

opportunity to link himself to Sihanouk, who had brought the temple dispute with Thailand to the International Court of Justice and obtained a decision in Cambodia's favour in 1962. Hun Sen's success in putting Preah Vihear on the UNESCO list not only justifies his duty to protect and carry on Sihanouk's legacy, but also enables him to promote Sihanouk's victory over neighbouring Thailand among the Cambodian public as well as the international community.

Readers would also benefit from a more in-depth discussion of the factors that caused FUNCINPEC to collapse. A focus on the top elite's political ideas as well as their perspectives on leadership, in certain respects, is a useful approach to capture the party's core ideology. However, this method also restrains the discussion from seeing a broader picture of the story as these key actors' political ideology is not always the main factor that determines their party's success or failure. FUNCINPEC failed because of poor leadership and interference by the CPP. The party experienced its first loss in the general election in 1998 mainly because it had suffered from a conflict with the military in July 1997 in which Hun Sen took away Ranariddh's military power and forced the prince into exile. As FUNCINPEC's internal divisions are widely known to have been caused by corruption and Hun Sen's interference, leading to Ranariddh's removal as party head in 2006, its losses in the general elections in 2008 and 2013 should be interpreted above and beyond Ranariddh's efforts to embody the image of his father.

THEARA THUN

*International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden*

## Indonesia

*Sovereign women in a Muslim kingdom: The Sultanahs of Aceh, 1641–1699*

By SHER BANU A.L. KHAN

Singapore: NUS Press, 2017. Pp. vii + 317. Map, Plates, Glossary, Bibliography, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463419000092

In *The forgotten queens of Islam* Fatima Mernissi (1993) mentioned that the Islamic societies in the Malay Archipelago have been special, in regard to the reign of women. Nevertheless, scholarly works on female rulers in the Indo-Malay worlds of Southeast Asia are still relatively uncommon. A closer look at both oral and written local history also suggests that the reigns of women neither 'appear' nor were recorded as extensively as those of men. In the case of Aceh, for instance, while Sultan Iskandar Muda (the 'king of kings' in *Hikayat Aceh*) and other male rulers dominated historical narratives — their policies, territorial and military expansion, power struggles and wars were written about in relative detail — little was said about the queens of Aceh. Given this gap, Sher Banu Khan's work is undeniably significant, and will help to balance the existing mainstream historical discourse. Mining the limited sources such as letters and diaries left by the Acehnese queens, along with Dutch

colonial sources and Malay manuscripts, Khan successfully uncovers and explores more detail about their reigns.

In *Sovereign women in a Muslim kingdom: The Sultanahs of Aceh, 1641–1699*, Khan suggests that the ascension of the first female ruler of Aceh (Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah) in 1641 took place in a unique situation (p. 253), although three other sultanahs followed in her path. The three other sultanahs also followed Safiatuddin Syah's model of leadership, which Khan defines as the 'politics of piety'. She is convinced that the half century of successive women rulers (1641–99) was not an 'accident' in Aceh's history, and that those sultanahs 'were not mere puppets but ruled in their own right' (p. xiv). Notably, the aristocracy (*orangkaya*; *ulee balang*), accepted and supported them. The sultanahs' policies benefited the aristocracy through bringing about more peaceful relations, which 'replaced the perpetual conflict that characterized royal-elite relations under the earlier male king's' (p. 215). They are also portrayed as 'stranger queens', non-partisans who remained outside all political factions. In this way, they could facilitate peace, commerce, and diplomacy, as well as mediate conflict. Collectively, their reign over half of the seventeenth century brought stability and safety for international commerce, and made Aceh the archipelago's most important independent port.

Generally speaking, the topic of women and leadership can be controversial within Muslim societies such as Aceh (up to the present). This is more so when it relates to religious interpretations of female leadership. Indeed, 'women' and 'leadership' used to be perceived as incompatible, and provoked some resistance. Interestingly, Khan's study shows that there was no such resistance in the case of the Acehnese queens; the prerequisites for a ruler being: royal lineage, good conduct, acceptance by the majority of the aristocracy, and conformance to the *kanun syarak kerajaan Aceh*. Abdurrauf Singkel, the well-known Acehnese *ulama*, never objected to the idea of a female ruler. Nor was there any serious resistance based on religious interpretation or from religious groups (at least until the death of Abdurrauf in 1693). Only later, during the reign of the last queen (1688–99), did a letter from Mecca arrive banning women from being rulers, and the sultanah deposed.

This study of the Acehnese sultanahs' era also importantly points to the existence of a 'local understanding of statecraft, gender and Islamic authority' (p. xv) in the Indo-Malay world that might differ from the general context of Muslim societies. Indeed, *Sovereign women in a Muslim kingdom* is a pioneering study in this respect. Further research on other regional Muslim female rulers will perhaps extend this effort and produce a deeper framework for understanding and conceptualising the interrelationships between women, power and sovereignty in Southeast Asia's Muslim kingdoms. This historical knowledge will inevitably also contribute to the 'unfinished' debate on women's leadership in Muslim societies.

EKA SRIMULYANI

*State Islamic University of Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh*