

Book Reviews

Southeast Asia

New terrains in Southeast Asian history.

Edited by ABU TALIB AHMAD and TAN LIOK EE.

Singapore and Athens, OH: Singapore University Press and Ohio University Press, 2003. Pp. 424. Index. DOI: 10.1017/S002246340521007X

This collection on the histories of Southeast Asia presents the reflections of a set of scholars based within the region. Whilst the genealogy of most issues discussed in this book could be found in earlier volumes of edited works, namely *Historians of South East Asia* (ed. D. G. E. Hall [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961]) and *Perceptions of the past in Southeast Asia* (ed. Anthony Reid and David Marr [Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books for Asian Studies Association of Australia, 1979]), this set of essays further engages the terms, concepts, methodologies, theories, audiences and notions of time as well as space that have so often been employed simplistically by historians of the region we now term 'Southeast Asia'.

The book is divided into three main parts. The first examines new perspectives and strategies in approaching the history of Southeast Asia. Thongchai Winichakul sets the baseline by reviewing briefly the development and the almost inevitable end of nationalist histories. To lay the foundation for post-nationalist narratives, he proposes that future histories of Southeast Asia be written 'at the interstices', that is, in the margins of national, cultural, local and global histories. This arduous task should be carried out by historians of the 'home', who are not necessarily 'indigenous' yet have made Southeast Asia the place where they reside. Thongchai envisions that by being constantly sensitive and receptive towards the developments around them and keeping in mind the interstices, historians of the 'home' could some day develop the confidence to make contributions in the realm of theory beyond their fields of study.

Thongchai's essay is extended further by other fine contributions in this part of the volume. Brenda Yeoh's 'Changing conceptions of space' criticises the lack of spatial imagination within a majority of historical writings on Singapore. Like the essays by M. R. Fernando, Yong Mun Cheong and Paul H. Kratoska in the chapters that follow, Yeoh insists that history should be complemented by other theoretical discourses, qualitative methods and far-reaching notions of space. In addressing further Yeoh's propositions, Yong's piece on 'Southeast Asian history, literary theory and chaos' goes further 'left' to propose the inclusion of Chaos Theory into the study of history. Radical as it seems to be, his article has the effect of taking the study of Southeast Asia's history to an even more exhilarating level.

Part Two of the volume tackles the issue of constructing and deconstructing the national past. Ni Ni Myint's chapter assesses 'Myanmar's historiography since 1945'.

Following this are perceptive essays on the politics of Singapore's national histories by C. J. W.-L. Wee and by Hong Lysa and Huang Jianli. Both articles highlight two main features of Singapore's past: the fact that it has been dominated largely by economic-driven motives and a continued de-emphasis on alternative discourses that are, in the main, essential elements of the country's history. This section also includes reviews of Malaysia's past and the interaction of Malay and Thai historiography through the study of texts produced by the various kingdoms.

Part Three delves into the issue of writing at the interstices as proposed by Thongchai. Abu Talib Ahmad's article explores the writing of Malaysia's social history from ecclesiastical records. This is followed by an interesting chapter by Dhiravat na Pombejra, who focuses on the history of Phuket and its inter-connectedness with national and regional pasts. Chapters 13 and 15 explore the histories of Chinese within Malaysian history, focusing on issues of women and secret societies. Andrew Hardy's chapter on migrants in and out of Vietnam is perhaps most worthy of praise as it examines Vietnamese who left their homes out of personal ambition as well as chronically difficult circumstances. The article is a clear demonstration of how by 'looking below' at the perspectives of common people, Southeast Asia's histories can be fundamentally reconstructed towards examining ideas of choices, identity and belonging which are often regarded as fixed and unchanging.

All in all, this volume of essays is indeed a welcome addition to the refinement of historical investigation and narration of the histories of Southeast Asia. Having said that, it is pertinent to note that the Philippines, Indonesia and Cambodia are sadly lost in the silences within the volume due to considerable emphasis on the politics and reassessment of Singaporean and Malaysian historiographies. Southeast Asia as a geographical construct is not subjected to critical assessment; this fact reveals, to a great extent, the many terminologies that are still regarded as 'givens' by 'home' scholars. It is hoped that future volumes of this nature will engage more deeply with such pertinent issues.

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Constituting communities: Theravāda Buddhism and the religious cultures of South and Southeast Asia.

Edited by JOHN CLIFFORD HOLT, JACOB N. KINNARD, JONATHAN S. WALTERS.

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003. Pp. 224. Index.

DOI: 10.1017/S0022463405220076

This collection, composed of an introduction and ten individual chapters, could equally well have been titled *Revisiting Theravāda Buddhism*. It can in effect be read at two levels. As the actual title and the introduction indicate, its varied contents address the issue of what are the Buddhist elements and principles at work in the making of social communities in South and Southeast Asia and how they function. The theme of 'constituting communities' is, it must be said, a loose organising thread for the contributions to the book: the word 'communities' refers in the articles to various kinds of entities, and it rarely appears at the forefront of the authors' perspective. In other words, the question underlying the book may be put in even more general terms: how does

Theravāda Buddhism work as a medium for representing, organising and changing the world? To answer this question, the authors draw their insights mainly from the reading of textual sources, be they doctrinal, historical or contemporary. In spite of the subtitle suggesting a wide geographical scope, the focus of the chapters dealing with historical or contemporary aspects of Theravādin societies is mostly on Sri Lankan religious culture. Burmese, Cambodian, Lao and Thai religious cultures are not at the core of any of the chapters. Still, as some of the contributors themselves suggest, the questions raised and the interpretations put forward from the reading of texts or the observation of the Sri Lankan contexts could often be fruitfully transposed to the study of the history and religious cultures of Southeast Asian Theravādin communities.

Therefore and secondly, the book can also be seen as a major contribution to the study of Theravāda Buddhism at large. Each of the chapters revolves around one or more core issues in the field of Theravāda Studies: karma, merit and its transfer, kingship, sainthood, religious reform, localisation of imported monastic lineages, monastic authority, ways of spreading the Buddhist religion and the cult of the Buddha. In each case, the book renews our understanding of these issues by revealing aspects usually overlooked in the existing scholarship.

In the opening chapter, entitled 'Communal karma and karmic community in Theravāda Buddhist history', Jonathan S. Walters calls for a change of focus in the analysis of the notion of karma. He argues that it has mainly been considered in its individual dimension, whereas the ways it links individuals and forges community bonds have been neglected, with the remarkable but far from satisfactory exception of James P. McDermott's work. Karma is not only an individual's stock of meritorious and demeritorious actions accomplished throughout one's successive existences and influencing one's becoming, it is also a collective making and something which bears collective results. Coining the term 'sociokarma' to stress these collective dimensions, Walters proceeds to offer a typology of seven kinds of sociokarma. Thus individuals such as the Buddha and his entourage may encounter each other and be linked one way or another through existence after existence because of the dynamics of their karmic interactions, a phenomenon which the author labels the 'co-transmigration of social units'. Also, social institutions may be endowed with a kind of karma: they may be reborn with the same organisation (but not necessarily with the same individuals) at different times.

In 'Towards a theory of Buddhist queenship. The legend of Asandhimitā', John S. Strong suggests that thinking about Buddhist kingship, a much-studied institution, requires attention to Buddhist queenship, a much-disregarded institution. He examines the various dimensions in the personality and role of one of Aśoka's queens, Asandhimitā, as it is described in three ancient sources from Southeast Asia. His analysis simultaneously shows what makes a genuine Buddhist queen according to these sources (merit-making in past and present lives, ability to manage the kingdom in the place of the king, conspicuous subordination to her husband's authority and spiritual accomplishment), and demonstrates the kind of mutually supportive though hierarchical relationship that exists between the king and the queen, so that the paradigmatic Aśokan kingship could not be fully instantiated without the queen's contribution.

The two subsequent essays deal with the ways a Buddhist saint may act in the world to save people. In 'Beggars can be choosers. Mahākassapa as a selective eater of offerings', Liz Wilson emphasises how the relationship of gift-giving between a holy figure such as

Mahākassapa and lay people entails a mechanism of ‘transfer of demerit’. Mahākassapa is well known for choosing to take gifts of food from especially destitute people. In consuming this food or accepting what is an impure gift, Wilson explains, the saint consumes a part of the donor’s bad karma and allows him or her to obtain a better rebirth. Throughout the chapter the author compares this mechanism with the principle of the Vedic sacrifice.

This is specifically the argument of Julie Gifford in ‘The insight guide to Hell. Mahāmoggallāna and Theravāda Buddhist cosmology’, namely that the Buddhist saint, far from being solely the kind of world renouncer typically embodied in the figure of the forest monk, is also and correlatively a world saviour. In fact, it is the accomplishment of the saint in the solitary practice of forest meditation that allows him to work towards others’ salvation. Gifford expands upon the case of Mahāmoggallāna, a disciple of the Buddha famous for his supernatural powers. These powers notably make possible his travels to different planes of existence of the Buddhist cosmology: *deva* (heavens) and *peta* (ghosts, hells). He subsequently reports to the Buddha and to lay people about his encounters with the inhabitants of these planes and relates the karmic paths that led them there. This is a way the compassionate saint may teach the community of his devotees and guide them towards right action.

The next three chapters move from a concern for doctrinal or ideological patterns to an emphasis on historical patterns. In ‘When the Buddha sued Visnu’, Jacob N. Kinnard investigates how from the end of the nineteenth century until the 1950s, the internal divisions and external frontiers of the community constituted around the site of Bodhgayā, the place of the Buddha’s Enlightenment, evolved dramatically. Focusing on a few significant events and characters, Kinnard sheds light on how Hindus, Buddhists, the Indian nationalist movement, colonial justice and the Western conceptions of Asian religions all interacted throughout the period in the complex and tense making of this community. The author’s historical approach allows him to suggest that Victor Turner’s notion of *communitas* is not fully adequate to give account of what happens around such a pilgrimage site.

John Clifford Holt’s ‘Minister of Defense? The Visnu controversy in contemporary Sri Lanka’ attempts to explain why the cult of Visnu, widespread in Sri Lankan religious culture as the deity is considered a defender of the Buddhist religion and of the country, has recently been under fierce attack by some members of society. Dwelling at length on the discourse of a foremost critic of this cult, a highly mediatic monk named Soma, the author argues that the call for religious reform through the exclusion of what has often been termed popular practices originates less in a concern for the preservation of an unachievable purity of the Buddhist religion than in a reaction of fear by some members of the Sinhalese community, especially urban middle-class people, who see the presence of Hindu Tamils on the island as a threat to the national Buddhist identity. Ethnic conflict is at the roots of religious reform, while religious reform also nurtures ethnic conflict.

While Holt’s chapter gives a bleak account of a dynamic of closure and exclusion within Sri Lankan society, Anne M. Blackburn’s essay on ‘Localizing lineage. Importing higher ordination in Theravādin South and Southeast Asia’ describes how the same society was able to incorporate successfully a foreign tradition of higher ordination coming from Ayutthaya in 1753, at a time when there were no longer any fully ordained

monks in Sri Lanka. She discusses the factors that made this importation a success and the steps taken by its supporters to transform a foreign cultural product into a local tradition. She concludes by suggesting how her model of localisation may offer new insights on some episodes in the history of Southeast Asian Buddhism.

The last three chapters deal with some of the ways the Buddhist religion may spread and take root in a community: preaching, religious booklets and the visual cult of the Buddha. In 'Preacher as a poet. Poetic preaching as a monastic strategy in constituting Buddhist communities in modern Sri Lanka and Thailand', Mahinda Degalle depicts the rise and characteristics of a style of preaching known as 'poetic preaching' (*kavi bana*) in modern Sri Lanka. The distinctive feature of this mode of preaching lies in the use of verse language and musical tone to give a Buddhist sermon. It renders the sermon far more appealing to the audience and has thus constituted an effective technique for spreading the Buddha's words, particularly in rural areas. Degalle compares the Sri Lankan founder of this kind of preaching, the monk Gunaratana (1914–1989), with the Thai monk Phayom Kalayano (b. 1949), whose lively style and concern for social matters, especially the behaviour of the younger generation, have also made him a most famous preacher. The author stresses the resistance both figures met in their endeavour, since monastic discipline forbids the use of poetry for preaching. He links such resistance to tensions inherent in the structure of national Buddhisms, notably between those seeing Buddhism as a normative tradition to be preserved as it is and those favouring an evolutionary and adjustable Buddhism. True, Degalle concludes, were the Buddha here to give his opinion, he might reject poetic preaching, but it nevertheless fits with a modern context and is an indispensable tool in spreading the Master's words.

In examining the contents of a handbook of Buddhism which has contributed significantly to shaping the religious culture of generations of Sri Lankan Buddhists in the twentieth century, Carol S. Anderson's chapter, "For those who are ignorant". A study of the *Bauddha Ādahilla*, illustrates another of the ways the Buddhist religion spreads. Anderson emphasises that the main impression the handbook left on its numerous readers concerns the idea of the Buddha as the greatest superman in the world and not of the view of a great rational thinker; such a representation notably implies that the ritual cult of the Buddha has a protective effectiveness. This leads the author, among other things, to question the nature of the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which has generally been equated with a move towards 'Protestant Buddhism'. Was the true driving force of this revival, she asks, an intellectual re-examination of the Buddhist doctrine or the reformulation of the ritual worshipping of the Buddha?

The final chapter by James R. Egge, 'Interpretive strategies for seeing the body of the Buddha', discusses successively two types of material: some canonical texts depicting the extraordinary physical characteristics of the Buddha through his encounters with some disciples, and some early *stūpa* reliefs which include such non-figurative elements as trees, wheels, thrones, etc., representing the Buddha. Egge is asking what the body of the Buddha may mean to the one who sees it, and how it may be seen when the Master has physically disappeared from the world. The Buddha's body and its markers appear from both sets of materials as signifying either his mundane or his supramundane greatness, his status as superman or his status as one Awakened; both are sometimes articulated in a single representation. Inspired by Charles Peirce's terminology, the author distinguishes

symbolic and iconic modes of representation. The former uses signs as conventions to evoke the essential qualities of the Buddha, while the latter works through an 'immediate' display of his Buddhahood; the former grounds belief, while the latter arouses devotion. Egge suggests that a shift took place from the one to the other around the first century BCE.

It is no wonder that this stimulating book, written with great clarity and insight, is dedicated to Frank K. Reynolds. Reynolds' work and teaching at the University of Chicago have deeply marked and renewed the study of Therāvada Buddhism from the early 1970s onwards, his influence being especially formative for the constitution of the field of Therāvada Studies in America. Most of the contributors to the book, all of whom are his former or current students, now teach in American academic institutions. The book thus also offers an image of the current state of Theravāda Studies in America; in reading it, one can only be truly optimistic about the future of the field.

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Transparency and authoritarian rule in Southeast Asia: Singapore and Malaysia.

By GARRY RODAN.

London and New York: Routledge, 2004. xvii, 265 pp.

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Economics, electronics, epidemics and explosives started to dominate the vocabulary of the Asian-Pacific region from the closing years of the twentieth century; from the 1997 economic crisis and the Internet to terrorism and SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome). Historically disruptive, the forces of commerce, technology, militancy and disease have altered the political landscapes of the region from South Korea to Indonesia. Transparency – defined within the terminologies of accountability, openness, democracy and plurality – began to be portrayed as a paramount condition for governments who do not want to be marginalised by capital flows and engulfed by social unrests. Between the newly emerging democracies of Thailand and Indonesia and their stubbornly totalitarian counterparts in Laos and Myanmar is the resilience of the economically vibrant but politically authoritarian governments of Singapore and Malaysia. Rather than aberrations of global trends, in *Transparency and authoritarian rule in Southeast Asia*, Garry Rodan seeks to caution against the faith in political crises like 9/11 and the SARS pandemic, as well as deeper trends of information technology and increasing capital mobility as agents of democratisation. Although his focus on the dominance of state power over civil societies, the media and industry in these two countries is not novel, Rodan's work should be read along the provision of a framework of understanding the continued persistence of these regime systems.

The author introduces the relationship between information and governance by outlining the ideas on the inevitable route towards modernisation and liberal democracy by authoritarian states. The insular political structures of these states, for example, have given in to the pressures of their increasingly educated and middle-class population and also to the demands of the competitive global capitalist markets. Through the cases of Singapore and Malaysia, however, Rodan seeks to challenge the notions that remaining

authoritarian governments become exceptions to the general rule rather than alternative political models of capitalist development.

Inheriting the British parliamentary systems, the governing parties of United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) in Malaysia and the People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore have held their commanding position within their countries' political cultures since independence in 1957 and 1965 respectively. Since the 1960s, to varying degrees, the two governments have emasculated competing political pressures from trade unions, opposition parties, civil society groups and the local and international media. Rodan posits that the 1997 financial crisis and accompanying spotlight on 'crony capitalism' and the general absence of transparency as the causes of the weak financial positions have placed the two governments under significant pressures. The ideological and political foundations of the authoritarian systems of Singapore and Malaysia were left initially besieged as their counterpart in the Suharto regime gave way to a new wave of democratic reforms in Indonesia.

Rather than caving in, the two states have not just negotiated and co-opted the growing demands for transparency; they were also instrumental in capitalising on the various political and economic crises to enhance their legitimacies. In significant detail, the author highlights the approaches of both the Singapore and Malaysian governments in skilfully differentiating corporate governance from democratic accountability in the 'reform' of government-linked companies and financial regulations to address the concerns of international capital. On the one hand, regulations have sprung up for a more consistent and unambiguous disclosure of accounts and information to facilitate the smoother flow of financial capital. What is emphasized here is that such reforms do not necessarily weaken the authority of the state. On the other hand, the two states continue to keep a relatively tight lid on crucial national statistics that would threaten 'national security', and have continued to monitor the flow of information in the broadcast, print and electronic media with greater zeal.

In this respect, Rodan clearly explains the process of regulating not just information by the state on the media, but groups intending to use it for purpose of political mobilisation and contestation. While the blatant use of censorship (especially in Singapore) is no longer practised given the two countries' commitments to the goal of being global information hubs, more subtle measures are employed to co-opt or muzzle dissenting forces. The elements of 'crusading journalism' of the local media in both countries have been tamed since the 1970s with the organisations being controlled or heavily influenced by the state apparatus. Their international counterparts, too, found themselves wrestling with expensive libel suits in local courts, restrictions on circulation and expulsion of their correspondents. Media corporations like Bloomberg, *Time* and the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, with significant investments in the Singapore and Malaysian markets, found it wiser to compromise than to confront.

Lastly, Rodan also indicates that other political contenders, from public activists to opposition figures in the two countries, operating within the limits of legality, have been faced with a barrage of vague regulations selectively imposed on them. This has prevented them from capitalising on any dents in the government armour from financial fallouts or political scandals, or even to deploy information technology to raise greater counter-hegemonic challenges. Hence, it is not peculiar that the authoritarian political cultures of Singapore and Malaysia have paradoxically received international praise for being transparent from the World Health Organisation and the International Monetary

Fund. Rodan also believes that these systems are no longer exceptional, when they are held up as models for other authoritarian countries like China to emulate.

A central feature that has dominated this publication is the trend of controlling information through a combination of reactive censorship and cynical manipulation by both the Singapore and Malaysian governments. However prevalent these practices are, though, the preservation of the legitimacy of the two states is not merely founded upon such measures. In his quest to draw out the themes of transparency, especially after the post-1997 financial crisis, Rodan has unfortunately downplayed the more conscious and consistent efforts by the two governments to ‘manufacture consent’ among their general populace. In this respect, the ruling parties of both countries have deployed their public institutions, along with state-controlled and state-influenced community and media organisations, to propagate their founding myths as well as the indispensability of their guardianship over society. Thus, the constant reminders of the successful economic development of both Singapore and Malaysia, as well as the need to unite behind the government to maintain internal cohesion and fend off external threats of terrorism or SARS, are commonly echoed through the countries’ information networks. Rodan’s analysis would be more comprehensive if based on the question of whether the integrity and durability of both the PAP and Malaysia’s Barisan National (National Front) are rooted more in their successes in managing external pressures for greater transparency or in their ability to construct a more compliant social consensus among their subjects.

Nonetheless, Rodan’s examination of corporate and political transparency in Singapore and Malaysia is as thorough and meticulous as it is concise. In discussing the broader thematic issues, he has left few stones unturned with his consideration of most of the relevant events that are crucial in building up his case. Moreover, given the persistent trends of the neo-liberal capitalist paradigm in demanding corporate transparency instead of fundamental democratic changes, it is likely that Rodan’s arguments will remain sustainable in the longer term. More importantly, the wide coverage of themes and issues in *Transparency and authoritarian rule in Southeast Asia* gives this volume a broad appeal both across different academic disciplines and among a larger general readership.

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Indonesia

Sisters and lovers: Women and desire in Bali.

By MEGAN JENNAWAY.

New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002. Pp. xx, 309. Maps, Photographs, Notes, Bibliography, Index. DOI: 10.1017/S0022463405240079

‘Desire and all its discontents’ – these words close Megan Jennaway’s book, *Sisters and lovers: women and desire in Bali*. While the epilogue is a heart-wrenching account of the patriarchal tyranny some women in Bali live under (one of the main protagonists, Puri, has her baby taken by her husband’s family immediately after giving birth), the book is certainly far from depicting women as ‘merely the passive agents of their own

subordinate location in both cultural discourse and the material world' (p. 221). Rather, Jennaway provides women with a space where they can disentangle and articulate the complex emotions and desires they engage with as they journey through life, experiencing its highs and lows, as sisters and lovers, mothers and daughters, wives and widows.

Feeling frustrated with conventional methods of anthropological analysis, a format which makes it difficult to render not only the context but also the texture of female desire, Jennaway employs a form of 'experimental' ethnographic writing. To this end, the book's theoretical musings, spanning discourses as disparate as Freudian psychoanalysis, feminist philosophy and medical anthropology, are interspersed with evocative vignettes, providing both relief from heavy text and a return to the realities of quotidian life. These fictionalised accounts, one or two pages long and printed in italics, express the 'felt, subjective nature of women's emotional and erotic experience' (p. 215). While I found this method worked exceptionally well – affirming Jennaway's skill as a writer of prose – the passages do at times appear rather disjointed from the rest of the text, and at some points readers may wish for more explicit links between the analysis and the fiction. This use of fictionalised ethnography does open itself up to critique: how can one person possibly know, let alone convey, the felt subjectivity and sensual feelings of another? Moreover, on what evidence are these fictionalised descriptions based? I feel, however, that the benefits of the approach taken by Jennaway (such as the depth given to individual accounts) are outweighed by such potential criticisms.

Jennaway eloquently explores the negotiation of desire, a desire which moves beyond the realm of the sexual to incorporate all corporeal experiences. This encroachment into the world of desire is a well-needed one as anthropology has, until recently, eschewed the study of this domain – ironic for a discipline that specialises in the study of social and sexual taboos (p. 17). Taking the work of philosopher-psychoanalyst Jean-Michel Oughourlian as a departure point, Jennaway defines desire as 'an inter-subjective relation', affirming that it is fundamentally a *social* phenomenon, a connection between people (p. 216). She also tackles the notion of Balinese women being politically and socially 'muted' subjects (Chapter 2); as women are structurally located in discourse as the objects of desire, their desire is thus denied and repressed (p. 217).

Jennaway critiques the work of early ethnographers – primarily Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson and Jane Belo – who characterised Balinese people as emotionally flat and devoid of climatic affect. Rather, she reveals that individuals in Bali, including adolescents, register and experience desire as intensely as people elsewhere, albeit with particular cultural specificities (e.g., frustrated desire and hysterical illness). In examining desire, she explores ways in which it is lived out. Because Balinese women are 'muted', they often resort to outlets such as hysteria, and the body thus becomes a vehicle of articulation. Women employ subversive strategies such as evasion, deceit and clandestine forms of defiance, and some resort to embodied forms of resistance such as hysterical illness. In this way, women actively flout and resist the positioning of themselves as silent bodies. Female desire is, therefore, no longer repressed and denied but played out in hysterical illness, which becomes a source of symbolic wealth or power (Chapter 7). Moreover, women's hysteria subverts the normal hierarchical ordering of local gender relations and women's desire is for once dominant.

The choice of image for the cover is somewhat perplexing. While in her Foreword to the book, Linda Connor notes that 'bare-breasted maidens of the 1920s and 1930s have been replaced by nubile, flower-bedecked *legong* dancers' (p. xi), the cover image is 'Harvest', a painting by Dewa Putu Bedil featuring a number of bare-breasted maidens. As Jennaway targets the traditional muteness and objectification of women in Bali, the use of this image is intriguing. Is the cover seeking to undermine the strength of Balinese cultural codes which stress the desirability of female modesty? Is it attempting to reclaim the female body and promote the agency of women? Or alternatively, is it urging us to open the book and discover what lies beyond these images of Balinese women?

Readers not familiar with Indonesian and Balinese also may find the frequent use of local words tiring. However, there is an extensive glossary and the inclusion of these terms does add a particular richness to the text. One must presume that the reference to photo 1.7 (p. 117) is referring to photo 5.1, and the reference to photo 1.9 (p. 117) is referring to photo 5.3.

This rich ethnographic exploration of young women's desire presents an intimate portrait of women as they negotiate their hopes and pleasures. It is a wonderfully written book and will be of interest and value to anyone interested in Bali, desire and women.

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La minorité musulmane de Singapour.

By LAURENT METZGER.

Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003. Pp 296. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

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Unfortunately, the first impression one gets when reading this book is that it has probably been written in haste, especially the first chapters. The misspelled reference to Indonesia's '*pancalisa*' (p. 18) could still be a proofing mistake, but on the same page, the mention of a compulsory religious affiliation for Singaporeans is somewhat startling: many of their leaders have been avowed agnostics, if not atheists. The new towns of Ang Moh (*sic*) Kio and Tempines (*sic*) are mentioned (p. 41), even though the correct spellings are given on the map (p. 12). Geyland (*sic*) Serai appears on p. 58, as well as China's Ningxia '*région*' (actually a province). Some data are obviously wrong, such as the figure (p. 69) of 13.7 per cent (only !) of young Malays having reached the secondary school level in 1980 (by the way, why not a more recent figure ?). The style is sometimes too lax, or even incorrect to the point of obscurity, such as '*la création d'une instance qui se ferait par la base et non décidée par les pouvoirs publics*' (p. 34); '*un programme de reconnaissance des divisions des ressources humaines*' (p. 91) – probably a literal translation from English – is unintelligible for a French speaker. Some details are completely irrelevant and make the book excessively burdensome: thus, an entire page is dedicated to a list of mosque conferences in 2002, complete with dates, timetables, room locations, entrance fees, and such.

The extensive first part of the book, dedicated to 'The main Islamic organizations' (especially Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura [MUIS]) is very descriptive, and does not go

much further than what can be found in yearbooks, directories or in-house newsletters. Sorely lacking, for example, is a thorough evaluation of the ideological tenets of missionary groups such as *Perdaus* or *Jamiyah*, or of a secular group like the Association of Muslim Professionals. Nevertheless some remarks are useful, such as the general failure of 'Islamic finance' or the small number of contributors of the voluntary Muslim tax for the poor, *zakat harta*.

Part Two ('Islamic controversies') is more original. Three issues that are controversial among Muslims (and sometimes non-Muslims too) over the last ten years are considered: human organ transplants, the role of the *madrassah* (religious education), and the Islamic headscarf (obviously something of much interest to the French public, as a more restrictive law was adopted in 2004 amidst heated debate). Quite correctly, the positions of the three main actors are considered: Islamic official bodies, government authorities (or the ruling People's Action Party) and the Muslim community. Thus, in January 2002 several school principals, backed by the Ministry of Education, decided to ban the headscarf among students as contradicting the norms of school uniform. MUIS, speaking for the majority of Singapore Islamic organisations, adopted a low profile: good education should take priority over dress code.

In a tightly controlled society like Singapore, independent voices are harder to find: Laurent Metzger spots them on several Internet discussion forums. His account, sometimes almost *verbatim*, of their heated controversies is often revealing. Nevertheless, the small number of persons involved (a few names appear again and again) weakens the conclusions he draws regarding the feelings of the whole Muslim community. He should at least have considered another valuable source: the letters to the editors of daily newspapers, especially the Malay-language ones (Metzger teaches Malay/Indonesian at La Rochelle University in France).

The shorter Part Three ('The place of the Singapore Muslim community') is not very satisfying. There is no serious account of the deep divisions in the community based on ethnic origins, religious practice or socio-economic status; only the special status of the Arabs is somewhat developed (pp. 207–8). The attraction of Mahathirism and the more recent drift of a minority towards radical Islamism are mentioned, but in an overly impressionistic way, as once again Internet newsgroups are the main source. The 'rejected minority' syndrome, and the contradictions in government policy towards disenfranchised Muslims, are hardly discussed. The short conclusion puts into contrast the current terrorist threat, which could jeopardise the ethnic equilibrium, and the fact that Muslims in Singapore are more prosperous and free, even as regards religious practices, than people in most Muslim countries: thus more than 20 mosques have been built since Independence in 1965.

Apart from the account of several Internet debates, this book will not bring much to the readers of, say, Tania Li (*Malays in Singapore. Culture, economy and ideology* [Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989]) or Lily Zubaidah Rahim (*Singapore dilemma. Political and educational marginality of the Malay community* [Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1998]). However, for a French-speaking public always underinformed on present-day Southeast Asia, and extremely eager to know more about Islam, it could be of some help.

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Vietnam

Atlas historique des six provinces du sud du Vietnam: du milieu du XIXe au début du XXe siècle.

By PHILIPPE LANGLET and QUACH THANH TAM.

Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2001. Pp. 287. Tables, Maps, Bibliography, Index.

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Anyone who has wrestled with the frustrations of trying to locate particular Vietnamese places historically by tracing them through a convoluted succession of changing administrative boundaries will appreciate how much work has gone into this excellent historical atlas of the six provinces of southern Vietnam (Cochin China or Nam-kỳ) during the nineteenth century. Philippe Langlet and Quach Thanh Tam have drawn on an impressive array of sources, ranging from the Nguyễn provincial gazetteers [*Đại Nam nhất thống chí*] and other official court texts on the Viet side to the *Annuaire de la Cochinchine* and other far less readily available works from the early colonial era, and painstakingly sifted their geographical and administrative information. The result is an indispensable research tool for historians and others interested in this part of Vietnam.

As the authors point out, the atlas will be particularly useful to any scholars seeking to mine the economic and social data made available by Professor Nguyễn Đình Đầu's monumental series on the Nguyễn cadastral registers (*địa bạ*), published throughout the 1990s and later. Many other researchers beyond the relatively small number involved in such studies will also benefit from this atlas, principally because of its wonderful array of maps. While the authors' Introduction draws the user's attention to certain limitations in the maps, especially the absence of detail at the village level, this is an unavoidable consequence of the insuperable difficulties involved in mapping this volatile pioneering area in the nineteenth century. In 1866, for instance, in the two provinces of An Giang and Vĩnh Long alone officials reported the establishment of 190 new villages, while numerous established communes combined or divided with equal facility. Instead of communes, Langlet and Quach take cantons (*tổng*) as their basic unit, and from there reconstitute the boundaries of sub-prefectures (*huyện*, now translated as 'districts') and thence prefectures and provinces. Although the resulting maps are 'sketches', to borrow the authors' own modest assessment, from my experience using them I can vouch for their real value.

The first series of maps provides an overview of the six provinces around 1850, then 1868, and 1909, comparing Vietnamese and French administrative divisions in 1860 and 1909, and again in 1851 and 1997. While the general maps are interesting, far more significant is the following series of provincial maps that compares the imperial re-organisation of 1832 with the French administrative situation from 1862/67. This section, which takes each of the six provinces in turn, forms the heart of the book. Individual chapters begin with a translation of the province's administrative history from the mid-nineteenth-century Nguyễn gazetteer, followed by numerous maps showing the area in the mid-1800s, in 1868 and in 1909. After these maps comes a detailed analysis of each constituent *huyện*, including information on the numbers of its communes and a brief history of its administrative permutations throughout the nineteenth century.

The third section is perhaps the most fascinating. It contains a first attempt to compare data on the six provinces gathered from the Nguyễn gazetteers with French material from 1868. Some very useful introductory remarks preface chapters that provide tabulated information for both the imperial province and the French *inspections* covering the same area in 1868. These demographic, agricultural and educational data provide a sort of snapshot of the six Nam-kỳ provinces before much colonial change had occurred. These statistics reveal an enormous internal variation between provinces and districts at the time, and underline the mixed ethnicities and frontier nature of certain western prefectures in particular. For instance, if the average ratio of registered taxpayers to general population was overall, a very high 1:15, the range was extraordinary: from 1:7.5 in Chợ Lớn to an astonishing 1:43 in Trà Vinh, a prefecture that still contained 55 Khmer villages in 1868.

By conveniently bringing together such worthwhile material, and setting it upon the solid base of genuinely comparable maps at the cantonal and district levels, Langlet and Quach have done a real service to those seeking to anchor analyses of colonial and modern Vietnam much deeper in the soil of its own history. What a great pity that the materials for a similar atlas covering the northern and central regions probably no longer exist.

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