

mid-Ming vessels, shipyards, timber resources, caulking techniques, nautical technology, and so forth.

Hundreds of similar entries can be identified, where the finely printed *AS* compendium supplements and/or supersedes the older *ISMH* in one way or the other. Liew-Herres has endowed historians with a wonderful research tool, equipped with reliable indices and various appendices, and designed in such a way that it can be used with great ease. This work will become another indispensable guide for sinologists and Southeast Asianists alike and it should be acquired by all specialist libraries.

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Southeast Asia

Beyond the sacred forest: Complicating conservation in Southeast Asia

Edited by M. DOVE, P. SAJISE and A. DOOLITTLE

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For anyone who has had the good fortune to spend time between the ricefields and rainforests of Southeast Asia, it should be clear that environmental conservation is not a simple topic. Landscape categories such as forest and agriculture intertwine and many commonplace concepts, such as ‘sacred forest’ or ‘conservation’, carry influences that do not translate to local contexts. Some well-known debates about ‘local’ environmental knowledge carry misleading assumptions about spatial scale or indigeneity that hide exactly how ‘locality’ is defined.

This rich collection of essays seeks to redress many of these challenges. The book’s aim is to rethink some of the classic — and all too often unquestioned — assumptions about conservation that can result in simplistic categories such as ‘East’ and ‘West’, ‘nature’ and ‘society’ or ideas based on ecology in equilibrium. The authors therefore call for a new approach that is, among others, ‘postlocal’ (p. 1), ‘postequilibrium’ (p. 3), and ‘post-Western’ (p. 5). Their key objective is to welcome back some of the complexity that underlies ecological change in dynamic, settled landscapes. This complexity relates to how people use resources and landscapes, as well as to understanding how scientific and analytical approaches can reduce this complexity in unhelpful ways. Together, these arguments point to ‘a developing belief that there are no final or fixed endpoints in conservation and development management and intervention’ (p. 4).

The central concept of the ‘sacred forest’ is an important illustration. The book reviews the long debate concerning whether traditional resource management constitutes ‘conservation’ if it is ‘unintentional’, and how far it represents a happy coincidence between the interests of local people and those of Western conservationists. The editors list the various problems with these views, including the outside influences on making specific forests and people visible as ‘spiritually driven conservation’,

which ‘artificially abstracts what has happened on the landscape at one point in time from what has happened on the landscape as a whole over a long period of time’ (p. 8). Simple notions also avoid the connection between conservation and the regulation of labour, or the role of forests as ‘places of power’ (p. 9). The editors ask why the misleading representations of sacred forests, or ‘forest fundamentalism’ remain so strong. They suggest the answer lies in the Orientalist nature of the concept, and its ability to manufacture ‘difference between the metropolitan cultures of environmentalists and the marginal cultures of those having sacred groves’ (p. 9).

These themes are then illustrated in nine substantive chapters concerning Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. Lye Tuck-Po (pp. 37–61) presents an analysis of how nature–society dichotomies have been presented in the Taman Negara national park in Malaysia. This chapter gives a political history of how different government agencies have tried to influence the park and the Batek people, resulting in park landscapes and Batek livelihoods that reflect this fluctuating process.

Jeyamalar Kathirithamby-Wells (pp. 62–90) provides a useful background to current debates about plantations in Malaysia. She presents a history of rubber ‘megaplantations’ (p. 75) and the marginalisation of smallholders. Michael Dove (pp. 91–119) then analyses how smallholders have seen rubber in West Kalimantan (Indonesia). Paradoxically, rubber is called ‘dead land’ by smallholders (p. 91), yet has been lauded for its ecological and livelihood benefits. Dove uses linguistic and anthropological analysis to argue that ‘smallholders drew on indigenous cultural values to mark off the rubber production sphere and limit its wider impact on their society’ (p. 111).

Four chapters then consider how — and if — to include indigenous people in conservation policies. Upik Djalins (pp. 123–50) claims simple consultation makes people ‘the European ideal of the “ecologically noble savage”’ (p. 123). Amy Doolittle (pp. 151–79) provides a historical account of how property rights arose dynamically in Sabah (Malaysia) neither through predefined institutional behaviour, nor through a linear model of resistance to the state, but as a somewhat haphazard evolution of ‘creative forms of state control’ (p. 152). Emily Harwell (pp. 180–215) and Levita Duhaylungsod (pp. 216–38) complement this dynamic explanation of state–society relations in Kalimantan and the Philippines.

The book ends with two chapters focusing on means of understanding and representing indigenous knowledge. Endah Sulistyawati (pp. 239–75) analyses knowledge of swidden, biodiversity and rice sufficiency in Kalimantan, utilising statistics, household decisions and labour supply. Yunita Winarto (pp. 276–302) considers integrated pest management in Indonesia as an example of modern technologies among traditional farmers, drawing lessons for what this means for increasing state control.

This dense and rich book reminds readers that conservation is difficult to reduce to predefined concepts of social agency or environmental quality. The obvious readers will be scholars of political ecology, development and anthropology. But its message should be communicated more broadly: simplistic approaches to conservation lack accuracy; and transferable lessons can be drawn from contextual work.

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