

BOOK REVIEW

States and Societies in Motion: Essays in Honour of Takashi Shiraishi

Khoo Boo Teik and Jafar Suryomenggolo (eds) Copenhagen: NIAS Press (In Association with National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies), 2021.

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This book curates a rich and rewarding set of essays honouring Takashi Shiraishi-*sensei*, one of Japan's most respected social scientists. Befitting Shiraishi's professional contribution and his personal qualities, these essays are contributed by several of his long-time colleagues and friends in various institutions across the world. Often with Japan at their nexus, the essays speak to three enduring themes: political movements in Southeast Asia; national and regional politics in China and Japan; and the links between ideology, networks and policies at critical junctures of state formation. Put together, such highly engaging essays shed light on the intellectual thought processes that are essentially products of continuous conversation with Shiraishi over his distinguished career.

Perhaps more importantly, these essays underline the role of Shiraishi as a 'transnational point of intersection' (p. 14). Almost all of the essay contributors have met each other and exchanged notes in events, research networks organized by Shiraishi. Furthermore, his approach of cultivating an environment where researchers (young ones, especially) are free to explore as they see fit is increasingly uncommon in today's 'publish or perish' academic culture. To a certain extent, this has been facilitated by Shiraishi's resourcefulness in securing research funding to invite scholars so that they can spend time in Japan to pursue their writing interests. This patience in turn explains how Japan has managed to grow and maintain a burgeoning community of international academic exchange and expert cooperation.

States and Societies in Motion begins with an introduction by the two editors, who review his career moves and contributions. In addition, they also showcase Shiraishi's pictures, some of which provide a rare glimpse into his formative years in Niihama and Matsuyama, both in Ehime Prefecture. Thereafter, 13 essays provide lively discussion and debate on issues ranging from Japanese populism (Chapter 3), Muslim separatist movements in the southern end of the Philippines (Chapter 8), China's growing role in Asia (Chapter 10) and law enforcement in the rural areas of colonial Burma (Chapter 11).

For scholars who are keen on Thailand, Chapters 9, 12, 13 and 14 would prove insightful. For example, Chapter 9 revisits the origins of Thailand's bureaucracy. Going against conventional wisdom that portray Siam (which changed its name to Thailand only in 1939) as a crafty state that preserved its independence by playing the colonizers against one another, it argues for a more nuanced perspective. Amongst other things, Chapter 9 advocates the role of human agency and contingent choices by documenting the rise of King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910) from a puppet king to absolute monarch. Although it does not deny that the reign of King Chulalongkorn was characterized by Siam's modernization, it shows that the moves to consolidate power towards the monarchy simultaneously generated some 'inefficient' features such as arbitrary law enforcement and regulatory overlaps. More crucially, much of the structure set up by King Chulalongkorn persists to this day, which in turn circumscribes

the Southeast Asian nation's industrialization trajectories. If we accept this thesis, then it is also high time we more critically challenge oft-paddled arguments attributing the inefficient features of the state machinery to Thailand's (uneven) democratization, social norms, idiosyncratic behaviour from the politicians, etc.

Concluding *States and Societies in Motion* are two interesting chapters. Chapter 15 is a candid interview, conducted by the two editors, with Shiraishi himself. Some of the issues discussed include his childhood, education, career choices, policy and outreach work and how he views Japan in a fast-changing world. As a junior researcher, I find this chapter particularly meaningful because it provides more context on why and how he made some of the decisions that defined his career. Although not everyone will get the same opportunities, Shiraishi's frank sharing of his rationale behind key decisions instils hope for prospective researchers who are interested in pushing the existing knowledge paradigm. Along the same vein, Chapter 16 offers a careful compilation of Shiraishi's publications across different genres and languages. Before 1997 (when he returned to Japan from Cornell University), the majority of Shiraishi's publications are in academic outlets. However, his output began to show a distinctly higher proportion of working papers, commentaries, short essays and book reviews in the post-1997 era. The shift in focus reflected Shiraishi's growing public profile in Japanese academia. Despite a heavier social, public contribution, he maintained a rather healthy academic output. In addition to demonstrating Shiraishi's influence as a leading public intellectual, this chapter highlights how one could actively contribute to academia and the public at large by thoughtfully promoting particular forms of writings at different stages of his/her career. Read side-by-side with Chapter 15, it provides a helpful compass to more purposefully understand and celebrate Shiraishi's accomplished legacy.

In summary, this book does what it intends to do – a *festschrift* honouring a respected scholar – exceedingly well. Containing contributions from Shiraishi's extended network of colleagues, former pupils and friends, it also connects and contextualizes some of the key development issues in East Asia over the last few decades. Notwithstanding some minor shortcomings (e.g., several works cited in-text do not appear in their exact form in the bibliography), which are understandable in undertakings of this sort, the book is a recommended source of information for both general and specialist readers interested in the dynamics of regional development. It is hoped that the insights gleaned here would inform scholars and policymakers alike in their search for more innovative ways to tackle East Asia's remaining and emerging development challenges. On a more positive and inspiring note, it is my belief that *States and Societies in Motion* will encourage future generations of scholars to 'up their game' in their quest to aspire to the levels set by the book's honouree.