaime Sin, resigned to the futility of legal prosecution, advised voters to ‘pocket the money and vote your conscience’ – a recommendation which, if practised, could also be subversive of patronage politics.)

Yet despite these hopeful signs, vote-buying in Thailand continued to expand. Callahan correctly points out that the practice is not simply a commercial transaction (p. 130). If successful, it is merely a reinforcement mechanism for ongoing patronage networks. He also notes that this has been a phenomenon in Thailand only in the last 20 years, i.e. since elected officials began to acquire real power and valuable perks. In the Philippines the practice is more than four decades older.

But Callahan fails to put this difference in the context of long-term social change. There is some evidence that Thailand is belatedly following the Philippine pattern. Traditionally, patrons helped maintain the loyalty of clients, ordained by the dominant ideology, through a variety of minor favours. With the introduction of elections which affected the actual distribution of power the client’s bargaining position improved; s/he began to expect cash. At the same time modernising influences were weakening the ideological foundations of patronage. The patron’s response was either more money or intimidation, or both. And more recently in the Philippines, if neither achieved the desired outcome, bribery of electoral officials at the municipal or provincial level who do the counting became more prominent. This explains NAMFREL’s concentration on the ‘Quick Count’, gathering and tabulating data from the village level to bypass corrupt intermediaries, thus making a gross distortion by the Commission on Elections in the final count more difficult to justify. Violence at election time in Thailand is already increasing; its Election Commission may soon face other Philippine-type challenges. The comparison deserves to be pursued in more depth.

Callahan’s belated inclusion of Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia in his comparison is very brief and superficial. He does not even distinguish between the character of elections in the latter two. Thus the reader, seeing the title and expecting full regional coverage, is disappointed.

This book includes frequent reference to ‘corruption’, often seeming to equate the end of corruption with clean elections, an oversimplification at the very least. And corruption itself is given a definition so broad – ‘practices which avoid the democratic process’ (p. 151) – that it loses all analytical value. Thus it is not surprising that the sweeping recommendations for reform set forth in the conclusion offer an impossibly difficult agenda. Given the detail in the description of the Thai case, one

would have at least hoped for suggestions of specific measures that might help bring real democratic change for Thailand in the near future.

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*Islam and the Malay-Indonesian world: Transmission and responses*

By PETER RIDDELL

London: Hurst, 2001. Pp. xvii, 349. Maps, Tables, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

Research on Islam in Southeast Asia has long differed from its counterpart in the Middle East. From the nineteenth century on, textualists and religious scholars dominated the study of Islam in the latter region, with social scientists playing a decidedly secondary role. In Southeast Asia, by contrast, textual and religious-studies approaches have played second fiddle to anthropology, social history and political science. The result has been that specialists of Southeast Asian Islam have devoted less attention to the textual and doctrinal detail of Islam than have their colleagues in Middle Eastern studies.

In this thoughtful book, Peter Riddell sets out to adjust that intellectual imbalance by providing a comprehensive overview of the transmission and adaptation of key Islamic ideas in the Malay-Indonesian world from the thirteenth century to the end of the twentieth. The author devotes special attention to 'theological issues' and the 'religious dimension of Islam' (p. 2). The primary materials on which he draws are Malay, Javanese and Arabic texts used by Malay-Indonesian Muslims. These illuminate the changing theological concerns addressed by Southeast Asian Muslims over time.

Having laid out his intentions in the book's first pages, Riddell devotes the next ninety pages to an overview of the scriptural and intellectual foundations of Islam as developed in the Middle East after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Writing in an untechnical style intended for the educated student unfamiliar with Islamic history, Riddell reviews the origins and early compilation of the Qur'an, debates concerning the role of reason as opposed to revelation, the development of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*) and law (*shari'a*), the changing role of mysticism and the rise of reformism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Specialists familiar with this background may question Riddell's decision to devote so much of his book to non-Southeast Asian materials. However, in the preface to his book, Riddell explains that he hopes to 'to maximise the accessibility to a potential non-specialist audience' (p. v). Viewed from this perspective, the decision to include non-Southeast Asian materials seems justified and enhances the book's utility as an all-in-one introduction to the development of Islamic thought in the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

The overview itself is clearly written and judicious in its choice of themes. However, readers interested in modern Islam will note that Riddell waxes most expansive when discussing authors from the classical and middle periods of Islamic history. By comparison with premodern scholars, twentieth-century writers have

shown a dizzying array of styles and concerns; specialists of Islam have not yet reached a consensus as to how to engage this variety. Riddell takes note of this modern embarrassment of riches, but opts to provide a quick survey and general typology rather than a detailed framework for understanding modern Islamic thought.

When, in the last two-thirds of the book, the author turns back to Southeast Asian materials, he again organises his presentation by periods and themes. In this section, too, he seems most at ease when discussing events prior to the twentieth century. The scope of coverage is nonetheless remarkable, offering the most comprehensive overview of the development of Islamic thought in Southeast Asia yet available.

In one of the book's most sustained discussions, the author shows that mystical Sufism, not *shari`a*-minded legalism, was the 'theological default' (p. 317) during the first centuries of Islam in Southeast Asia. 'A non-Sufi *shari`a*-focused orthodoxy was always running to catch up, as it were, and it was to take several centuries more before Sufism was to be pushed to the margins' (p. 138). The most striking exception to this pattern of Sufi hegemony, Riddell demonstrates, was in the critically important field of Qur'anic exegesis. Contrary to the pattern in the Middle East, none of the major Arabic or Malay commentaries used in the Malay-Indonesian world adopted a Sufi or allegorical interpretation when interpreting Qur'anic verse. In this way, Qur'anic exegesis 'provided one of the key channels for the transmission of non-Sufi thinking which was to assume centre stage in a later period of Malay Islamic history' (p. 167).

Sufi perspectives on Islam held their own well into the nineteenth century, and they are still popular among ordinary Muslims to this day. Drawing on materials from Aceh in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and Java in the eighteenth and nineteenth, however, Riddell reveals how theosophical and pantheist variants of Sufism were slowly displaced by a *shari`a*-sensitive reformed Sufism. Influenced by events at centres of learning in the Arab Middle East, in the late nineteenth century Malay Muslims went one step further, shifting from Sufism as the primary vehicle for their faith to a more legalistic and revivalist Islam.

The book's last sections provide an overview of key Muslim thinkers in the twentieth century, as well as side discussions of modern Qur'anic exegesis and preaching. In this portion of the book Riddell opts for breadth rather than depth – in part, no doubt, because of the extraordinary intellectual pluralism that marks twentieth-century Islam. Theological trends remain primary but, more than in any other section of the book, the author makes significant concessions to political trends in choosing his subjects. Politicians like Abdurrahman Wahid and Anwar Ibrahim, who have written little of an explicitly theological sort, are given extensive coverage, while scholars of theological renown like Ali Yafie, M. Quraish Shihab and Masdar Mas`udi receive none.

In a work as far-reaching as this one, it is inevitable that some readers will lament the lack of reference to one topic or another. None of this should detract, however, from Riddell's considerable achievement in this book. In tracing the development of Islamic thought over a seven-century period, the author has done an enormous service to the study of Islam in Southeast Asia. No less significant is the fact that he has also made that theological history accessible to specialists of Islam in other parts

of the Muslim world, many of whom have only recently begun to give Southeast Asian Islam the attention it deserves. In short, this is a work well suited to classroom adoption and one that should be read by all specialists of Southeast Asia.

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### Indonesia

*Which way forward? People, forests, and policymaking in Indonesia*

Edited by CAROL J. PIERCE COLFER and IDA AJU PRADNJA RESOSUDARMO

Washington, DC: Resources for the Future, 2002. Pp. xix, 433. Figures, Tables, Plates, Notes, References, Index.

How did political transition and economic upheaval affect forest policy and practices in the resource-rich nation of Indonesia? The 16 chapters of this edited volume chronicle forestry developments since the 1960s to highlight the changes that occurred from 1997 to early 2000 in Indonesia, providing essential background for understanding that transitional period and subsequent directions in forest policy. As a whole, the book provides an analytical snapshot of the conditions during this critical time, detailing the links between economic circumstances, corporate practices, political factors and recent challenges in governance. In tracing the multiple and deep roots of forestry policy in Indonesia, the authors discuss how involved institutions could proceed with substantive change in the policies that impact local communities and businesses as they interact with national issues of regional autonomy, transparency and fiscal responsibility.

The chapters address several broad themes: government policies regarding forest-dwellers and their environments, the effects of political and economic collapse on several business sectors, recent forest fires and their causes and current topics including decentralisation and illegal logging. The authors hail from a wide range of disciplines. Rachel Wrangham traces the centralising discourses and legislation that enabled the Indonesian state to claim control over forest resources. Rita Lindayati describes changes in the institutional mechanisms behind social forestry policies. Illustrating the complexities of implementing devolution, Eva Wollenberg and Hariadi Kartodihardjo analyse the 1998 law said to transfer forest management to local levels, highlighting how the state still retains strategic power over customary forests. Jeffrey Campbell provides an overview of the legal status of traditional communities in forest management. Chip Fay and Martua Sirait outline the development of the indigenous people's movement and issues of overlapping claims to forest rights and state forest boundaries.

Several chapters offer sectoral case studies. Hariadi Kartodihardjo reports on the economic impact of unreported logging and the new responsibilities of each government department related to forestry, with a detailed annex evaluating each element of the 1999 forestry laws. In separate chapters, Ida Aju Pradnja Resosudarmo and Christopher Barr discuss specific policies and institutional arrangements that impede sustainable forest management, suggesting foundational changes that must be addressed in forest concessions while acknowledging the difficulties of enforcement. Anne Casson describes

the rapid development and future prospects for oil palm development in several regions of Indonesia, including the links between timber exploitation and oil palm concessions. William Sunderlin indicates the importance of agriculture and natural resource industries in national recovery from the economic crisis.

Two chapters on the causes and prevention of forest fires explore the multiple factors that allowed large-scale forest burning as occurred in 1997-98. Carol Pierce Colfer discusses ten natural, cultural, political and socio-economic conditions that increase the danger of fire damage and cause fire to be used as a weapon. Final chapters treat current issues of decentralisation and regional autonomy, and models of the complex systems involved in illegal logging. Emil Salim authored an afterword reflecting on the transitions in post-Suharto Indonesia. The appendices give a timeline of forestry legislation, abbreviations and acronyms in both Indonesian and English.

Of central interest to Indonesianists, this book also provides a concise introduction to the nation's multifaceted natural resource issues, in a form accessible to specialists from other regions and non-forestry disciplines. Readers will come away from this collection with a nuanced appreciation for the recent circumstances, daunting implementation challenges and future opportunities facing policymakers in Indonesia.

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*Agriculture in crisis: People, commodities and natural resources in Indonesia, 1996-2000*

Edited by FRANÇOISE GÉRARD and FRANÇOISE RUF

Montpellier, France: CIRAD; Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001. Pp. xxi, 406. Maps, Figures, Tables, Notes, Bibliography.

The economic and political crisis that engulfed Indonesia in late 1997 threw three decades of economic growth abruptly into reverse and brought down one of Asia's most enduring political regimes. This volume explores the consequences of those shocks for agriculture and forestry, sectors which, in spite of major structural changes, continue to dominate Indonesian economic life.

The book's 12 chapters are authored by Françoise Ruf, Françoise Gérard and other researchers associated with the French agricultural development research agency CIRAD and their Indonesian or international collaborators. After an introductory chapter with an overview of the crisis, the body of the text is presented in three parts, dealing respectively with the international context, smallholder producers of exportable plantation crops and smallholder food crop producers. A concluding chapter by the editors considers the role of agriculture in the recovery of the Indonesian economy.

Indonesia is among the world's leading exporters of rubber, cocoa, coffee, palm oil and timber and timber products. Three excellent chapters in Part I survey the effects of the crisis (and the concomitant El Niño drought) on aggregate production and prices. These chapters include important empirical investigations into the world price effects of changes in Indonesian (or, in the case of rubber and some other crops, Southeast Asian)



export supplies. In some cases – rubber, cocoa and timber/timber products – changes in Indonesian exports had significant world price impacts. In rubber, for example, currency depreciations by the world's three largest exporters (Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand) raised domestic returns, thus stimulating production increases, but also depressed world prices – in the authors' calculations by about 40 per cent in the first year of the crisis. This meant that the windfall gains to producers from crisis-induced currency depreciations were much smaller than they would have been had the world price remained unaffected. Given the importance of this finding, it would have been preferable to provide readers with more detail on the sources of the all-important elasticity values upon which the calculations are based. For example, a world demand elasticity of 0.05 for natural rubber (p. 37) seems very low. Also, one wonders what component of the observed world price drop might be attributable to factors other than Southeast Asian supply, such as the drop in synthetic rubber prices (caused by falling oil prices) and reduced demand for tyres given the expectation of a global economic slowdown.

Interestingly, palm oil has so many close substitutes in industrial and domestic use that the depreciation of Southeast Asian currencies barely moved its world market price, in spite of the region's overwhelming dominance of the global palm oil market. Domestically, however, palm oil is a key consumer staple, and the effects of *rupiah* depreciation were passed directly through to Indonesian consumers in the form of a huge price increase, contributing (we are told) to significant reductions in real incomes and increases in hardship among the poor, a trend exacerbated by the post-crisis relaxation of consumer price limits on the commodity.

In Part II attention turns to the fate of smallholder producers of cocoa, coffee and rubber. These are addressed in four chapters in case study form. The impact of the crisis and responses to it vary by site, by crop and by the circumstances of each producer group. However, a distinct common picture emerges of tree crop producers enjoying substantial windfall gains from price increases and labour cost declines, but at the same time facing increased prices for consumer goods (especially rice) and, in most cases, considerably greater uncertainty regarding their future well-being due to price instability, El Niño drought conditions, forest fires, political turmoil and, in some cases, social upheaval. For many producers, a typical response was to treat the windfall gains as transitory and save them against a future downturn in the form of real assets such as houses, farm-related vehicles and land. Cocoa growers in Sulawesi who also produced rice surpluses typically did very well during the crisis, as the price of rice trebled in 1997-98; by contrast, Sumatra rubber growers, especially those using low-yielding 'jungle rubber' technologies in rice-deficit areas, gained little during the crisis or even fell behind.

Part III examines the effects of the crisis on food crops, especially rice. Drought conditions severely reduced rice production during 1997-98, and the crisis and associated instability further contributed to rapid price rises for consumers, many of whom simultaneously experienced drastic income cuts. Chapter 9 documents this in vivid fashion, paying attention in particular to the Indonesian government's efforts at price and supply stabilisation. In 1998, as both the *rupiah* and the Indonesian government collapsed, the monopoly state trader, Bulog, utterly failed to perform its stabilisation function for either producers or consumers. Consumer prices doubled, yet

Bulog was unable to buy rice from producers at the traditionally protected price. Only the liberalization of rice imports in December 1998 brought the rise in consumer prices to a halt. The policy and human welfare implications of this important episode for the existence of one of the developing world's largest grain trading companies are hinted at, though a deeper and more rigorous analysis remains tantalisingly incomplete. As the authors conclude, the collapse of Bulog 'raises the question of what institutions and interventions might have served Indonesia better and whether these can be developed for future use in such situations' (p. 298).

The analytical content of this volume is comprehensively researched, well-written and clearly presented, with plenty of food for thought for economics specialists and interested generalists alike. The case study approach reveals a wealth of detailed knowledge, yielding analyses in which geographic, historical and ethnic particulars contribute to a complex and diverse pattern of impacts and responses. The only weakness of this approach is that by largely eschewing econometrics, the impacts of the several facets of the crisis, as well as of the concurrent drought and changes in world markets and government policies, cannot be disentangled in a way that might lead more directly to policy-oriented conclusions. The material in this book should stimulate a sustained research effort in this area.

The scope of *Agriculture in crisis* is considerably greater than what is delineated in the title, and therefore its shelf life will deservedly be much longer than that of the average 'Asian crisis' study currently on the market. Given this, the lack of an index is a regrettable omission. This flaw aside, *Agriculture in crisis* provides an excellent and timely record of a key sector of the Indonesian economy during a period of great turbulence, and merits reading by all concerned with the country's development.

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*Hinduism and hierarchy in Bali*

By LEO HOWE

Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2001. Pp. xvii, 228. Photographs, Tables, Notes, Map, Bibliography, Index.

This book is a considered analysis of the political implications of contemporary religious diversity in modern Bali. Specifically, Leo Howe examines revisions of *adat* (customary ritual practices) including the instantiation of *agama Hindu* (Hindu religion) in response to nationalisation, the recent importations of devotional forms of Hinduism from India (Sai Baba and Hare Krishna, Chapters 8 and 9) and the proliferation of indigenous religious movements (*aliran kepercayaan*). Howe approaches the complex topic of Balinese Hinduism from an interest in processes of Balinese identity formation, a process seen by indigenous elites to be in a state of accelerated change and 'crisis'. The ethnographic material presented to illustrate these developments reveals that the relationship between religion, politics and identity is indeed a priority issue for Balinese. The author compares these current indigenous social concerns with academic

debates on the history of social organisation in Bali, producing a thought-provoking study of the implications of these processes for traditional Balinese institutions maintained by an emphasis on hierarchy, the most famous of which is the so-called 'caste system'.

Through a synthesis and critique of key studies on the operation of hierarchy in Balinese and Indian caste systems (Chapter 4), Howe offers an informative contribution to the ethnography of Bali and to theories of caste systems in general. The contribution involves a shifting of perspective on caste initiated by the Dumontian idea of the importance of relative purity as a fundamental value, and moves on from a Geertzian notion of a fundamental tension between the competing values of hierarchy and egalitarianism in order to focus on recent transformations of the role of hierarchy in Balinese social organisation. This emphasis on historical contingencies is valuable because it elucidates in political terms the social relevance that a choice of religious affiliation holds for the construction of Balinese identity. Howe argues that forms of Balinese Hinduism offering higher degrees of exclusivity of identity, such as *adat*, are based upon co-extensive higher degrees of commitment to hierarchical distinctions such as caste. Local *adat* and *agama Hindu* are forms of Hinduism that retain a Balinese orientation to collective identity through a commitment to hierarchy, while devotional Hinduism advocates a relatively non-hierarchical ideology embracing a collective identity on a universal scale.

This book commits to a historical anthropological perspective through the provision of ethnographic depth and the contextualisation of ethnographic material in historical context. In an attempt to account for the importance and visibility of religion in modern Bali, Howe makes the contentious claim that the objectification of religion was initiated by Dutch colonisation in the early twentieth century. He argues that the Dutch took control of Bali's political affairs but left matters of religion to the Balinese – a style of rule that effectively separated politics and religion, a categorical distinction not maintained in the past. Howe concludes the point by stating that 'The emergence of a religious sphere ideologically independent of politics... (was then) developed by the anti-hierarchical movements of the 1920s and given further momentum by the state and the Parisada' (p. 133). There is evidence, however, that the separation of politics and ritual has long been a pervasive cultural ideal and practice throughout the Austronesian-speaking world, a phenomenon commonly referred to as 'dual authority/sovereignty' (see Thomas Reuter, *Custodians of the sacred mountains. Culture and society in the highlands of Bali* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002)). Perhaps the categorical isolation of religion is more apparent in post-colonial Indonesian discourse, but it may be the case that this development is a shift in degree and not kind. Be that as it may, the multiplicity of interpretations on this point indicates the desirability of the continuation of research such as Howe's, which combines ethnographic detail with a historical perspective.

Perhaps the most commendable feature of this topical work is that a serious regard for history is not construed as necessitating the reduction of relevant social outcomes to arbitrariness or to hyper-determination. For instance, Howe suggests that official 'attempts to create and enforce a religious orthodoxy ... have helped to foster conditions in which new religious movements arise and flourish. Consequently, religious diversity

can be seen as both a cause and effect of political conflict' (p. 200). This insightful analysis testifies to the general importance of social science research, which has the capacity to document effects not predetermined by intention. This book reminds us that it is perhaps it is the indeterminacy of culture that gives human societies their variety and richness.

*Hinduism and hierarchy in Bali* is a good read, and is written in such a way as to be accessible also to educated readers who are not academic experts on Bali.

CASSANDRA GREEN

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*Custodians of the sacred mountains: Culture and society in the highlands of Bali*

By THOMAS A. REUTER

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002. Pp. xi, 400. Map, Tables, Plates, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

This work is the first in-depth study of Central Bali's mountain population, generally referred to as 'Bali Aga' (mountain Balinese). Considered 'the original people of Bali', their world often is defined in negative contrast to the better-known lowland kingdoms of later Majapahit-influenced court cultures. In interaction with changing Balinese society, however, the highland population itself has preserved a shared identity as the founders of pre-Majapahit Balinese civilisation and custodians of ancient mountain sanctuaries of ongoing import throughout the island. This is facilitated in part by *banua* – the ancient networks of ritual alliance, some more than a millennium old, that are the focus of Thomas Reuter's book.

Working in over 50 villages, Reuter investigated the networks of more than 100 communities. Part I of *Custodians of the sacred mountains*, entitled 'Banua: Ritual domains and the status economy of highland Bali', consists of the resulting ethnography, which indeed fills a 'gap in the ethnography of Bali' (p. 6). He outlines the ancient alliance and status systems hitherto ignored in scholarly literature, but still performed in cooperative rituals centred at a temple in central Bali's crater rim area, with participating villages and sub-domains extending to northern and eastern coastal communities (p. 7). Part II, entitled 'In the shadow of paradise: The Bali Aga and the problem of representation', turns to issues of how Bali Aga represent themselves and are represented within 'a pan-Balinese landscape of identities'. Reuter's overall intent is for an alternative discourse and interpretation of Balinese society and, through resulting insights, to help resolve the anthropological (and wider) 'crisis of representation'.

In contrast to southern Balinese kingdoms, Reuter highlights Austronesian rather than Hindu aspects of Bali Aga society, emphasising dualism and precedence as central organising principles whereby, unlike a caste-based hierarchical system, a social whole is envisioned as 'forged from dual origins or from repeated encounters among different historically adjacent dyads of earlier and later peoples' (p. 269). Reuter's study may be positioned as well in regard to work on Balinese irrigation temple networks (p. 147). Interested in the question of the voluntary participation of otherwise autonomous

villages in a network characterised by 'a considerable degree of [status] asymmetry' (p. 26), he sets up for this symbolic status economy a paradox similar to that illuminated by Stephen J. Lansing with regard to water regulation in water temple systems (*Priests and programmers: Technologies of power in the engineered landscape of Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991)): Bali Aga, like Balinese farmers, must cooperate to compete. Combining these insights, Reuter concludes that their solution to the 'fundamental human conundrum' of representational bias 'is first to acknowledge that society and representational knowledge about society are the products of a historical and intersubjective process and, second, to create an interactive setting marked by voluntary cooperation and culturally managed (rather than unrestrained or liberal) competition among individuals or groups' (p. 262). His main point is that representation elsewhere, as in the *banua*, is 'a communicative or "intersubjective" game' and that it is intersubjectivity that 'may help overcome the problem of subjective bias within the social sciences' (p. 10). He adds the caveat 'at least under certain favorable conditions' (p. 262), and therein of course lies the obvious point of contention. While intersubjectivity may be 'fundamental to the cultural construction and contestation of knowledge', it rarely, if ever, is as voluntary and free and 'undistorted by the influence ... of glaring asymmetries in wealth and force' (p. 11) as in Reuter's presentation. It is similarly problematic to claim, as he also does, that intersubjectivity can constrain political domination provided it is voluntary and free (p. 6).

The ethnography, which constitutes the bulk of the book, remains most compelling. He presents a wide assortment of origin narratives, examples of different kinds of *banua* facing different issues, and of transitional cases allowing insight into process. His thorough elucidation of these elaborate ritual networks of intervillage alliances certainly supersedes any previous notions of Bali Aga as isolated and inward-looking or lacking in 'organisational complexity and regional unity' (pp. 261, 301ff.). Readers not familiar with Bali, however, might take Reuter's descriptions, differentiating Bali Aga (Austronesian) from lower kingdoms (Hindu and hierarchical), as unique to the mountain population. In fact, there is a striking sense of similarity between the temple systems and ritual networks and performances of the Bali Aga world and those of post-Majapahit kingdoms. The Austronesian themes, too, are recognisable in many Bali Hindu realms, and much of what Reuter says regarding the Bali Aga being ignored because they do not have the glamorous spectacle of southern courts applies to many other villages, including Indianised princedoms. More discussion of these relationships would have been welcome; instead, it is all the more puzzling when Reuter at times conflates Bali Aga and other Balinese as 'the Balinese', even regarding status (p. 128).

*Custodians of the sacred mountains* is one of the most exciting studies to come out of Bali, rich with material for comparative inquiry both within and without the island, and with discussion of broader issues of representation that takes a fresh approach by drawing on this fascinating ethnographic example.

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*A missão nas Molucas no século XVI. Contributo para o estudo da acção dos Jesuítas no Oriente.*

By MARIA ODETE SOARES MARTINS

Lisbon: Centro de História de Além-Mar of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2002 (Coleção Teses 2). Pp. 317. Maps, Diagrams, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

This book, originally based on a thesis, carries a fine preface by Luís Filipe F. R. Thomaz. The preface introduces Maria Odete Soares Martins' study as a kind of survey seen through Western eyes. Obviously Thomaz felt somewhat uneasy when composing his introduction, due to the nature of his student's sources. Most sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century materials on the Catholic missions in Ternate, Tidore, Bacian, Ambon, Halmahera and other islands are Jesuit texts, letters and reports, with only a few documents written by the members of other missionary groups, and with practically no works left by the Malukans themselves or by 'third parties'. Therefore, modern authors are compelled to read between the lines of each text. A certain bias cannot be avoided, it is true, but Martins has made a serious effort to present a critical account, with some interesting results, as Thomaz has suggested.

The more important documents on the Maluku in the early modern period are all available in the well-known collections edited by Hubert Jacobs, Josef Wicki, Artur Basílio de Sá, and others, some members of the Societas Iesu (Jesuits) themselves. To this may be added several old accounts with valuable data on trade and commerce and with scattered information on daily life, local religious traditions and other matters. Recently, much of this was also studied by Manuel Lobato, Leonard Andaya and other scholars chiefly interested in what the Maluku and Banda were always famed for: the production and export of cloves, nutmeg and mace.

Part I of Martins' book sets the stage. It deals with the basic geographic and demographic elements of the region, with local languages and society in general – all of which are reflected through early modern sources. The focus is on North Maluku and Ambon; Ceram, the Banda Islands, eastern Celebes, and the Banggai and Siau groups are less extensively covered. The approach is mostly descriptive. We are informed, for example, about the marriage 'system' and how marriage alliances functioned among the ruling elite. There were also mixed Muslim–Christian families, but these may not have been too important in the local context. Here, as indeed in the entire book, more could have been said on the role of Islam and its possible influence on the various Malukan ports and polities. Other observations relate to food consumption, currencies, shipping, etc. Unusually detailed information may be found in regard to local dressing habits. The differences between ethnic groups are also mentioned. Finally, some sections are devoted to sea trade and internal communication between islands and villages. Perhaps religious and trade links among North Maluku, Mindanao and, more generally, the Sulu zone – across the Celebes Sea – deserve one or two additional paragraphs. However, by and large all the features necessary for a better understanding of the Christian missions in the Spice Islands are systematically presented in this section.

The first chapter of Part II is concerned with the essential characteristics of Portuguese missionary activities. Among other things, the old question is discussed of whether Portugal's gradual expansion to India and beyond was chiefly motivated by

commercial dimensions, religious zeal, or both. The worldly and the spiritual, it is conceded, did not always interact smoothly, whether in Goa, Melaka, the Malukan Islands or elsewhere. Much is said about Melaka, the logistical base for Portugal's Malukan 'adventure'. Chapter 2 outlines the early stages of the missions on Ternate, in the Moro region, and elsewhere. The account is not organised on a strictly chronological basis, but rather by themes. Documents by or related to St Francis Xavier (who died in December 1552 on Shangchuan Island) are of course frequently quoted. Xavier was a pioneer in the best sense of the word, as were many others who followed his steps.

More generally, it is shown that the early Jesuits had set up an efficient institutional framework for their missionary work. They were well-informed about Asian societies, and they considered the quality of personnel, including health and physical strength, crucial for their success. In modern terms, education, leadership, 'intercultural skills' and adequate use of human resources were key factors in operating one of the world's earliest global 'enterprises'. But the Church also had its problems: there were never enough priests, native clergies had to be formed, and certain groups, like the *cristãos-novos* (New Christians), had to be treated carefully. There were also some conflicts between the Church and the secular layers of the colonial *Estado da Índia*. In many cases, the Jesuits and others tried to resolve these tensions – with varying success. Relations between them and the *Estado* were perhaps best in the times of D. Constantino de Bragança, as Martins suggests. Occasionally, conflicts also flared up between the Society and the Franciscans, but these misunderstandings should not be overstressed. Thomaz, it seems, was very generous when saying the author tried to be 'neutral' in her account.

Chapter 3, still within Part II, highlights the Malukan missions. Different Malukan islands and regions are dealt with, one by one. Certain segments are arranged chronologically, while others follow themes, as in the previous section. Some interesting notes relate to the rise and decline in the number of Catholics, for example on Ambon. However, the destructive role of the Dutch, who followed their profit-maximising instincts without leaving any positive traces in the Malukan region, is not always adequately exposed. Other parts of this chapter look at the political setting within the Malukan Islands, especially at the unfortunate circumstances leading to an end of friendly relations between Portugal and Ternate. There are also detailed segments on the Church's activities in Tidore and the Moro region, as well as on early religious contacts to New Guinea. By contrast, the segments on Java, Bali, Sumatra and Makassar are rather short and might have been left out.

Chapter 4 returns to the delicate issue of intra-Church relations between the Jesuits and other groups. This also includes certain rivalries between the Spanish and the Portuguese. Claims to the Malukan Islands, it is well known, were related to the old treaties of Tordesillas and Zaragoza, which caused some friction between both camps. But the Church tried to gradually overcome this dilemma (leaving aside such 'spiritual conquistadores' as Alonso Sánchez), particularly in view of Dutch and English threats. A very different aspect, also discussed in the same chapter, concerns the commercial activities of the Jesuits. The Malukan Islands were far away from Melaka and Goa and always in need of funds. To maintain buildings, charitable institutions and schools, the Jesuit fathers occasionally invested small sums in trade, the returns of which flowed back to the missionary areas, and thereby ultimately to the local host societies themselves.

Similar constellations are reported, for example, in the context of the Macau–Japan trade. On account of these rather worldly ‘operations’, the Jesuits were often criticised, but they knew how to defend themselves well, as can be demonstrated through the letters and statements left by Valignano and others. Given the limited funds and a constant shortage in personnel, the Jesuits were indeed able to set up an impressive network of small educational and other institutions with long-lasting effects on their host societies. All this is described in the fourth chapter. Further remarks are related to the institutional contacts between Goa, Melaka and Maluku. Finally, the issue of collective baptism is addressed as well. Here, more could have been said on the proselytising efforts of Islamic groups and the challenges which the Catholic priests had to face.

The conclusion is rather short. It deals with numbers, quotes Francisco de Sousa, takes up again – in brief – the old issue of Luso-Castillian rivalries, and finally tells us that the percentage of Catholics living in modern Indonesia is slightly higher than in other areas where the Church had unfolded its activities. This is followed by a bibliography and an index. The bibliography could be amplified by several modern studies, especially on economic and other aspects dealt with in Part I of the book. The index is extremely useful, but certain entries with a long list of page numbers might have been organised differently, with sub-entries and short explanations.

As was said, this is a descriptive survey. It addresses several themes and even though it is limited by the nature of the sources, it flows and mostly flows well. True, some unnecessary repetitions and ‘twists’ could have been avoided. At times, one also gets the impression that the author is not only concerned with the Catholic Church in Maluku, because certain general aspects related to very different themes and the overall structure of Jesuit activities in Asia tend to dominate the discussion; however, careful consideration of these questions reveals that they are all important facets of one and the same larger ‘setting’. Put differently, this study moves from general observations to specific dimensions, and back from there to the general, thus trying to embed the Malukan case in the greater whole of the *Estado da Índia*. In sum, Martins’ book is a useful account, a kind of work that was long overdue, and a book that should certainly be read by all those interested in the history of early modern eastern Indonesia.

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*Breaking the spell: Colonialism and literary renaissance in Indonesia*

By SYLVIA TIWON

Leiden: Department of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia and Oceania

University of Leiden, 1999. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

One of the legacies of colonialism has been the critical problem of defining the significance of a national literature for Southeast Asian scholars working in the second half of the twentieth century. Sylvia Tiwon addresses these issues in her latest work in relation to the development of Indonesia’s national literature. She draws upon a range of figures including Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, Amir Hamzah and Chairil Anwar to depict



not only the richness of Indonesian literature, but also the difficulties generated by colonialism.

Building on the scholarship of Amin Sweeney, Tiwon focuses on oral traditions and the ways in which they function in colonial and post-colonial situations. In particular, Tiwon emphasises the transitional nature of much of Indonesian literature as she exposes some of the dilemmas inherent in connecting oral tradition to print cultures. *Breaking the spell* depicts this transition in terms of the changing relationship between author and audience.

Tiwon places these literary developments within a historical frame of reference in which modernisation and opposition to Dutch rule were dominant concerns. For instance, she writes interestingly about Dutch attempts to suppress challenges to colonial rule in the name of Islam. The rise of Pan-Islamic movements meant that Islam became a threat to Dutch authority, leaving Malay authors with the new resources to contest colonial hierarchies. At the same time, figures such as Takdir Alisjahbana found themselves often torn between retaining indigenous traditions and embracing aspects of modernity.

All told, *Breaking the spell* augments the growing body of scholarship devoted to both colonial literatures and orality. Tiwon's book, then, will be of interest to many students of Southeast Asian cultures.

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#### Malaysia

*Reinventing Malaysia: Reflections on its past and future*

Edited by JOMO K. S.

Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2001. Pp. 160. Index.

Scholars studying Southeast Asian societies have long pondered how the issues of historical and cultural specificities should inform the analyses of these societies and the conceptual challenges that local knowledge poses to dominant social science definitions. This eight-chapter volume, compiled from six keynote speeches at the International Malaysian Studies Conference organised by the Malaysian Social Science Association and two solicited essays, represents an attempt to use historically and culturally informed analyses of contemporary transformations to initiate a rethinking of dominant social science discourse about Malaysian society and politics. Edited by Jomo K. S., the volume comprises contributions by eminent scholars of Malaysian society – Wang Gungwu, John Butcher, Cheah Boon Kheng, Rustam Sani, James Scott, Syed Husin Ali, Charles Hirschman – and the social activist and public figure, medical practitioner M. K. Rajakumar. Despite the diversity of contributors, the chapters fit together surprisingly well, with each author drawing on the various aspects of local history, cultural sensibilities and everyday life to reassess dominant explanations about Malaysian society and politics. In addition, the chapters are largely written in straightforward style, making the volume accessible to the non-academic reader as well.

The introduction by Jomo provides a succinct overview of the chapters, positing the volume as a call for 'reinventing Malaysia' as Malaysian society stands at an important threshold of radical social and political transformations. Wang's initial chapter scrutinises two fundamental conceptions of Malaysian transformations – the nation-state and cultural pluralism – and nicely sets off the theme of reflexivity over the relationship between knowledge and historical and cultural locations for the volume. In this chapter, Wang speaks against the uncritical adoption of alien concepts in the analyses of Malaysian transformations, calling instead for a reinsertion of historical realities as key to theory-building. Pointing out that the Western European model of modern nationhood inherited upon Malaysia's Independence erases the local historical reality as part of the borderless maritime world of the Malay Archipelago characterised by the free movement of people, trade and commerce, Wang argues that the earlier openness offers grounds for alternatives to the current problems of national identity and cultural citizenship in Malaysian society.

Following Wang's contribution, to further elucidate the pertinence of understanding the historicities of ideas and practices in Malaysian society in order to better grasp its present and future, are the chapters by Butcher, Cheah, Rustam and Rajakumar. Focusing on various social and political changes ranging from the racial riots of 1969 to the recent deterioration of human rights and the political turmoil set off by the financial crises and the sacking of ex-Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, these authors seek to debunk the ideologies of modernisation, democratisation and developmentalism found in dominant interpretations of these events. Underscoring the institutional processes set in pace by colonial legacies as well as the regimes of control enacted in the post-colonial era, they highlight reified class differences and the particular sets of beliefs around ethnic differences, dominance and democracy produced from these institutional processes as shaping social thought and action in Malaysian society. Nevertheless, to these authors, the ethnic, national and class foregrounding of human agency in Malaysian society poses constraints as well as possibilities for alternative imaginations and practices of identity, democracy and politics.

The remaining chapters by Scott, Syed Husin and Hirschman deal specifically with the politics of knowledge production and its entwinement with state power and the conventions of Western social science. Here, the discussions revolve around two themes: first, the question of the survival of independent and critical scholarship *vis-à-vis* the larger powers of the state to curb as well as co-opt scholars; and second, considerations on colonial legacies and institutional inequities that set apart the practice of social science in the West and in a developing country like Malaysia, as well as recent material and epistemological developments that offer possibilities for narrowing these gaps.

*Reinventing Malaysia* is a timely collection given current endeavours to de-centre Western modes of engagement and thinking in the search of a social science that can better account for the multiplicities and simultaneities of time, thought and action in the contemporary world. Although this volume is more of a social commentary and more in-depth studies need to be undertaken in support of the ideas posed, it has nevertheless made strong the point that experience and meaning are constituted through particular historicities of meaning and action rather than by any fixed sets of priorities. The onus then falls on social scientists to construct definitions and methodologies that can pay

serious attention to what local societies accept as reason and their claims of action and reason that may not correspond with universally shared assumptions about the world and social action.

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### Myanmar

*Living silence: Burma under military rule*

By CHRISTINA FINK

London: Zed Books, 2001. Pp. xv, 286. Maps, Photographs, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

Despite being the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia, Burma has long been inaccessible to international scholars. As a result, Burmese studies has remained relatively underdeveloped. With the exception of studies on minority issues, most scholarly and journalistic works on Burma in the last three decades focus mainly on political and economic problems. Due to the paucity of data, most existing studies of Burmese politics normally deal with the short- and long-term 'psychological effects of military' rule on the general populace of Burma in only a cursory manner. In spite of growing international attention to political developments under the current military regime, this gap in the study of modern Burmese politics remained unfilled until the publication of Christina Fink's work in 2001. Based on extensive library research and interviews with people from different social, political and economic backgrounds, the book details 'the specifics of life under military rule in Burma' (p. 7).

There are 13 chapters in the book. Chapters 1 through 4 present a good synthesis of what has been written about how the military came to the forefront of Burmese politics, how it has affected the country politically and economically, how it tried to keep the opponents of the regime at bay, and how the public, especially students and monks, occasionally organised anti-military demonstrations. These chapters also examine how the international community responded to the current military regime's human rights record and how the campaigns against its violations drew international attention to the social and political deterioration in Burma in existing scholarly and journalistic works on post-independence Burmese politics.

Chapters 5 through 11 exhaustively detail the social, political and economic sufferings of the Burmese people under military rule. In these chapters, Fink explains how constraints forced politically conscious students to limit their activities to holding small secret discussions and how the rigid political system and unnecessary laws, rules and regulations introduced by successive Burmese military regimes, along with the latter's brutal repression of their foes, turned the majority of the public into criminals and politically apathetic citizens. In so doing, Fink also highlights dilemmas the whole population had to encounter under military rule: 'Should [one] take the high road and be honest or engage in corruption so [one's] family can make ends meet? Should [one] raise [one's] children to accept military rule as normal or should [one] encourage them to resist and risk years of imprisonment? Is hijacking a place or seizing an embassy

justified if the world is ignoring a people's call for help?

The answer to all these questions is that military rule has led the majority of Burmese people to adopt a 'safety-first' rule as the guiding principle in coping with their problems, and to do things which people from the so-called 'free world' would consider unreasonable. Quoting one of her interviewees, Fink writes, 'Fear has deprived a lot of people of their reasoning power' (p. 211). Having grown up amidst the political difficulties and dilemmas created by these same regimes, this reviewer is in a position to say that Fink has done a favour to a large number of Burmese who did not have the opportunity to speak their minds. Her book nicely conveys voices of frustration and suffering uttered by a large number of Burmese people. This, in fact, is the beauty of the book. To be sure, many scholars and journalists have written about how the general public suffered under military rule, but no one has echoed these voices as well and as lucidly as Fink has done here.

However, paradoxical as it may sound, what should be considered as the strength of the book also turns out to be its major weakness. The coverage of the anger, frustration and sufferings of Burmese people is a little too overwhelming, to the extent that it could make the book appear to be a piece of propaganda issued by anti-government activists. In addition, the overemphasis on how the public suffered also distracts the author from paying attention to some important issues. For instance, in Chapter 7, Fink is so preoccupied with the unhappiness of non-commissioned officers in the military that she fails to deal with an obviously important question: regardless of growing unhappiness among these officers, how does the military remain a united institution? The fact that most people Fink interviewed appeared to be politically conscious people with strong anti-military sentiment also makes the book rather problematic. A major issue encountered in interviewing such people, especially Burmese political activists, is that their unhappiness with the military regime often leads them to exaggerate their experiences with the government. As with many Burmese, especially pro-democracy activists, talking about their lives under military rule itself is a part of their anti-military strategy. It is naturally in their interest to portray the regime as negatively as possible.

Although Fink does not discuss how she processed the data she obtained from her interviews with Burmese people, the way she quotes the statements of her interviewees suggests that she did not question the objective validity of the interviews sufficiently. For instance, one of Fink's interviewees from a minority area noted his displeasure at the need to get permission before he started repairing his house (p.137) – probably unaware that people in every country have to get official permission for such work. Without highlighting the validity of such requirements, Fink tries to show the suffering of people living in minority areas by writing 'it was illegal to repair one's own house without permission' (p. 137).

Such overemphasis on public suffering can inhibit the author from unravelling the complexity of certain political issues. For instance, in line with most anti-government activists, Fink separates Buddhist monks into pro-military and anti-military groups and hinted that members of the former group who indulge themselves in the luxurious goods donated to them by the junta distance themselves from the democratic movement. In reality, although they have not criticised the junta openly, many senior monks believed to be close to the regime often ask senior military officers to be lenient towards anti-

government activists in their private conversations with them. At the same time, many monks are very supportive of the pro-democracy movement while working closely with the regime to promote the Buddha *sasana* (religion). The clear-cut distinction of monks as anti- and pro-military obscures the paradoxical role played by some societal actors in state–society relations. Similarly, although Fink nicely explains how writers try to circumvent censorship rules; how students, monks and workers have tried to launch anti-government activities covertly and overtly; and what the problems with public transcripts are, her discussion of what James Scott calls ‘infrapolitics’ or ‘hidden transcripts’ is quite minimal. One cannot help feeling that a section or a chapter on the everyday forms of resistance prevailing among ordinary citizens would make the book more complete.

Notwithstanding these weaknesses, Fink’s *Living silence* makes an immense contribution to a better understanding of Burmese politics and society. Without a doubt, it is an addition to the current short list of good books on modern Burmese politics.

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*The 1988 uprising in Burma*

By MAUNG MAUNG. Foreword by FRANKLIN MARK OSANKA  
New Haven: Yale Southeast Asia Studies, 1999. Pp. xx, 285. Index.

This work will be of value to students of Burma’s troubled recent history because it aptly illustrates the extent to which the nation’s colonial heritage continues to shape political perceptions. The author, Maung Maung, understands the explosion that brought the attention of the world to Burma in the summer of 1988 through the lens of country’s struggles since independence. However, this is achieved at a cost: the author is largely indifferent to the causes of the widespread anger that was reflected in the massive protests. *The 1988 uprising in Burma* is a narrative defence of Myanmar’s military rulers. Nonetheless, the account remains valuable because it reveals the manner in which one of the nation’s central political actors understood the events of 1988–89.

The author, after all, remains one of those figures who is well known both inside and outside of Burma. His political career reflects the nation’s stormy political history: having served in the Caretaker Government (1958–60), after the 1962 coup he acted as Ne Win’s Chief Justice. The author wrote the 1974 Constitution, but readers of this journal are more likely familiar with his *Burma and General Ne Win* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1969), which painted a very positive picture of the nation’s ruler. More important for the work under review, Maung Maung was a key figure in the government, serving as a member of the Central Executive Committee. He became President of Burma between 19 August and 18 September 1988.

Given this position, it should not surprise readers that *The 1988 uprising in Burma* amounts to an apologia for the government. At the heart of Maung Maung’s view is the idea that the protests which broke out in 1988 were misunderstood by Burmese. Instead of a local event, it was actually part of a much larger pattern of political disruption which

swept the world in 1988-89. He understands these events as a lost opportunity for Burma to provide an example that might have been emulated by other countries. Instead, the widespread protests of 1988 were fostered by some legitimate complaints (socialism's failure to fully deliver) but largely shaped by a combination of criminal and outside elements.

Maung Maung's presentation of these episodes will doubtless be contested by many. For instance, he scarcely credits the student protesters with agency beyond their own youth. The students who led some of the more prolific protests were easily swayed by 'looters', 'hooligans' and 'terrorists' (p. 100). In addition, these youthful protesters were exploited by both businessmen (who were opposed to socialism) and local politicians. Since these various groups were familiar with world conflict, they understood 'how urban guerrillas operate, how mass emotions were roused, how riots could be whipped up in the noble name of revolution, how a handful of determined people could rob a bank, assassinate their targets or their good names' (p. 100). Therefore, while he does concede that a number of grievances were legitimate, the author tends to link the causes of what amounted to massive protests to foreign or purely disruptive forces. More telling, while he admits that the government crackdown was excessive, his treatment amounts to a virtual cover-up of an event that might as well be described as a massacre. In addition, the author believes that the international media exploited the situation to entertain audiences worldwide. Unfortunately, since the press was easily manipulated by the criminal and political elements, their impact was disruptive as well. In short, Maung Maung's account offers politically safe scapegoats while failing to critically seek root causes for the 1988 protests.

Despite these weaknesses, there is additional value in Maung Maung's work: it provides one more source for students of Southeast Asia (and, more generally, modern/contemporary history) who do not happen to read or speak Burmese but are interested in these events. To this end, the volume includes the text of some of the author's televised addresses. Finally, Maung Maung provides a last chapter that includes his reflections about key personages, which may be of interest to students of Burma's turbulent history.

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### The Philippines

*Amlat: Kapampangan local history contours in Tarlac and Pampanga*

By LINO L. DIZON. Forward by RAFAEL R. ESTRADA

Tarlac City: Center for Tarlaqueño Studies, 2000. Pp. xxxviii, 161. Maps, Tables, Notes, Bibliography.

*Amlat* (history) is a collection of ten essays concerning the Kapampangan speaking region of Central Luzon with special (but not exclusive) emphasis placed on the border between Tarlac and Pampanga Provinces. Here the author grew up, lives and works, and he seeks to explain something about the characteristics and experiences of his homeland

and its people. Philippine local history has grown rapidly in the past few decades, and it has come to serve several historiographic purposes, depending on the intent of the author. Two dominate: local history can illuminate national history, or it can portray what is different about a particular area, thus enhancing regional pride. In this case, Lino Dizon is interested in exploring what makes the Kapampangan-speaking community so special.

He begins by considering what he sees as the current state of historical studies on Pampanga and what needs to be done further. He acknowledges the role of Reynaldo Ileto in influencing his approach to the discipline. Thus oral history, language study and folklore take their place among the legitimate sources in locating an authentic Kapampangan voice. Even as he seeks to find what Kapampangan truly is, Dizon acknowledges that the culture has been enmeshed in the colonial experience and cannot be freed from external influence. Additionally, this introduction contains a listing of underutilised source materials about the area.

Three succeeding shorter pieces deal with the linguistic affinities of Kapampangan with other regional languages, with the need to collect and save oral folklore, and with the origin of local toponyms. All serve to draw attention to tools and sources for a more comprehensive and accurate history of the region and its people.

The next three essays are included to demonstrate what can be accomplished with new local sources. The first one deals with the origin of the names of various settlements in the present town of Capas, Tarlac. A second traces the story of a road near Mt. Arayat that connects with the region's radical past. This use of a historic roadway (*dalan*) as the main focus for linking together various incidents in revolutionary history represents an innovative technique for pointing to an important tradition in the region. The third essay in this group lists most of the parish priests in the congregation of Concepcion, Tarlac, and reminds readers of the influence the clergy, colonial and native, has had on provincial life.

The final three articles, longer and more fully realised than the others, look at political and military history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Dizon's purpose here is to contribute to the discourse on the level of Kampangan participation in the Philippine Revolution from 1896 to 1901. He argues that the Kapampangan people were as nationalistic as their Tagalog neighbours and brings up the cases of General Francisco Makabulos and the *gobernadorcillo* Espiridion Fajardo to make his point. That key individuals among the Pampangan elite took part in the Revolution and the subsequent Philippine–American War has never been in doubt. However, whether the elite had the same agenda as the Manila-centred Tagalogs and whether they represented the region's majority are questions that remain unsettled and await further strenuous consideration by scholars willing to sift through literary sources and such monumental collections as the unwieldy Philippine Insurgent Records. In the meantime, the article on Farjado, which begins with an acrostic poem about his inauguration into office (*misa de vara*), can be a model for other historians who wish to write about the Pampanga/Tarlac region and its politics and culture.

In general, the book stands as a reminder of the challenges that persist in completing a more complete portrait of Kampangan history and culture. Without sufficient traditional written documents available, new methods and new sources will have to be

employed, and Dizon has some suggestions for filling the gap. This is a work not for the general reader but for the specialist and the Kapampangan loyalist; hence, the message is intended mainly for a local audience. The language is colourful, reflecting the author's intention to make a more cultural, rather than the usual narrative, presentation. These articles vary in density and in detail, but they are organised in a logical, coherent order. An attached bibliography indicates the intensive effort made to identify useful sources for the region's history.

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*The embarrassment of slavery: Controversies over bondage and nationalism in the American colonial Philippines*

By MICHAEL SALMAN

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. Pp. xi, 335. Maps, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

Michael Salman has produced a very intricate work of history with many levels of analysis, being as much about the nature of slavery, colonialism and nationalism as it is a challenge to conventional historiography. In particular, he explores the profound impact discourse had in shaping events in the Philippines at the beginning of the twentieth century. While discourse has long been accepted as a key concept in helping understanding contemporary social movements, as it is through discourse that people define their situations and assess their possibilities for action, historians have largely chosen to ignore this theoretical literature as it might apply to the Philippine Revolution and the subsequent debate over independence during the first decades of US colonialism. Salman demonstrates how the power struggles that inevitably accompany such discourses can be arenas of conflict in their own right that are no less fierce than those involving physical contestation. The central focus of the study is on how slavery as a discourse was employed by the USA on the one hand, to legitimise colonialism as a period of progress towards some notional level of civilisation deemed commensurate with full nationhood, and by Filipino nationalists on the other hand, who were forced to refute its very existence as undermining their assertion of constituting a single people that the enslavement of each other would imply. In the process of explaining the many twists and turns that the protagonists adopted in this debate, Salman begins to question the relevance of Western social-science definitional paradigms to the non-Western world and to challenge the privileged position the USA occupies in global historiography.

All of this is a very ambitious project that requires not only intellectual rigour but also considerable skill in terms of structuring text and developing argument. To do so, Salman divides his study into three 'overlapping accounts'. Part I examines the problem of slavery that suffuses the early debate in the USA over the establishment and extension of colonial rule in the Philippines and considers the initial impact of reports that it actually existed in certain regions. Under the Bates Treaty of 1899, slavery was tolerated in the South under the pretext of indirect rule and respect for local custom while the USA fought 'a brutal war' to impose direct rule on the Christianised North. Part II



reconstructs the US colonial encounter with slavery in Moro society and the circumstances surrounding the measures that led to its abolition. In particular, it charts how American perceptions began to shift around mid-1902 and how the same conditions that had previously made slavery in the South appear 'mild' now made it seem intolerably 'harsh' without any actual alteration in practice. Part III switches attention to slavery among the non-Christian tribes and how these ethnic groups came to be seen as both a threat to nationalists' assertions that Filipinos were ready for independence and also as 'an increasingly valuable ideological source' to validate the continuance of the colonial state; to both, however, the allegation of slavery increasingly came to represent an embarrassment – hence the title – and one that was ultimately transformed into a metaphor of colonial bondage.

An intriguing aspect of Salman's study in the wake of 11 September 2001 is the insight his narrative sheds on the historical origins of American attitudes towards Islam. Though the USA's relations with Muslim societies date back to the late eighteenth century and the Barbary Wars of 1801-5, the southern Philippines brought the first prolonged contact Americans had with such cultures. It is unfortunate in this respect that slavery came to constitute the primary interpretative framework through which attempts were made to understand Islamic societies. In particular, the association of Moros with forms of bondage and polygamy led to their classification within a colonial typology as 'wild' and 'uncivilised' and so 'unfit' to represent themselves in the National Assembly convened in 1907. Moreover, their enslavement of Christians was increasingly viewed as 'a violation of categories, a reversal of the order of progress central to colonial ideology' (p. 89) and even as paralysing 'all true development' (p. 119). Moros gained the reputation of being inherently intractable and as not understanding 'any other mode of authority' but force (p. 93). To what extent these attitudes still dominate US foreign policy thinking in the contemporary global context is a matter of more than historical interest.

Salman has written an innovative book that sheds light on both the past as well as the present. Given the subject matter, however, his analysis of discourse might have benefited greatly from a more solid theoretical grounding. Actors shape discourse through their individual and collective agency and yet are not so much moulded by a single discursive framework as they avail themselves from among competing alternatives. In many respects, this is precisely what Salman argues, providing a valuable historical example of the duality of discourse in practice. However, he could make all this much more explicit by linking it not only to well-known figures such as Dean C. Worcester and William Cameron Forbes but also to less prominent ones. As it stands, the discourses he discusses so ably seem totally removed from the provenance of the common people. Another matter of some concern is the limited historical perspective that Salman adopts, which results in his neglect of things Spanish. There is too little discussion of conditions under Spanish rule especially given the fact that, as he notes, the Chief of the Ethnological Survey reported in 1903 that the previous colonial administration had been more effective in controlling headhunting, slavery and piracy (p. 118). More attention might also have been paid to Spanish racial classifications such as *infielos* (unbelievers) that seem to have their counterparts in the US lexicon. Nor does he convincingly argue that Spain's policy of *reduccion*, whereby people were brought to live together in

municipalities centred round the parish church, was only a minimal disruption to indigenous life (p. 124). A greater sense of historical continuity would add strength and perspective to his thesis.

*The embarrassment of slavery* may not always be the easiest of books to read but it is certainly a fascinating one. Page by page, it rewards the reader with its keen insights into the past and Philippine–American interactions over notions of slavery, colonialism and nationalism. Such definitional disputes are not mere academic exercises but continue to have real import in the present global context. Moreover, through his analysis of discourse, Salman makes a significant contribution to Philippine history as well as questioning some of the accepted precepts of Western historiography.

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### Singapore

*Theatre and the politics of culture in contemporary Singapore*

By WILLIAM PETERSON

Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001. Pp. xi, 287. Photographs, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

William Peterson has produced an excellent piece of work in his exciting contribution to Singapore studies – *Theatre and the politics of culture in contemporary Singapore*. In many ways, this was a book waiting to be written. The contextualisation of theatre in Singapore has long been ignored. What is so exhilarating about this book is how the author goes about rectifying this discrepancy. For Peterson, theatre is an opportunity to explore some of the deeper cultural implications of the stage in Singapore. His opening contention, that ‘theatre cannot be divorced from politics just as culture in Singapore cannot be seen apart from the political apparatus that seeks to shape and contain it’ (p. 3), allows him a wide and interconnected gaze. Three main themes – the nation, the body and Singaporean theatre – provide an intriguing foundation for this argument.

The first and second of Peterson’s themes are the most interesting. His juxtaposing of the nation and theatre is novel and fruitful, as he considers how the Singaporean nation is staged through National Day parades, cultural policy and festivals. Peterson identifies the positioning of Lee Kuan Yew and Stamford Raffles in national iconography as crucial to the process of constructing the nation. The maintenance of a benevolent Raffles allows Lee to uphold particular and dominant understandings of leadership and history, which Peterson examines. His exploration of theatre is perhaps less illuminating, as extensive reference to specific performances in Singapore detracts from the strength of his critique of nation and theatre. Peterson is at his most engaged when using theatre as a lens for examining Singaporean society, rather than in analysing theatre itself. In considering the queering of the stage, for example, he is able to ask some intriguing questions of policy and its implementation and subversion. The implications for gay Singaporeans of the ‘Every Singaporean Matters’ policy initiative are drawn out in this manner.

The author places himself firmly in the text. I was most intrigued by his discussion of his complicity in upholding state narratives by his teaching practice during his time at the National University of Singapore. Peterson's close involvement with the arts community in Singapore allows him a personalised insight, but one that is also problematic. In a significant and new approach, Peterson effectively illustrates the discrepancies in traditional modes of evaluating Singapore's artistic products. The framework that he uses to consider the success of the arts in Singapore is the criteria established by the National Arts Council. In using a local criterion as the mode of evaluation, he causes Singaporean values and policies to reflect upon themselves. The result is to provide an effective, if damning, analysis that complements his personalised observations.

Peterson's scholarship could have been enhanced by a closer reference to primary materials; an over-reliance on secondary sources is occasionally frustrating, though he compensates admirably with insightful analysis. His sustained and compelling intellectual engagement with the themes in this book insists upon its unique and overdue contribution to the field. Any difficulties of methodology or execution in this study remain largely on the surface. *Theatre and the politics of culture in contemporary Singapore* is one of the most interesting recent publications in Singapore studies. William Peterson's probing work has provided us with new models of analysis that ought to prove revealing in their broader application to this field.

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#### Thailand

*The journey of one Buddhist nun*

By SID BROWN

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001. Pp. xi, 180. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

*The journey of one Buddhist nun* gives an invaluable account of Thai Buddhism in practice. The account is invaluable – beyond value, more valuable than any value – not simply for its content but also because in some important way it is offered without the expectation of a return: Sid Brown's patent intent is to give without measure. The intention is that of one engaged in Buddhism and in life, in Buddhism today and, more specifically, in the life of a contemporary Thai Buddhist nun (*māechī*) named Wābī. The book is explicitly offered to a deceased brother, and implicitly to *Māechī* Wābī. We begin, then, with the sacral gravity of the gift – a book offered to those who can not read it.

Yet the author's gift lies also in a remarkable capacity to measure her account. From an unbounded field of sources, ranging from the immense Pali canon to the immense life of *Māechī* Wābī, Brown has harvested and winnowed an extraordinary amount of material. With the essential that remains she tells a series of inter-related stories. These are, most importantly, the on-going stories of *Māechī* Wābī, of the institutionalisation of the Buddhist nunhood in Thailand and also a certain story of Sid Brown. Together, these stories engage numerous issues of interest to students of Buddhism and contemporary

Southeast Asia, as well as to those seeking to explore questions of sexual difference and processes of globalisation.

The author's inaugural goal, as evidenced throughout the book by a sustained interlacing of canonical material with field observation and as stated in the Appendix, was to represent a living Buddhist tradition, 'textually defined but also, most assuredly, culturally defined and defining' (143). Interplay between Pali text and Thai practice is indeed well represented, at once in the words and actions of *Māechī* Wābī and other Thai Buddhists documented by Brown, and in the author's narrative trajectory as she brings her own textual knowledge to bear in interpreting experience. This approach posits a system of mobile exchange in which no single entity can be simply fixed, isolated, reduced and understood as such. Texts inform and explain practice as practice illuminates and motivates the use and production of texts. Similarly, the narrator frequently changes place with the narrated as Brown tells both her story and that of Wābī, including translations of Wābī's interpretations of her own and Sid Brown's stories. This approach, in a book meant not just to describe or analyse but in some sense to teach, is best exploited on the subject of meditation.

Meditation takes on increasing importance as *The journey* progresses. We follow the gradual amplification of Wābī's engagement in meditation, along with her and others' descriptions of increasingly intense meditation visions and experience. This attention to meditation reaches a climax at the book's centre (Chapter 6) in which the author pursues her own and Wābī's Buddhist interpretations of meditation experience. These interpretations are framed, more or less consciously, within the particular sociological, psychological and intellectual realms which the two protagonists – Wābī and Brown – inhabit. Still following *Māechī* Wābī, and as if coming down from the high point of meditative intensity, the narrative focus begins then to gradually shift to the life story of the Institute of Thai *Māechī*. In this way, the author takes us into the experience of meditation. We learn of the visions as recounted and analysed by the nuns themselves, and through the narrative staging, we ourselves undergo a sort of meditative experience. Comparisons made by Brown between the experience of reading and that of meditation, though somewhat problematic if only for their brevity, are in a sense performed by the narrative. This reading experience appropriately includes a sense of vacuity – not necessarily that of meditation's most rarefied element but rather that of leaving such a state to re-enter the mundane world.

This is the world of the Institute responsible for administering Thai *Māechī* and in which focus strays from meditation. In this institutional context, one wonders to what extent meditation, while supported as one of many activities (including classes on Buddhist doctrine, general education, sewing and flower arrangement), may in fact lose its focus. The paradox of teaching meditation – and perhaps of any teaching at all – is thus coupled with the dilemma of the institution. How can one relate knowledge of experience – that is, knowledge of a specific experience and knowledge attainable only through singular personal experience? Yet meditation must be taught – the dangers of unguided exploration, feared in many traditional Buddhist contexts, are made apparent by *Māechī* Wābī. How can an Authority authorise the most interior individual experience? Yet individual freedom is inseparable from, and strictly speaking inconceivable without, some form of institutional frame.

Although these issues are not explicitly addressed in a sustained manner, this book offers a detailed look at a very telling example: in the present socio-economic and cultural context, Thai women's freedom in such religious practice is highly dependent upon institutional support. It is in fact the first encounter with this inextricable paradox which triggers a formative crisis of faith for *Māechī* Wābī. It is doubt in the honesty of teaching – in the very possibility of teaching honestly – a doubt in the authority of authorities, which brings Wābī to nearly lose and then reconfirm her Buddhist faith.

Her story is like that of many contemporary Thai Buddhist nuns. Seeking refuge in the nunhood was seeking refuge from poverty and domestic abuse or unhappiness. But she is exemplary in another sense: rigorously compassionate, giving, hard-working, studious and calm, she is, in Brown's account, a model Buddhist nun. In cultivating such traits, Wābī has improved her lot in life, or rather reaped the merits sown in this and past lives. The explanation of Wābī's life is not, however, hermetically sealed within Buddhist doctrine. Brown shows Wābī's life to be not strictly of her own fashioning, but also largely affected by the course of contemporary history. Understanding the intricacies of this singular life within the context of both Thai nation-building trends and massive globalisation (and it should be noted that at least in the current state of affairs these two forces have contracted a *mariage de raison*) requires extraordinary analytical agility, open to critiquing East *and* West, and capable of standing on perpetually shifting ground. Those points in *The journey* in which Sid Brown seems to lose her footing are precisely such points of translation: linguistic, cultural, intellectual, political translation. These are faults only insofar as, uncovered by the reader, they lay bare the chasms created when different worlds or continents meet.

The author's notably recurrent appeal to choice provides an intriguing demonstration of the complexities of the interpretive task at hand. The temple in which Wābī lives is said to be a 'community of choice' (104); Wābī is frequently said to have 'chosen' her path. The establishment of choices for Thai girls and women is lauded as a goal and accomplishment. The nun's alter-ego in this Thai women's history play is of course the prostitute. Both have left a difficult home for homelessness; they are of similar socio-economic origins. In Brown's narrative, however, an important distinction between the two lies in the question of choice: while the prostitute is forced into her vocation, the nun enters voluntarily. This attribution of choice to the nun is an explicit attempt to combat contemporary Thai preconceptions of the nun as a woman who, having lost in love, 'chose' the nunhood only out of desperation, not unlike the prostitute. More implicitly, the interpretation reflects a certain and steady spread of American political culture which promotes choice in stripping it of philosophical and political complexity. A more precise calculation of the degree of choice exercised by Wābī and other Thai nuns, or even by the Institute for Thai *Māechī* could be had, for example, by investigating the duplicity of karma as it masterfully conjugates determinism and its opposite, free will.

Like Wābī's multiple 'choices' made to enter the nunhood, the 'choice' to establish the Institute of Thai *Māechī* was a complex one. The Institute can be seen in many ways as itself born of prostitution. Steadily expanding and increasingly institutionalised sexual exploitation of poor girls and women in Thailand over the course of the twentieth century necessitated a concerted institutional effort to provide a viable alternative path

for these vulnerable populations. Though not of course without roots in traditional culture, both institutions have been established as such in close conjunction with the unrelenting machine of globalisation. On the one hand, since the Vietnam War, Thailand has been exploited as an international prostitution playground. On the other, American feminism (and here I pose another question to Sid Brown: would many references to 'Western' not be more precisely construed as 'American' – whether or not they come directly from American nationals?) directly incited Thai authorities to formalise female roles within Buddhist hierarchies. In both its working structures and its philosophy, the Institute owes much to Thai social and cultural complexes, of course, but also to Western-inspired forms of private organisation, grassroots resistance and good works. Though Brown delineates this Western influence, she leaves it more or less unanalysed. We are left with a number of vast and imprecise ideas, such as that of choice being what Thai nuns need or want or have.

American hegemony also makes itself felt in *The journey's* referential frame. The foreign case in hand is repeatedly illuminated by reference to contemporary American scholarship on a wide variety of issues, including but by no means limited to Buddhism. This shuttling between Thailand and America would seem to aim at isolating universal truths shared by all cultures, and to give an American public access to a distant subject. In the process, the most essential point – i. e., the universality of truth, the very notion of truth as a fixed, self-sufficient concept – remains unquestioned. See, for example, the observation (p. 73) that 'meditation removes the "bulwarks of ignorance" when we might otherwise actively refuse knowledge of truth'. The American referents, summoned in view of demonstrating the universality of the Thai Buddhist example, are, like the concept of choice, left unanalysed. In the name of laudable and indeed necessary ideals, difference is elided.

A certain nostalgia, even conservatism, enveloping the text at times is not without relation to this lack of analytical edge. Many readers would undoubtedly welcome sustained analysis of the structure of a feminist path like that of Wābī, explicitly based on emulation of the father who abandons the family; of the significance of sexual repression and expression within the Thai nunhood and so apparent in Wābī's life; of the significance of Catholicism within contemporary institutionalisation of the Thai nunhood. Those for whom sewing or flower arrangement classes (or the *Vessantarajataka* tales) have no place in feminism, and those who see danger in the unsounded naïveté of American political culture at large, may particularly suffer from this absence. Brown's determination to celebrate the courage of those who obtain or make it possible to obtain high school diplomas at a late age, like those who demonstrate compassion when struck, tends to inhibit acknowledgement of irreducible complexity. 'Choices' made, consciously or not, to winnow out certain details of Buddhist narrative parallel such analytical lacunae. Though we are told, for example, the story of the Buddha's disgust at the sight of revellers drooling in their sleep the day after, never are we told these revellers were women. Though we are told the story of Mahāpajāpati's long struggle with her son the Buddha to gain his authorisation for acceptance of women into the Buddhist order, never are we told the severe conditions under which authorisation was finally accorded. Sid Brown has told a compelling story; we should however remember to what extent this story is her own in the making.

As final note on language, this book is a vast translation. I would like to reiterate my admiration for the skill and care with which Wābī's life has been given to us. Here again, those points at which translation seems wanting reveal the impossibility of perfect exchange. Yet it is precisely here, where language resists facile translation, that careful analysis can best demonstrate how specific cultures articulate, in their own terms, universal truths. One of these points arises with the Pali/Thai term *dhammatā/thamatā* (p. 58-9). That this single word is spelled differently in its Pali and Thai forms leads, first, to confusion. Commentary in the text and the Appendix do not sufficiently clarify the issues at hand. Never are we told, for example, that Pali words are transliterated letter for letter while Thai is phonetically transcribed. Never is it made clear that *dhammatā* and *thamatā* are virtually (etymologically at the very least) one and the same word. Relationships between Pali/Sanskrit and Southeast Asian vernaculars, though relatively straightforward, are frequently difficult for Western students to grasp. This is largely due to an initial inability to envisage how one language could be written in any number of scripts. A more careful presentation of this situation would have facilitated reading this book and, more generally, conceiving Indian languages as cultural vehicles in Thai. The transliteration of the Thai form, *dharrmatā*, gives in fact an interesting link to an extra-Theravadin past: Thai 'suchness' retains reference to Sanskrit, most probably brought to Thai through Khmer. The uninformed reader is likely instead to understand there to be two related words which mean two different things: in Pali: 'suchness', and in Thai: 'normal'. Understanding the semantically extensive use of *thamatā* in Thai, be it in a secular or a religious context, gains from an understanding of the term's religious roots. The fact that these roots are not entirely cut in popular Thai usage allows Wābī to come to an intensely religious insight of the term. 'Normal' is in fact far too normal a translation for *thamatā*.

It is, on the other hand, the informed reader who may wish for clarification of the translation 'heartmind'. While we learn the relatively irrelevant fact that 'food', is *gap khao* ('with rice') in Thai (p. 8), never are we given the original of 'heartmind', a key concept recurring throughout the book. Is this the Thai *chai* or a Pali 'equivalent'? These are of course details, but details which, carefully studied, could bring us that much closer to the 'heartmind' or the 'suchness' of Thai Buddhism – to its specificity, there where it promises to communicate a universal.

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## Vietnam

*Imagining Vietnam and America: The making of postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950*

By MARK PHILIP BRADLEY

Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000. Pp. xv, 304. Maps, Bibliography, Index.

Mark Bradley's *Imagining Vietnam and America*, recently accorded the Association of Asian Studies' Benda Prize in Southeast Asian Studies, is an important book, and I recommend it highly. It makes significant contributions to the studies of twentieth-century American foreign relations and (post-) colonialism: how an imperial superpower and an independence-seeking, non-Western society sought to make sense of, and shape, their encounters during late colonialism and the early Cold War.

Bradley's core purposes are ambitious: to trace Vietnamese and American engagements with one another – imagined and real – before US intervention in Viet Nam in the 1950s and the resulting catastrophes thereafter; and to show how deeply these mutual perceptions were influenced by contemporary discourses on modernity, colonialism and race, and how profoundly they determined both sides' conceptions of a postcolonial Vietnamese state. As such, Bradley positions himself against a prevailing, mainly Americanist and/or US-centric scholarship that has placed the US war in Viet Nam solely within a framework of Cold War strategies. Bradley's desire to reconceptualise traditional diplomatic history by giving equal voice to the other side and infusing it with intellectual and cultural history – for which the term 'imagining' is code – clearly emerges in the introduction.

How, then, did Vietnamese and American mutual perceptions contribute to the formulations of postcolonial visions for Viet Nam? In the American case, Bradley weaves an exhaustive web of intellectual currents such as nineteenth-century Western imperialist notions of what he aptly if somewhat coyly calls 'racialised cultural hierarchies' (he avoids the term racism), white American concepts of their country's immigration and internal colonisation policies, and self-congratulatory faith in US exceptionalism and its system's universal applicability and desirability. American interwar observers thus described Vietnamese not only as inferior, immature (such as incapable of self-governing), and imitative (such as traditionally susceptible to outside control), but also as victimised by a brutish, exploitative French colonial model refusing – unlike America's supposedly enlightened rule over the Philippines – to guide the Vietnamese to eventual self-determination.

US visions of postcolonial Viet Nam therefore built on abiding criticisms of France and, yet, consistent rejections of Vietnamese appeals of 'revolutionary nationalism' because the Vietnamese – devoid of agency – would only fall under even less desirable external (Soviet or Chinese) manipulations if allowed immediate independence. Consequently, Viet Nam would be best served by a period of tutelage in superior US models. Absent that option – only vigorously pursued by 1954 – continued French control had to suffice. US acquiescence to French recolonisation after 1945, Bradley argues, exemplifies America's full complicity in the Western colonialist project, exceptionalist claims notwithstanding. Its shared, unshakeable racist assumptions, coupled with reflexive anti-communism, always far outweighed its anti-colonial rhetoric.



Bradley therefore dismisses arguments that the 1940s were a period of 'lost opportunities' in US–Vietnamese relations.

Some comments on this otherwise thoroughly convincing part of Bradley's argument: with French Indochina encompassing Cambodia and Laos as well as an artificially divided Viet Nam (of which Cochinchina, its southernmost part, constituted a minefield regarding its post-1945 status), Bradley should have explained his decisions to focus on Viet Nam alone and not to engage the critical issue of Vietnamese national unity. Further, having also used journalists, missionaries and businessmen as diverse sources for American pre-1945 apprehensions of Viet Nam, Bradley later focuses only on the assumptions of diplomats, agents and policy-makers to the exclusion of public debates surrounding decolonisation. Finally, given Bradley's stated 'sharp departure' (p. 7) from Cold War-centric scholarship of US policies in Viet Nam, subjecting this very historiography to an equally rigorous cultural analysis – I suspect with findings – could have lent his revisionism additional force.

If delusions of superiority and exceptionalism continuously prevented Americans from forming a nuanced understanding of the situation in Viet Nam, the Vietnamese by contrast appear far more adaptive, flexible and realistic in their assessment of America as they envisioned and fought to establish their postcolonial state. Again Bradley's analysis begins before World War One, when Vietnamese intellectuals, searching for guidance as the old order crumbled under colonialism, conjured idealised American leaders as role models. Mediated through East Asian accounts and interpreted within Vietnamese cultural contexts and new, Social Darwinist thought, these images supported broadly anti-colonial, 'heroic voluntarist' strategies.

New postwar intellectual and political leaders, also influenced by Marxism-Leninism and Western individualism, hoped for American support of their vision of a postcolonial Viet Nam, now couched in 'revolutionary nationalist' discourse. However, during the 1930s and 1940s they assessed America increasingly soberly, clearly distinguishing between US rhetoric and policies. Consequently, they always sought additional sources of international support in Europe, China, and South/Southeast Asia and America often was 'barely perceptible' (p. 37) and 'remained on the periphery' (p. 114) in Vietnamese debates and strategies. By 1950, with all appeals for US assistance rejected, the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam government reluctantly abandoned a postcolonial vision that included America.

These sections are very good, but Bradley overemphasises Confucian – even more, neo-Confucian – influences on Vietnamese thought and could have engaged the constructedness of a 'nationalised' heroic past. Additionally, frequent recourse to terminology like 'tensions and contradictions', 'shifting currents', and 'fluid' thought distracts more than it explains. Finally, with America admittedly not central to 'the making of postcolonial Vietnam', Bradley at times struggles to keep the focus on Vietnamese perceptions of the US (while detailing Viet Nam's Southeast Asian and Chinese initiatives, but largely leaving out the Franco-Vietnamese encounter). Inserting the word 'in' between the book's title and subtitle would have been advisable.

These concerns, however, are far outweighed by fresh arguments too numerous to detail here. This is a highly insightful book, with impressive depth and reach, based on diligent research in a wide array of sources. Both students and specialists will find it

eminently useful. Given current world crises and US policies, even to a general readership its implications will be disconcertingly apropos.

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*Indochine: la colonisation ambiguë, 1858-1954*

By PIERRE BROCHEUX and DANIEL HÉMERY

Paris: La Découverte, 2001. Pp. 447. Map, Tables, Appendixes, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

This is a key and up-to-date book for anyone interested in colonial studies, offering the best synthesis so far of the history of Indochina from 1858 to 1954. Wanting to move away from the historiography that promotes the civilising role of France for its colonies and the anti-colonial historiography presenting the colonial system as ‘purely dominating, repressive and exploitative’ (p. 8), the authors aim to emphasise the ambiguity of French colonisation.

First, the ambiguity appears at the level of colonial rule. The writers stress the role of economic interests and political orientations in the *métropole* shaping ‘ambiguous’ colonial policies ranging from repression to limited colonial reformism. More precisely, they present the thoughts and practices of state officials who believed and were committed to applying the ideal of the *mission civilisatrice*. However, this ideal often clashed with the economic goals and the repressive policies of the colonial regime.

At the level of Indochina, the authors look at the main Western actors who drove the process of colonisation – explorers, missionaries, the navy/military, civil servants and merchants/businessmen – and the reactions of natives. The colonisation was ambiguous in that the colonisers were far from being a monolithic group. Riddled with conflicts, it was the heterogeneity of the colonisers that was influential in shaping the process of decision-making in the colony. Administrators often served as the middlemen, regulating relations between colonists and natives and frequently restraining the excesses of the former toward indigenous people (pp. 74, 184).

Second, the ambiguity also emerges regarding the unintended consequences of colonial policies. It is correctly emphasised how, like other colonial powers, France created systems of repressive rules which natives turned to their own benefit. It is clear that the republican rhetoric would empower natives in their struggles for independence. Moreover, before the late 1930s, Vietnamese reformists and Vietnamese advocating violence against the colonial state had an ambiguous relation with colonial authorities in their ‘resistance-dialogue’ responses to colonialism (p. 290).

Implicitly, we can wonder if Indochina was in fact ‘an ambiguous colonisation’, whether the colonisation was more ambiguous than in other colonies, or whether all colonial enterprises were ambiguous. For the authors, the fragmented aspect of the conjunction between the French and the Indochinese civilisations – made of admiration and contempt, understanding and misunderstanding on both sides – creates the notion of ‘ambiguity’ (pp. 366, 111). However, this notion of ‘ambiguity’ is not sufficiently proven, and the authors do not tackle it head-on in the book. The term ends up being

defined only as a collection of negative and positive aspects of the colonial enterprise in Indochina. These cases are banal ones which are found under any colonial system. In addition, I feel the term ambiguity is somewhat overstated since it overemphasises the equivocal, double meaning of colonisation and indirectly gives too much weight to its positive side. Actually, many of the examples presented by Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery cast a negative light on colonialism. For instance, the authors themselves define the colonial state as first and foremost a 'police state' (p. 112). At the economic level, they notice how most of the indigenous people hardly benefited from the transfer of the technical and scientific knowledge from the metropolitan centre to the colonial periphery (p. 130). Therefore, from a theoretical perspective, this book does not bring anything new to our understanding of the colonial Indochina since this research is based on the unexplored and too ambiguous concept of 'ambiguity'.

An attractive feature of the book is that it gives a useful updated bibliography on French research done on Vietnam. In addition, beneficial information is provided on historical topics where more research is needed, such as evaluating the profits made by Indochinese firms as well as their failures (p. 166).

I would conclude by strongly recommending this book to any student working on the area of colonial studies.

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