

Book Reviews

Asia

China and ASEAN. Diplomacy during the Cold War and after

By RABINDRA SEN

Howrah: Manuscript India, 2002. Pp. 189. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

DOI: 10.1017/S0022463404210189

Rabindra Sen's book on China–ASEAN relations appears to have two overall aims: to review China's diplomacy towards Southeast Asia from the Cold War onwards and to question the extent to which Chinese diplomacy is determined by China–US relations. The author therefore establishes within these aims a substantial task, given the time period concerned and the complexity of overlapping bilateral relationships. To tackle the task, the book's structure is divided into seven main chapters dealing with Chinese diplomacy towards ASEAN from the Cold War period to the present.

Chapters 1 and 2 deal with Chinese diplomacy towards ASEAN during the Cold War, and post-Cold War diplomacy and threat perceptions respectively. Chapter 1 ostensibly serves as background detail to later chapters, and does not review this period in any detail. The focus is placed on the period after the fall of Saigon in 1975 and the developments in the triangular relationship between the US, China and ASEAN following the withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam and the invasion of Cambodia by Vietnamese forces. Sen concludes that 'China's economic diplomacy towards Southeast Asia during the Cold War years was anaemic and did not become as significant a component of its policy as it is known to have been since the end of the Cold War' (p. 23).

Chapter 2 rightly notes the profound shift that occurred following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 and the ensuing reduction of Soviet influence in Southeast Asia. Sen argues that in the post-war period, 'China's desire to forge a partnership with the countries in Southeast Asia has been designed to limit the influence of the United States' (p. 29). Thus the chapter proceeds to review China–ASEAN relations during the 1990s through the lens of US–China relations, with some space devoted to US missile defence policy, arm sales to Taiwan, the role of Japan and China's emergent foreign policy objectives. There is little direct discussion of China–ASEAN relations in this chapter, the point being to explain why ASEAN took on greater strategic importance for Beijing in the 1990s: that is, to ensure a stable external environment to promote economic growth and modernisation, and restore its territorial integrity.

Chapter 3 then turns to the issue of 'Adjustments in Chinese policy', reviewing the two contentious issues of Beijing's past links with Communist parties in Asia, and Chinese populations in ASEAN. China's position on the South China Sea and the ASEAN Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (ANWFZ) is also dealt with in terms of how China has 'introduced modifications' in its policies 'in the hope of removing or

attenuating the misgivings in the minds of leaders of ASEAN countries about its intentions' (p. 54). Chapter 4 then very briefly reviews the issue of Taiwan in Sino-ASEAN relations.

The most substantial chapter in the book, Chapter 5 on 'Strengthening bilateral relations', reviews the People's Republic of China's bilateral relations with all ASEAN countries except Brunei. The author recognises how the intricacies of these bilateral interactions have contributed over time to the relationship between ASEAN as an organisation and China. It thus goes some way towards reviewing the major determinants of each distinct bilateral relationship (focusing on the 1980s onwards) and providing an explanation of how a combination of these issues and histories then evolves to form ASEAN's diplomatic position and postures over time. The chapter is uneven however in the length allocated to each country, with the CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam) countries receiving a somewhat more detailed review than the original ASEAN Five. The Philippines, for example, is given only a cursory treatment.

Here Sen argues overall that it was 'the normalization of relations between China and Indonesia that made the completion of the circle of China's diplomatic reach and penetration in Southeast Asia possible' (p. 111). He concurs with the conventional view that ASEAN countries – some more than others – still view China cautiously, while at the same time noting the considerable improvements made on the whole in Sino-ASEAN relations in the 1990s. China's diplomacy in the future, he argues, 'will be geared towards attaining the objective of removing or at least lessening the suspicion' (p. 113).

The final two chapters review China's diplomacy towards ASEAN via economic relations, and anti-US sentiment in the region. The author notes correctly that without the drain of Cold War rivalry, China's growing economic importance in the 1990s has given its diplomacy additional strength (p. 125). The final chapter, organised somewhat awkwardly around the theme of anti-US sentiment, really tries to deal with the ongoing role of the US in the region and its implications for China-ASEAN relations. Sen argues that ASEAN countries are 'likely to walk the tightrope of accommodation, focusing on the economic positives but without fully trusting China's strategic goodwill' (p. 151).

Overall, the book provides a useful review of key aspects of the China-ASEAN relationship as it unfolded in the 1990s, preceded as it was by Cold War rivalries. It would therefore serve as a good introduction for undergraduates and the uninitiated reader. As noted above, however, due to its chronological scope and given the already substantial inter-disciplinary and historical literature on China-ASEAN interactions, the book may not offer anything substantially new for the expert reader. Nevertheless, Sen's question of whether Southeast Asia's perception of China has undergone a fundamental change is a pertinent one for historians and political scientists alike. A related topic for debate is whether China's diplomacy towards ASEAN is now, or will remain, a function of Sino-US relations for the foreseeable future, as the author asserts in the conclusion (p. 166).

MELISSA G. CURLEY
University of Hong Kong

Southeast Asia

Three exotic views of Southeast Asia: The travel narratives of Isabella Bird, Max Dauthendey, Ai Wu, 1850–1930

By MARIA NOELLE NG

White Plains, NY: Eastbridge, 2002. Pp. xiv, 212. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

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Maria Noelle Ng's *Three exotic views of Southeast Asia* uses the narratives of Isabella Bird (1831–1904), Max Dauthendey (1867–1918) and Ai Wu (1904–92) to explore the ways in which travellers have represented Southeast Asia. These figures reflect a broad sweep of history: they wrote about their experiences in the region before and during the 'new imperialism' and in the period after World War I. At the same time, since the three come from different countries (Britain, Germany and China respectively), Ng is able to engage a wide range of cultural interactions.

Travel writing has become the subject of study in a number of academic disciplines. This massive body of literature has been explored for many purposes, not least of which is to recover the history and experience of the contacts between Western and non-Western cultures. Ng's book builds upon the fascination with travel writing, but the author takes an unusual approach to the subject. Most studies of travel writing focus upon problematic realities inherent in cultural encounters; the strength of this book is that it addresses the experience of these authors before they travelled. That is, Ng traces the ways in which conceptualisations of their own culture preceded their travels and encounters with Southeast Asia.

Ng argues that Bird – possibly the best-known of these travel writers – can be best grasped through biographical developments which took place before she visited Asia. Bird, the daughter of a clergyman, worked with the poor in Edinburgh, which culminated in her treatment of the subject in a book called *Notes on old Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1869). Ng situates Bird in relation to the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851, claiming that she was a 'quintessential Victorian' who was shaped by her 'religious upbringing' (p. 35) or that she was a "'trained" Victorian' because she was 'religious and materialistic' (p. 73). The problem with this characterisation is that it underestimates the complexity of nineteenth-century Britain as there were many (especially those like Bird who lived in the second half of the century) who were neither.

Nonetheless, if Ng does not grasp or at least successfully depict the nuances of nineteenth-century Britain, she deserves praise for reading Bird in the context of Victorian society. Ng connects Bird's writings about Chinese society (in Hong Kong, Canton and Singapore) and Malay life with the ways in which Victorian writers understood their own societies. To be specific, Ng compares Henry Mayhew's four-volume *London labour and the London poor* (London: G. Woodfall, 1851–62) and Edwin Chadwick's *Report . . . on the sanitary condition of the labouring population of Gt Britain* (London: W. Clowes, 1842) with Bird's *The Golden Chersonese and the way thither* (New York: G. Putnam's Sons, 1883) to show that Bird's view of Asian cultures was already prefigured by her own work with and interest in Britain's poor. The picture which emerges of Bird, then, is not of someone who is writing merely in praise of British

imperialism, but rather of a reformer who understood Asian societies through the lens of social reform.

Max Dauthendey came to Southeast Asia for completely different reasons. Ng paints an interesting portrait of this German short story writer who ventured to the Dutch East Indies to pursue aesthetic interests. Like Joseph Conrad, who represented Asia as 'exotic' by drawing material from comparatively banal travel guidebooks, Dauthendey drew his fiction from travel information: souvenirs, postcards and other mementos. Ng argues that Dauthendey's Asian writings portray the region and its people according to their visual appearances; he did not really engage with or understand indigenous culture. In addition, while he never questioned Germany's imperial ambitions, it is clear that he came to look askance at colonial society.

Ng traces Dauthendey's experience in *fin-de-siècle* imperial Berlin to show how it prefigured his ability to understand Asia. Dauthendey found in Wilhelmine Berlin consumer culture, imperial spectacles (designed to promote nation building), enthusiasm for German colonialism, and avant-garde poets and artists who cultivated the life of the *flâneur* (which meant deliberate attempts to violate the regimentation of newly emerging mass society by self-proclaimed independent living). Whereas Bird had imperial values reaffirmed by her visits to the Crystal Palace Exhibition, Dauthendey drew a different set of lessons from Edvard Munch's 1892 exhibition. Munch was criticised by conservatives, but exploited the interest in exotic forms of painting to stifle the objections of his detractors. Dauthendey was influenced by Munch and other forms of avant-garde art as he wrote about Southeast Asia emphasising its exotic features. Ng sees him as the embodiment of German *fin-de-siècle* Orientalism, which is marked by the combination of aesthetic radicalism and political conservatism. Dauthendey viewed Southeast Asia like 'a shopper'; his perception of Berlin, and later of the Asian countries he visited, would not go beyond the superficial appearance of things. In short, the aesthetic habits he acquired in Berlin largely dictated Dauthendey's way of seeing Southeast Asia.

Ai Wu's perceptions were shaped by the conflicts over modernisation in China. Ng explains that while Ai Wu remains largely unknown outside of China, he is a significant writer because he witnessed many of the formative events of the twentieth century. Ai Wu would follow the better-known Lü Xun in embracing some of the Western ideas associated with the May Fourth Movement. Ai Wu accepted that China was backward and his writings from Yunnan reveal that he was critical of many feudal practices.

However, it was his experience in Burma that was much more interesting. Ai Wu went there in 1927 and his writings are fascinating because, as Ng notes, he saw much that colonial travellers did not. Ng states that Chinese communists saw in Ai Wu someone who had glorified the proletariat, but her analysis suggests otherwise. Rather, the portrait which emerges of Burma in the late 1920s is one in which crime, poverty and racism are the norm. Ng uses these texts and those of Chiang Yee, a travel writer who wrote about Europe, to try to recover colonial understandings of interracial relationships. Unfortunately, this is a vast and complex subject, Ng's treatment of which is superficial at best. More important, she shows that Ai Wu becomes critical not only of imperial rule, but of Westerners generally. All told, she demonstrates that Ai Wu saw and wrote about fascinating places; his journeys led to an unmistakable progression which began with a critical perspective on China (partly shaped by the encounter with Western ideas) and ended in a profound dislike for Westerners and all that they represented.

Ng's treatment of these interesting figures adds to our understanding of the forces which were at work in shaping the perception of those who travelled and wrote about Southeast Asia. *Three exotic views of Southeast Asia* also reminds us that we should resist stereotypes about 'Western' or 'Chinese' forms of discourse, as the text vividly illustrates the complexity of recovering the ways in which people in colonial society regarded their world. That said, this reviewer wishes that Ng had been more patient in reconstructing both the travellers' worldviews and their writings, because this rich subject deserves more sustained treatment. As a general comment, this book would have been a much stronger work had it allowed Bird, Dauthendey and Ai Wu to speak more independently of the collection of texts which Ng used to explain them. Nonetheless, Maria Noelle Ng has succeeded in making these figures and the worlds they represented a bit more accessible to us.

STEPHEN L. KECK

National University of Singapore

Merit and the millennium: Routine and crisis in the ritual lives of the Lahu people

By ANTHONY R. WALKER

New Delhi: Hindustan Publishing, 2003. pp. xxxi, 907. Maps, Figures, Plates, Bibliography, Notes, Index. DOI: 10.1017/S0022463404230181

As one of the most politically marginalised ethnic minorities living along both sides of the border between southwest China and several Southeast Asian countries, the Lahu people, along with their cultural traditions, have drawn little academic attention in either Chinese- or English-language literature. Resulting from intensive fieldwork and library research that spans 35 years, Anthony Walker's *Merit and the millennium* is a monumental work on Lahu religion. The extraordinary detail of its ethnographic descriptions, which some will treasure while others may debate, is further enriched by a large number of excellent illustrations and photographs. Complementarily, Walker's library research accesses archival material, historical sources, photographs and missionary reports on Lahu residents in several countries, giving admirable historical depth and comparative scope to this book. Contributing greatly to Lahu studies, this book will also become a valuable resource for specialists in Southeast Asia and religious studies in general.

The book has 11 chapters. Following two introductory chapters, Chapters 3 through 9 explore the religious ideas and ritual practices of the Lahu majority and Chapters 10 and 11 explore the cultural continuities and discontinuities among the Christian Lahu, who make up about 10 per cent of the population. Furthermore, while Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 8 all focus on indigenous Lahu traditions, Chapters 6, 7 and 9 highlight the influence of Mahayana Buddhism. On the one hand, all four of the chapters on traditions emphasise non-Buddhist features of the Lahu region, exploring respectively indigenous ontology and worldviews, animist ritual practices, the pursuit of merits and blessings versus sorcery practices, and rituals concerning annual and life cycles. The three chapters on Buddhist influences respectively examine Mahayana Buddhism in Lahu history, the similarities shared by contemporary temple rituals across different Lahu regions and the

critical role prophets played in Lahu millenarianism in both historical and contemporary contexts.

In addition to a comprehensive presentation of the complexity of religious ideas and practices across the different Lahu communities, this book also addresses several important theoretical issues in Lahu studies. Most importantly, Walker provides an insightful explanation for a seemingly paradoxical phenomenon that is crucial to our understanding of Lahu culture and history. Specifically, although characterised as socially egalitarian and culturally autonomous in addition to being well known for their frequent armed resistance against various external powers, the Lahu have also drawn considerable interest for their spectacularly large-scale conversions to Christianity. Availing himself of several sociological theories on prophetic millenarianism, Walker argues that struggles for ethnic survival and cultural renewal have fused with mystic faith. The result has been that, while Lahu warriors faced the might of imperial China in addition to British and Burmese bullets (p. 546) with faith-based courage, there has been a massive zeal in embracing the Christian Messiah (p. 628). These analyses challenge, although only implicitly, the hegemony in most of the Chinese-language literature of Marxist-Leninist approaches to account for the large-scale Lahu resistance movements against local Dai officials and the imperial Chinese state.

Another major theoretical contribution of this book is the attempt to identify and explain the particularity of Lahu theism within the wider context of mainland Southeast Asia. Based on detailed comparative data on a large number of Lahu communities, Walker provides a fascinating illustration of how the Lahu across a wide expanse of regions and numerous countries all share, to a great extent, beliefs and rituals oriented towards the creator-divinity named Xeul Sha. The author also sharply and convincingly points out that, in contrast to similar creator-divinities among other Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples, the Lahu deity (Xeul Sha) is unique for being believed to be involved in and to determine the daily lives of human beings. After successfully identifying the traits of Mahayana Buddhism in many temple rituals revolving around Xeul Sha worship, the author traces the source of its uniqueness to the dramatic impact – especially through Lahu millenarian resistance movements (p. 628) – of the transcendental Buddhahood of Mahayana Buddhism (p. 161). However, it may be more accurate to state that Mahayana Buddhism greatly intensified, rather than determined, the significance of Xeul Sha in Lahu socio-religious life. After all, few Buddhist influences are identifiable in the encyclopaedia-like Lahu origin myths that revolve around Xeul Sha and lay the foundation for the Lahu worldview and rituals. Specifically, unlike temple rituals and despite their sporadic incorporation of both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhist components, household rituals are often not only oriented towards Xeul Sha, but also closely concordant with indigenous Lahu origin myths.

Notwithstanding the risk of some controversy, Walker's work will stimulate further scholarly explorations of the mystic fusion in Lahu culture of theism with animism, which are often considered two extremes in the continuum of religious beliefs across cultures.

SHANSHAN DU
Tulane University

Indocina persilangan kebudayaan

By BERNARD PHILIPPE GROSlier. Translated by IDA SUNDARI HOESEN. Edited by DANIEL PERRET and JEAN COUTEAU.

Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia (KPG), École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 2002. Seri Terjemahan Arkeologi No. 6. Pp. 340. Appendices, Tables, Maps, Figures. Bibliography, Index. [In Indonesian] DOI: 10.1017/S0022463404240188

This volume constitutes a translation of B. P. Groslier's *Indochine, carrefour des arts* (Paris: A. Michel, 1961). The École Française d'Extrême-Orient has been actively publishing translations of French works on a broad range of subjects focusing on Southeast Asian history and archaeology over the last two decades. This latest contribution to the series covers the geography of Indochina, prehistory, the contributions of China and India, the early historic period, the growth and florescence of Khmer civilisation and the arrival of Europeans. Illustrations include colour pictures of some major works of art. No doubt there are non-Indonesian scholars for whom the Indonesian language is more accessible than French who will also benefit from this translation.

JOHN N. MIKSIC

National University of Singapore

Indonesia

The potent dead: Ancestors, saints and heroes in contemporary Indonesia

Edited by HENRI CHAMBERT-LOIR and ANTHONY REID

Crows Nest, NSW and Honolulu: Allen and Unwin and University of Hawaii Press, 2002. Pp. xxvi, 242. Figures, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

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Those of us who study Indonesia are aware of the pervasive presence of a religious dimension in Indonesian life. While this may take the ostensible form of any of the five universal/world religions recognised by the government, these religions conceal, often barely, older indigenous systems of belief embedded in distinctively local forms of ritual practice. These involve beliefs in and respect for a range of supernatural beings, many of them embodied in features of the local landscape and natural species. But a central element in almost all is the role of beings known generically as ancestors – those who lived and died before, but remain a real part of the lives of their descendants – powerful, perhaps dangerous, and in a way still part of the community of the living. Many Indonesians accept the official relegation of old belief/practice to the category of *adat* (local customs), separate from and inferior to real religion (*agama*). Yet in everyday practice, they remain if anything more real and relevant to daily concerns.

The potent dead is about these systems of belief/practice. It is a collection of 13 chapters, fine-grained ethnographic explorations of a range of ancestor beliefs/practices from across Indonesia, representing a range of scholars, countries (especially France, Australia and the USA) and disciplines (especially anthropology, history and literature). The first six contributions describe mortuary practice/belief in a range of nominally Christian

or Hindu societies. The next three discuss relationships between ancestor religion and Islam. Three more explore the complex politics surrounding tombs in Central Java – nominally Muslim, but still deeply imbued with the aristocratic Hinduism of its ancient kingdoms. In the final chapter, Klaus Shreiner considers the role of ‘national ancestors’ in the civil religion with which successive regimes have sought to legitimate their rule and unify a diverse nation.

Bernard Sellato’s chapter, surprisingly titled ‘The castrated dead’, is primarily an argument against the indiscriminate use of the category ‘ancestors’, using evidence from Dayak groups in central Kalimantan. Anne Schiller describes the spectacular secondary mortuary ritual of the Ngaju Dayak of Central Kalimantan, highlighting the relationship between their Hindu Kaharingan religion and the state bureaucracy. Danielle Geirnaert also writes of funerary ritual, among the Laboya of West Sumba. She tells of the funerals of two brothers, stressing the interface between ancestor worship and Christianity and the role of the government in local practice. Rudolfo Giambelli looks at the religion of Bali through the lens of a peripheral island, where self-conscious ideas of ‘Hindu-ness’ are less dominant. He describes an ongoing system of reciprocity among living humans, ancestors, natural environment and a range of other deities. Elizabeth Coville’s chapter focuses on the ambivalent relationship between the living and the dead in Tana Toraja – the movement, embodied in ritual, between remembering and forgetting, holding the deceased close and allowing them to move away to become generic deified ancestors. Anthony Reid reports on the growing practice among Toba Batak of erecting increasingly elaborate memorials to clan ancestors, funded largely by urban residents but organised by local communities – a revival of traditional practice amongst increasingly ‘modern’ and nominally Christian people.

Minako Sakai describes the management of tensions between old ancestor belief/practice and Islam among the Gumai of South Sumatra. Old places, rituals and traditions are re-interpreted in Islamic terms, while Islamic ritual is infused with old forms. Christian Pelras, in his study of Bugis ancestor preoccupations, finds that despite profession of strictly Islamic beliefs about the dead, their practical concern with ancestors relates more to issues of status than religion.

In Central Java, Henri Chambert-Loir explores the way in which the Sufi tradition of veneration of the tombs of saints articulates a conceptual link with older Javanese ancestor worship. Claude Guillot looks more closely at the historical politics embodied in a specific aristocratic tomb. James Fox writes more generally of Javanese tombs and the local knowledge surrounding them. George Quinn discusses the appropriation of tombs and their local histories by the state bureaucracy.

A striking feature of this book, and no doubt one of its underlying intentions, is the recurrence of several themes. These include: the coexistence/interface between old/ancestor traditions with new/monotheistic religions; the various involvements of government in religion; the complexity and diversity within the category ‘ancestor worship’; and the dynamic, living quality of links between living Indonesians and their dead, but not-dead ancestors.

This book is rich in empirical detail, perhaps too much so for easy reading, but not so as a reference. It seems under-theorised, but as the themes noted above indicate, it has much to say between the lines about how we think about religion in Indonesia and

elsewhere. The production is excellent. It would make an admirable text for a course on Indonesian religion or a supplementary source for a course on the anthropology of religion.

GRAEME MACRAE
Massey University

Violence and vengeance: Discontent and conflict in New Order Indonesia

Edited by FRANS HÜSKEN and HUUB DE JONGE

Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik Saarbrücken GmbH, 2002. Pp. 163.
Index. DOI: 10.1017/S0022463404260180

The considerable number of publications in recent years on violence in Indonesia with a particular focus on the New Order would make one question a book's ability to contribute much that is new. This collection of articles edited by Frans Hüsken and Huub de Jonge, far from retracing old ground, challenges previous analyses and presents us with some alternative readings of violence in Indonesia.

While most scholars agree that the New Order was a 'state of violence', there was also violence that was not performed by the state, a point which is raised in a number of contributions to this publication. Stephan Eklof's cultural analysis of the 1965–66 massacres in Bali and the studies by Eldar Braten and De Jonge on community violence or justice ask critical questions about the uses and applications of violence by Indonesians. They seek answers not only in the political and institutional structures of the state, but also locally in the social and cultural. While the violence of the state is crucial, these scholars encourage us to include these 'local' elements in our own investigations in order to approach the subject in a different way.

The essays by Rosalina Sciortino and Ines Smyth, Kees van Dijk, Braten, De Jonge and Eklof explain violence which takes place 'in spite' of the New Order but which is also deeply as a consequence of it. Domestic violence as well as student and community violence were at odds with the New Order policy of *rukun*, harmony and order. As Van Dijk explains, this was epitomised by the state's *Gerakan Disiplin Nasional* (GDN, National Discipline Movement). Sciortino and Smyth cite the trope of '*Ibuism*' regarding the delineation of the position of women in the family and in the state. These scholars demonstrate that rhetorical harmony in the home or on the street was not matched by reality. In addition, the norms of harmony and order were entrenched and propagated with such intensity that there was simply no social space to acknowledge that disorder and violence existed. Sciortino and Smyth saliently argue that unlike the association made in the West between domestic violence and the division of public and private, the absence of this division in Indonesia made violence within the family possible. The state's myth of harmony erased the possibility of violence within the family as well.

Community justice or *kapok* enacted by villagers in East Java and Madura (in, respectively, the contributions by Braten and De Jonge) also undermined the New Order's claims to discipline and order, as well as its monopoly on violence. These communities carried out their own forms of justice, particularly when the provisions of the state were found to be lacking. On the one hand this supports the argument that violence as vengeance and as a means for seeking justice is a widespread and accepted practice in Indonesia, but it also demonstrates the part played by morality and perceptions of

humanity held by these communities. This brings an extremely important, and until now largely overlooked, perspective to the study of violence in Indonesia. It is a perspective that brings us closer to understanding perpetrators of such violence. In countering the culturalist tropes of the 'peaceful Javanese', 'tranquil Bali' and 'loving husband', the essays in this book demonstrate the complexity involved in challenging this analysis. It is too easy to leap to the other extreme and to argue that Indonesians are all violent, or, as most recent scholarship has tended to do, to omit culture from analysis in favour of political and socio-economic explanations. This book takes steps towards bridging this deficiency in the scholarship; that is, to understand the connection between the state and those who carry out violence. As Eklof puts it: 'Understanding something about the latent proclivities towards violence in different cultures can help us understand how and why ordinary citizens can be turned into willing tools of murder and to leave everything normally considered human behind' (p. 135). Of course, the next step is to interrogate perceptions of the ordinary and 'normal' in Indonesia and within the disciplines in which we work.

Vengeance and retaliation by communities, school groups and individuals as examples of violence provide this scholarship with a dichotomy of interpretations. Are these acts – or the permissibility of them, perhaps – a consequence of the institutionalised violence of the New Order state, or did the state itself appropriate existing methods? It could be posited as the proverbial chicken-and-egg conundrum, but it is not. De Jonge and Hüsken and the contributors to this book recognise the inseparable nature of these factors. As the editors conclude, the New Order 'created and exacerbated a social and political climate in which violence had become ubiquitous and all pervasive' (p. 8). This is not to say that violence would not have taken place without it; as with any state, anywhere, it would have. The New Order, however, made violence an accepted, 'normal' recourse to settle disputes, seek justice or extract concessions, which was unchallenged and also crucially unspoken.

JEMMA PURDEY
University of Melbourne

Treasure hunting? Collectors and collections of Indonesian artifacts

Edited by REIMAR SCHEFOLD and HAN F. VERMEULEN

Leiden: CNWS, 2002. Pp. x, 321. Photographs, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

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This consistently fascinating, concretely detailed anthology of 13 essays documents two intertwined histories: the twists and turns of museum acquisitions policies in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Italy from the late 1700s onwards regarding Indonesian collections; and the history of art and artifact collectors' aims and motivations in accumulating masses of Indonesian textiles, tools, shields, ritual sculptures and so on over the same period. As has often been noted, Western museums and museum collections directed towards documenting the non-Western world are texts in a Geertzian sense: they tell observers much about the peoples that first produced the alluring objects at issue, but they also speak volumes about the museums' own home cultures and philosophical assumptions, and about Euro-America's perceived political and aesthetic

relationships to 'collectible cultures' (and even people) in places like the colonial Indies and independent Indonesia. This volume astutely turns a critical historical gaze on the culture of collecting and Western museums' hunger for all manner of Indonesian social things, from sacred objects to everyday implements to (remarkably) entire 'traditional village houses' from places like Nias. Such a home, the valuable introductory essay by Reimar Schefold and Han F. Vermeulen informs readers, was once disassembled in its entirety from a royal village in south Nias and carted off to Copenhagen for the Royal Museum of Denmark.

The anthology focuses on public museum collections (not private collections in homes) and zeroes in on some major ones, all of which are ethnographic, not fine arts, in nature. The essays deal with the Indonesian materials at the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, the Museum Nusantera in Delft, Amsterdam's Tropenmuseum, Rotterdam's Museum of Ethnology, and the ethnological museums of Basle, Switzerland and Copenhagen. The individual collectors discussed include the Italian 'painstaking explorer' (p. 209) Elio Modigliani (1860–1932); the Philadelphia millionaire gentleman scientist William Louis Abbott (1860–1936), the Smithsonian Institution's major early donor of collections; the German ethnologist and dogged traveller Wilhelm Muller-Wismar (1881–1916); and the Frankfurt academic Ernst Vatter, who with his wife Hanna collected widely in Flores, the Solor Islands, Pantar and Alor in the late 1920s. Readers also encounter many other fervent, sometimes eccentric European collectors in the other essays on museum histories. Most chapters spring from a 1989 symposium commemorating the 125th anniversary of the Museum Nusantera in Delft. An Epilogue includes 'The role of museums in Indonesia' by Moh Amir Sutaarga, former director of the National Museum in Jakarta, and an eye-opening interview with Jac Hoogerbrugge, a contemporary collector of New Guinea primitive art (the term is problematic, as all contributors aver).

Much of the basic history of Western ethnological museums is well known: these institutions' entanglements with European and American colonial expansion into 'tribal lands'; the linkage between nationalist ideology in the US and Britain and on the Continent with the establishment of great national museums of fine arts and also of ethnology; the association between museum acquisition and display practices and the late nineteenth-century scientific community's penchant for evolutionism (for imagining human history as a progression of stages, from less to more developed). Also well known is the history of the emergence of the self-consciously modern, scientific ethnological museum from complex, deeply colonial settings: from royal cabinets of curiosities; from the formation of learned societies in both the metropole and in places like Batavia (societies that often published monographs and organised museums); from voyages of exploration like Captain Cook's, which often omnivorously targeted flora, fauna, and cultural artifacts; and from the educational needs of growing colonial bureaucracies, where artifacts were used in the training of new civil servants posted to the tropics. Delft's Museum Nusantera grew from such a training collection and eventually became a repository (like many of these museums) for huge inflows of donated Indies exotica. Missionary processes of Christian conversion led to another stream of donations, sometimes to specific mission museums in Europe. Here, redefinition of indigenous *sacra* as 'idols' freed those objects to be collected, for good or ill. At times, 'idols' were burnt. The book as a whole makes the welcome point that these pathways from village to metropolitan museum were multiple and sometimes self-contradictory.

Beyond further documenting these familiar processes, *Treasure hunting?* goes on to suggest several less expected trends. Each of these cries out for later comparative study, with other museum worlds touching on Africa, Native America and Polynesia. One such trend, for example, concerns Indonesian museum collection growth in relation to specific types of military campaigns in the Indies, such as the c. 1900–10 final expansion of colonial control into Aceh, Bali and Lombok. When royal houses in such areas fell, their magic weaponry (*qua* war loot) emerged as collectible museum pieces, as several of these essays note. Might a broad-scale, cross-regional comparative history of such micro-collections be possible, in terms of military history but also indigenous concepts of power as documented, for instance, in Margaret Wiener's *Visible and invisible realms: Power, magic, and colonial conquest in Bali* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995)? Such studies would be illuminating.

When taken in tandem with other recent studies on art collecting and Indonesia such as Jill Forshee's *Between the folds: Stories of cloth, lives, and travel from Sumba* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001) and Andrew Causey's *Hard bargaining in Sumatra: Western travelers and Toba Bataks in the marketplace of souvenirs* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), this fine anthology can push this important field of study in innovative directions.

SUSAN RODGERS

College of the Holy Cross

Indonesia: Peoples and histories

By JEAN GELMAN TAYLOR

New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003. Pp. xxii, 420. Maps, Photographs, Bibliography, Index. DOI: 10.1017/S0022463404280183

The book jacket on Jean Gelman Taylor's new history of Indonesia intones hopefully that 'this book – the first new history of Indonesia written in more than twenty years – will be essential reading for anyone interested in the history of Southeast Asia and the future stability of the region'. It is the job of presses (and blurbs) to sell books, and the jacket is certainly right about one thing – this book is indeed now essential reading on Indonesia. Don't buy it, however, to appraise the future stability of the region. Buy it because it is, simply, a terrific book – literate, learned and humane. Taylor succeeds in wrapping over 2,000 years of Indonesian history into a single narrative that carries the reader easily from beginning to end. In this journey we pass from megaliths to modernity, from the Indian Ocean to Oceania, from a time when Buddhism trickled into the archipelago to a time when Indonesian Ph.D. students now trickle out of it. It is a long voyage, filled with intellectual stops and starts, various ports of call, attempts at cultural ingestion and reprocessing and the synthesis of ideas and foreign notions, and perhaps most importantly, the footsteps of many feet. Taylor's Indonesia isn't a static entity – it is a riot of colour and change and movement. This book gives the reader a graphic sense of how complicated Indonesia and its history really is – in all of its many manifestations.

Academic purists beware – this book makes use of several dozen 'capsule histories' – paragraph to page-long digressions on particular topics, from pilgrims to calendars

to kisses. I suspect some of the hard-core academic crowd will look down their noses at these textual interventions as hopeless simplifiers of a very complicated story. I loved them. Taylor carries the narrative of her history along extremely well, and these digressions into everything from Birds of Paradise to Chinese temples to *Pancasila* help the reader keep pace with the story without losing any of the scenery along the way. The capsules allow us to think about pigs and pork for a moment while the author is detailing the historical entrance of Islam; we are also given a window into the world of the *jago* (or 'thug'), who could be equally described as a hero or bandit, depending on the context of available sources. Such digressions seem important: it's relatively straightforward to outline the arguments for when and where Islam came to Indonesia, but what did it actually mean to a peasant on the ground? How did it affect his food supply, and his security? Equally, how was 'disorder' seen by average Javanese when it was described in this way by local Dutch officials? Did peasants see area toughs as symptoms of Dutch success or failure in taking over the archipelago? When were they viewed as predators, and when as Robin Hoods? The capsules allow Taylor to de-centre her discussion away from systems and grand narratives, and to focus her inquiry down to particular aspects of Indonesian history, often as seen by ordinary local actors.

In fact, it is this concern for an 'autonomous history' of Indonesia – a predilection that Taylor inherited from her teacher, John Smal – that permeates this book. This is not a volume that approaches history from the top down, skimming along the surface of decrees, battles and dead colonialists in a range of cemeteries over the centuries. Taylor is particularly concerned to keep the Indonesian at the centre of his or her own history in this book, an aim at which she succeeds very well. Though the Dutch (and the Spanish, Portuguese, English, and Americans, and even Chinese, Japanese, Indians, and Arabs) all appear in this volume, they rarely steer the boat – Indonesians have been left to do this themselves. This obviously has been a conscious choice in the writing of this history, one that is laudable and understandable in the context of many decades of historiography about Indonesia that gave too much centrality to the doings of outsiders. Yet I did occasionally wonder if we needed to see a bit more of these foreign hands upon the rudder – the influence of outsiders who did sometimes chart the directions of change, through their avarice or militancy or even (very occasionally) their compassion. What about oppression, or the compulsion to force Indonesians to do many things against their will in the past several hundred years? Should these unsettling aspects of the Indonesian past have had a larger place in this history? There is only so much room in any account for story lines, and every telling will be different in this respect. Taylor has chosen to accentuate indigenous agency, and this narrative strategy works very well in keeping this exegesis together.

We now have two extremely accomplished *longue durée* histories of Indonesia – Taylor's new book and Merle Ricklefs' *A history of modern Indonesia since c. 1200* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003), which has been recently re-issued with thorough updating and some new early materials by the author. It can only be a good thing that the fourth-largest nation on earth is now starting to attract this kind of scholarly attention (can we imagine only one or two interpretive histories each for the United States, or Russia, or China?). The publication of Taylor's book signals a new complexity in the avenue of vision directed towards Indonesia; it also allows us to view Indonesian societies

and the multi-valent forces that have shaped them in new and interesting ways. This book is a potent teaching tool, and it can and no doubt will be used in the classroom by scholars who are able to concentrate a full semester's time on the notion of 'Indonesia' alone. Yet this book should also be read by those who wish to ask 'how do we look?' How do we see? How do we tabulate and define and ultimately interpret the masses of data that exist on any country into a coherent, convincing, and at the same time, necessarily human story? Taylor's study succeeds admirably in bridging that deep stream between knowledge and compassion for a country and for a people. This will be a book that Indonesianists will use for many, many years to come.

ERIC TAGLIACCOZZO
Cornell University

Pertimbangan ekologis. Penempatan situs masa Hindu-Buda di daerah Yogyakarta
By MUNDARDJITO

Jakarta: Wedatama Widya Sastra/École Française d'Extrême-Orient. 2002. Diagrams, Tables, Illustrations, Bibliography, Index. Pp. xvii, 380. [In Indonesian with English summary] DOI: 10.1017/S002246340429018X

This book originated as a doctoral dissertation, completed at Universitas Indonesia in 1993. It attempts to discover the relative importance of religious and environmental factors influencing the distribution of sites (mainly temples) in the district of Yogyakarta from the early Classical period, the eighth and ninth centuries CE. The volume includes data on the locations of over 200 archaeological sites, many first recorded by the author during his fieldwork. Environmental factors considered include slope, proximity to water and soil type.

JOHN N. MIKSIC
National University of Singapore

Malaysia

Malaysia: Mahathirism, hegemony and the new opposition

By JOHN HILLEY

London and New York: Zed Books, 2001. Pp.viii, 305. Tables, Abbreviations, Appendix, Index. DOI: 10.1017/S0022463404300184

John Hilley's book takes an innovative approach to examining how power blocs, politics, macro-economic planning and hegemonic relations worked under Dr Mahathir Mohamad's rule in Malaysia. Its methodologically rich interpretative framework demonstrates how Mahathir, using tactics of development, social rewards and 'post-ethnic nationalism', moved from the coercion of the strong arm of the state to a system of consensual political order.

Based on his Ph.D. thesis at the University of Glasgow, Hilley's book contends that 'as a condition of the rapid economic transition and "accommodation" of globally

ascendant neo-liberal practices in Malaysia in the early 80s, a newly evolved set of state-class relations had begun to unfold, setting in motion social tensions that came to require a more hegemonic form of authority with which to sustain it' (p. 7). Focusing on how Malaysian civil society became a contested site requiring new forms of consensus and cooption, Hilley maintains that this hegemonic form was based on a system of political order that functioned on a rewards system that cultivated compliance rather than coercion using the strong arm of the state. He adopts Gramscian perspectives to problematise the roles of actors and institutions and in doing so, he reveals how academic, media and political discourses became text for national-populist output (p. 282). Hilley's central thesis on the Mahathir project of consent-building is given substance and skilful argument in the ensuing nine chapters.

Against a historical backdrop of the emergence of Vision 2020 as the evolving hegemonic framework, Chapter 1 provides a critique of the various forces employed in the construction of legitimacy in Malaysia. He traces the evolving nature of the Malaysian state and its promotion of ethnic ideologies in three phases: colonialism to *Merdeka* (c. 1786–1957), Alliance consociationalism (1957–69) and NEP (New Economic Policy) Bumiputeraism (1971–91). He analyses the colonial legacy and demonstrates how legitimisation strategies were and are constructed from ethnic, religious and cultural forms. He describes a gradual shift away from *bumiputera*-focused NEP ideology, ethnic balancing and the politics of consociationalism to what he terms 'post-ethnic nationalism' – a new type of state-class construction, more relevant to the demands of global markets and to a cross-ethnic idea of the national interest.

Chapter 2 looks at the economic footing of the power bloc from the early 1980s to the Asian financial crisis of 1997, outlining key structural changes and state-class relations and their impact at the social level. The Mahathir project is considered against three key elements: the 'Malay dilemma', NEP distribution and privatisation. Exploring in more detail the impediments to Malay development, he traces Mahathir's reformist growth-driven agenda and describes how Malay socio-economic development was hindered by a disinclination to compete in open markets. The subsidy mentality, the ethnic resentment created by the NEP and the inflexible relationship between state and domestic capital precipitated a change in state-class relations and informed the structural dimensions of the 1997 financial crisis (p. 50). Chapter 3 sketches the political elements of the power bloc, how Mahathir tried to change the rationale of the NEP and how he tried 'to build consensus by managing tensions within the political bloc and crafting national-popular support' (p. 84). It discusses internal conflict and the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), Chinese politics and the wider party alliance and political pressures of the crisis leading to the Anwar Ibrahim debacle (p. 101).

Chapter 4 looks at how the ideological basis of the power bloc and how the Anwar crisis was managed, primarily through the use of the mass media (p. 117). Using Gramsci's notion of intellectuals, Hilley explores the networks of influence in Malaysia to illustrate how hegemony is an ongoing, managed affair. He looks at Vision 2020 discourses and national culture and describes the means by which the crisis was managed, including the rare reportage of opposition opinion and ISA (Internal Security Act) detentions. These themes are made even more specific in Chapter 5, where Hilley examines Anwar's removal and arrest as a prism through which to examine the Malaysian media's interaction with the UMNO network. He also compares the domestic and international media's handling of the affair.

Hilley moves from the deterioration within UMNO and its support base and the social tensions created by the Anwar affair to the issues of counter-hegemony and alternatives to Vision 2020. In Chapter 6, he outlines the test UMNO faces in dealing with the threat from Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) and discusses how Vision Islam depicts one of the key counter-hegemonic alternatives to the Vision project. He contends that the Vision was used to engage Islamic consciousness through a modernist project and sets it against the Islamic social collectivist model promoted by PAS.

Chapter 7 analyses the Anwar crisis in the context of how it affected PAS as a political party and the implications 'in terms of political contestation and the PAS-Islamic project' (p. 201). Exploring Malay discontent, *reformasi* and *Harakah*, the Opposition bloc as well as Fadzil Noor and Anwar's fall, it ends with an assessment of the state of PAS and its ambitions by late 1999 in terms of politics, class/economy and ideology. Hilley maintains that the PAS project evidenced the integration of Islamic, non-Islamic and *reformasi* oppositions (p. 223). These themes are taken up again in Chapter 8 with Hilley's assessment of the Malaysian 'Left' and opposition strength in the lead-up to the 1999 election. It explores the extent to which Leftist ideas permeate the alternative bloc and finds that despite the effort to control key institutions, and despite the continuing inability of *reformasi* to displace the ruling coalition, civil space in Malaysia remains keenly contested.

In his concluding chapter, Hilley takes stock of the Mahathir project's evolving elements, an overview of the 1999 election and an analysis of the counter-project by 2000. He concludes that notwithstanding the economic recovery and the 1999 election victory, Mahathir's appeal to authoritarian populism could not guarantee political support for the project. As for opposition prospects, Hilley believes that any realistic opposition will have to develop its own coherent and consensual intellectual as well as political alternative to the ruling coalition's ethnic politics and class base to deal with the increasing contestation of Malaysian civil society (p. 268).

Dr Mahathir Mohamad's recent departure will undoubtedly create a mini-industry of works dealing with his time in office. However, John Hilley's work, which was published before the departure, will retain its own unique place in the canon owing to its innovative interpretative framework and the level of detail and analysis in the book. Hilley has succeeded in tackling a difficult and complex subject. His reportorial style and the quality of analysis offers nuanced perspectives on hegemonic relations explicating how the state negotiates power in terms of alliances, leadership and interests.

The heavy reliance on English-language sources does, at times, hinder the appreciation of some local subtleties. For example, a close reading of relevant Malay-language material would have ensured that PAS was not presented as an undifferentiated whole and that the *ulama* were shown as an amorphous bloc as riven by internal disputes and as contested as the civil society of Malaysia that Hilley so deftly describes. In addition, there are a number of errors of fact or nomenclature which close editing could have erased. However, these matters do not detract from Hilley's overall elegant contribution to the scholarly political analysis of the Mahathir era and to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing the prospects for Opposition politics in Malaysia's future.

MARY KILCLINE CODY
Australian National University

Rethinking Malaysia: Malaysian studies 1

Edited by JOMO KS

Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Social Science Association, 1999. Pp. i, 292. Tables, Notes, References. DOI: 10.1017/S0022463404310180

The Malaysian Social Science Association should be congratulated for putting out the conference proceedings of the First Malaysian Studies Conference that was held at the Institute for Advanced Studies at Universiti Malaya in Kuala Lumpur in August 1997. Its intention, one must surmise, is to widen the scope for debate and challenge some of the conventional wisdom found in the scholarship on Malaysia. Any praise for this collection of papers, however, is qualified. The weaknesses in this book are common to most publications that seek to reproduce conference proceedings. Even though the quality of the papers is somewhat uneven, many of the chapters deliver what the title hints at: new perspectives on contemporary Malaysian society as well as Malaysian history. Some of these papers make for very interesting reading; others raise questions that should and will capture the imagination of scholars in the field; and others provide us with bibliographical sources as well as a peek into the holdings of archives in Portugal, the United Kingdom, France, India, Malaysia, Singapore and Spain.

This collection contains twelve papers, ten of which were presented at the conference while the remaining two were submitted for publication in this collection. There are a good range of disciplines represented. The first six essays focus on political economy, civil society and the Malaysian middle class; the next four chapters focus on history, while the last two deal with gender studies.

The quality of some essays in this collection is good and provides a useful starting point for further research. The constraints of space only allow me to discuss a small sample of the papers in the collection without being able to do justice to all the paper writers. Abdul Rahman Embong's paper on 'Malaysian middle-class studies: A critical review' (Chapter 5) is an excellent survey of the terrain of middle-class studies drawing upon a vast range of sociological as well as historical material and in the process drawing out the tensions that exist between differing viewpoints of scholars in this field. The author points out that the tension lies in the problematic arena of theorising and conceptualising the Malay middle class (p. 121). Abdul Rahman rightly points out that this is a field that is ripe for 'more in-depth research and rigorous analysis' (p. 122) but he also puts forward the challenge to scholars to expand the scope to middle-class studies to include other ethnic groups in East Malaysia as well as to address new questions concerning gender.

Sheila Nair's paper on 'Constructing civil society in Malaysia: Nationalism, hegemony and resistance' is another interesting piece and is even more so now in the years after the Mahathir–Anwar fallout in 1998, and the recent succession of Abdullah Badawi to the premiership. Drawn from her Ph.D. dissertation, the paper argues persuasively that 'New social movements' have found it difficult to establish a solid foothold for various reasons, with a crucial determinant being the various means that the postcolonial state has at its disposal to constrain dissent in civil society. Nair does concede that 'civil society remains a space where politics and identity continue to be negotiated along different fronts' (p. 100), despite the hegemonic discourses of the state, the coercive power of state organs and all other factors that stymie the growth of new social movements. This paper gives us the opportunity to ask further questions: has the reality in Malaysia shifted

since 1998? Has the hegemonic discursive power of the state diminished or was it only temporally displaced, and if so, why? Have new social movements grown over the last few years or has it just been the status quo? What kind of continuity or change will Malaysian civil society experience under its new leader, Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi?

Diana Carroll's essay shows that much work remains to be done on that most ubiquitous of Malay writings, the *Hikayat Abdullah*. She calls for a reappraisal of the Abdullah Munshi text, specifically by looking at it in the context of the work of two missionaries, Robert Morrison and William Milne, and the philosophies on language, literature and education found in their publication, *The gleaner*. Carroll makes a case that there are resonances between the writings in *The gleaner* and in the *Hikayat Abdullah* but the paper is heavily predicated on the material found in *The gleaner*, which is understandable given the word limits imposed on conference papers. While drawing out the influences found in the *Hikayat Abdullah*, the argument would have been made much stronger by finding more space in this paper for Abdullah's own writing. The longer quotes taken from the *Hikayat Abdullah* (p. 174) are used to good effect in demonstrating one of her points. This does not detract from the enormous amount of original research that Carroll has put into the paper and she clearly has more material in her hands to write a longer and more nuanced piece. Perhaps of more importance is the debate likely to follow the controversial claim that Morrison and Milne as much as Abdullah had a significant part to play in giving birth to the concept of 'Malay studies'.

It is difficult to review each and every single essay but scholars would do well to pore through the impressive amount of data available in this publication: M. Fazilah Abdul Samad's 'The performance of politically affiliated businesses in Malaysia'; Susela Devi Selvaraj's 'Accounting regulation in Malaysia'; K.S. Jomo's 'A Malaysian middle class?'; S. Jeyaseela Stephen's 'The trade economy of Melaka port in the 16th century'; Nakahara Michiko's paper on labour recruitment on the Burma–Siam Death Railway; and Christine Campbell's paper on women authors in Malaysia in the post-independence period, to name but a few.

This collection, however, would have been a stronger publication had there been an introductory and concluding chapter to explain the make-up of the book, its purpose, its audience, the main themes considered at the conference and the various themes that tie the volume together as whole. There needs to be some fine-tuning of their future product but there are many positives to take from this book, and I hope that the Malaysian Social Science Association will carry on their good work and continue to put out such publications in the future, if only to stir the pot further and generate more debate in the field of Malaysian studies.

MARK EMMANUEL

Australian National University

Wong Ah Fook: Immigrant, builder and entrepreneur

By P. LIM PUI HUEN

Singapore: Times Editions, 2002. Pp. 185. Illustrations

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Here is a book that you will enjoy reading, and it is also a fine, scholarly study that has a broad significance. With professional diligence, including the best type of historical

imagination, *Wong Ah Fook: Immigrant, builder and entrepreneur* is a biography that (as the author, Pat Lim, promises) offers a 'narrative of the Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore'.

Wong Ah Fook came to Singapore in 1854, established himself in building construction and then branched off into agriculture, revenue farming, gambling, banking and land development. He was a successful, influential entrepreneur who developed close links with the Johor Sultanate. The author is one of his great-grandchildren, and the personal connection makes the book all the more compelling, as she relates her own excitement in pursuing the story of his life. In a sense it is her story as well as his.

One of the strengths of the book is the author's account of her exploration of Wong Ah Fook's Chinese background, including her visits to his home in China; Spectacles Village, on the edge of the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong is a lineage village, in which everyone is descended from the same founder. Lim was shown the spirit tablet of her great-grandfather and his two wives, and was taken up the hill behind the village to honour the grave of the ancestor who is believed to have protected the community. Lim recreates the circumstances in which Wong Ah Fook must have left Spectacles Village to seek his fortune in Southeast Asia, and goes on to show the continuing relationship which he maintained with the place later in his life, including establishing a school there. She discusses the history of the Wong clan from its origins in Northern China, and in doing so helps to develop a phenomenology of the Chinese immigrant. The Wong genealogy would have been essential to Wong Ah Fook's sense of self – his awareness of himself as 'one of a long line of people marching through time . . . and his sons' sons coming after him in the future' (p. 23). His commitment to establishing ancestral trusts and supporting clan associations and education is understandable in terms of this worldview. Lim even conjectures that Wong compared himself with the progenitor of the clan, who had also been a pioneer, migrating across China many centuries earlier.

The story of Wong's early career in Singapore and Johor is also difficult to reconstruct, but he appears early on as a poorly paid carpenter. An opportunity appeared when the influential Cantonese known as Whampoa introduced him to the elite of Johor, including the Maharajah's consort, and the book provides insights into the patronage and commercial relationships that operated not only within the Chinese community but also between Chinese entrepreneurs and the Malay regime. Monarchy, it is clear, transcends ethnicity. Wong's relationship with the Johor ruler involved not merely the building of the palace, the Istana Besar, but also service of different types to the ruler and the royal reward of an honour (The Order of the Crown of Johor).

One of Wong's principal activities in Johor was as a revenue farmer. He was given a lease (with a rent of \$20,000 per month) by the ruler to impose a tax on gambier and pepper. Lim suggests his contract may have been the result of the Johor government's endeavour to break the hold of a Singapore cartel; an enterprising Cantonese with little or no affiliations to the Teochew power holders, Wong was ideal for the task. A less successful initiative for Wong was the Kwong Yik Bank, the first Chinese bank in British Malaya. Lim says that 'those who lived through [the collapse of this bank], even as children, could only speak of it with distress'. She can still remember 'the anguish on their faces . . . the accusing fingers pointed here and there' (p. 109). The bank was set up when the community was still learning 'the rudiments of modern banking' (p. 116), and its operations were reliant on *guanxi* (connections) and *xinyong* (trust). When a run on the bank occurred, the situation became so serious that Wong offered his entire fortune

as security for the debts. In the end the bank could not be saved, though, as Lim explains, the collapse was a well-publicised ‘learning experience for Singapore and was an essential step towards its development as a financial centre’ (p. 125).

This is a biography that helps to open up many aspects of British Malaya’s government, society and economy – drawing attention to the British colonial context as well as the operations of the Johor Sultanate. The splendid photographs do much to evoke the age, giving illustrations of the architecture, dress styles and personalities of the time. In her writing, Lim pauses to give detailed descriptions, such as that of the country house her grandfather bought in 1901, with its open verandah, purple bougainvillea and ancestral altars. Wong’s first wife Chew Yew (Lim’s great-grandmother) was responsible for the evidently magnificent garden, and Lim’s book makes clear that in various other ways she was a powerful presence: a shrewd business woman and housekeeper, remembered late in her life sitting in the kitchen ‘with her daughters, grand-daughters and servants’ and serving a Cantonese curry and steamed crab, Taishan style.

Perhaps the most revealing illustration of the way a successful Chinese entrepreneur might negotiate the Malay-British-Chinese context at the opening of the twentieth century is Lim’s description of her great-grandfather’s plans for his sons’ future careers. The eldest was to receive a classical education as a Chinese scholar ‘to win honour and recognition for the family and to make a place for the family in China’ (p. 138); the second was to help with the family business; the youngest boys were to go to ‘the best English schools and universities to learn the ways of the British in order to make their way in a British colony’ (p. 132).

Many of Wong’s descendants have had illustrious careers in business, scholarship, the media and sport. After the great-grandfather died the large extended family continued to engage in the rituals of ancestor worship – family occasions which Lim describes in vivid, affectionate detail. Like Wong, her outlook is influenced by the sense of continuity of the family, and as we read the last portion of the book, we realise the truth of her final observation that this is a narrative not only of her great-grandfather but also of the search for her ‘own past and the roots of my heritage’.

The success of this book may lead to many more family studies; these will enliven the whole field of overseas Chinese studies.

ANTHONY MILNER

Australian National University

Singapore

New culture in a new world: The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese diaspora in Singapore, 1919–1932

By DAVID KENLEY

London, New York: Routledge, 2003. Pp. 231. Illustrations.

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With the opening up of China after the Opium Wars, the Middle Kingdom became more porous to trade, migration and ideas. As debates raged on about the extent of modernisation required to compete with the West, adverse economic conditions compelled many Chinese to seek their fortunes outside the country. Consequently,

overseas Chinese communities, also known as the *Huaqiao*, emerged from plantations, ports, mines and cities around the world. Far from being peripheral and fragmented, the *Huaqiao* were recognised as an important historical force by contesting Chinese political groups seeking to garner their financial and moral support. In turn, the overseas Chinese political and cultural identities were also shaped by events and trends in the mainland, particularly from the 1911 Revolution to the Tiananmen massacre in 1989. In *New culture in a new world*, David Kenley attempts to reconstruct the impact of the May Fourth Movement in 1919 on the Chinese Diaspora in colonial Singapore through the lens of political demonstrations, newspaper articles and emerging Chinese schools. While the author underlines the unique literary developments in Singapore inspired by the movement, his use of sources, conceptual frameworks and choice of areas to be covered leaves much to be desired.

Works on Chinese political activism in Singapore prior to the Second World War have focused on Sun Yet Sen's sojourns and the establishment of the Communist- and Nationalist-based groups, as well as organised resistance against Japanese militarism. Kenley, however, argues that the May Fourth Movement also had significant political and cultural repercussions in Singapore in the period from 1919 to 1932. Initially, the event inspired a series of protests, boycotts, demonstrations and riots in Singapore over the Paris Peace Conferences and the Japanese military intervention in China. These public protests also targeted the repressive policies of the British colonial authorities, from the banishment of Chinese activists to the censorship of local newspapers.

Behind the apparently sporadic demonstrations were the underground efforts by converts of the movement to mould a 'new culture' based on the principles of Nationalism and Modernism. Radicals called for not just heightened social consciousnesses, but also a concerted drive to erase the superstitious and feudal past, a past blamed for China's weakness and disunity. Spearheading this movement were Guomindang (KMT) officials, Communist agitators and organisers, intellectuals, journalists and returning graduates sent by wealthier Straits Chinese families to China for university education. Kenley emphasises that the *Huaqiao* did not regard the development of 'new culture' in Singapore as merely being dictated from China.

The growth of a more localised narrative stemmed from the inherent difficulties in relating to and recognising the unique experiences of the Chinese Diaspora by their comrades in the mainland. From the articles extracted by the author, a general sentiment of disdain of the supposedly decadent colonial society pervaded the newly arrived Chinese writers and literalists in Singapore. Straits Chinese scholars also faced similar stigmatisation on the part of their supposedly liberated Chinese counterparts. Dismissed by the orthodoxy of 'new culture' and suspected by the increasingly uneasy British authorities, the local Chinese communities began to draw strength and stories from their own Diasporic legacies. Through poetry, articles and fables about rickshaw riders, memories and desire to return to an imagined homeland, as well as appreciation of the local natural landscape, the *Nanyang* (South Seas) culture began to take root. For Kenley, the main thrust of the May Fourth Movement lasted until 1932, when the attention of the Chinese communities was turned from defining a new cultural consciousness to resistance against the Japanese aggression in China.

To a large extent, the author should be commended for raising a more complex and colourful account of the experience of the May Fourth Movement in Singapore.

Unfortunately, both his research and his approach remain limited and inadequate in accessing the more enduring legacies of the movement's impact on the Chinese Diaspora. Among the more disturbing details, however minor, are his selection of Romanisation styles and his omission of key British official documents. On the former Kenley argues that the adoption of the Mandarin-based *Pinyin* style in his book over the more traditional renderings based on non-Mandarin dialect pronunciations serves as the most appropriate form of clearing the confusion of Chinese names. He seems, however, insensitive towards the tensions behind these two systems in Singapore, where the *Pinyin* version represents a more alien imposition of Mainland Chinese standardisation on local Diasporic dialect identities. In addition there is a shocking absence of any indication that the author has consulted government records and papers from the British Colonial Office on Malaya. This has ruled out not just more insights into the attitudes of the colonial administration towards the movement, but also potential sources of vital information on this particular era.

Regarding broader thematic issues, Kenley has introduced the discourses surrounding the relationship between Diaspora, nationalism, and culture. However, he has missed the opportunity to create a more relevant discussion surrounding the context of the May Fourth Movement for overseas Chinese communities in general. Readers would be able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the legacy of the movement in Singapore through a broader survey about the differing impacts of Chinese revolutionary politics on the *Huaqiao*. Furthermore, the author is also unable to provide the readers with greater historical depth for the May Fourth Movement in Singapore, as reflected in his incomplete prologue of the Chinese Diaspora there and the epilogue on the Republic's reaction to the Tiananmen Massacre. His portrayal of a more compliant Straits Chinese population prior to 1919 contrasts starkly with the British fears of violent rivalries between dialect-based secret societies and with acts such as cutting off pigtails in support of the 1911 Revolution. Essential periods of the country's post-war history – from the student demonstrations in the 1950s and the clampdown on pro-Communist Chinese political opposition in the 1960s to the 'integration' of the Chinese-medium Nanyang University in the late 1970s – are also left unmentioned.

Given the enduring nature and global historical trends, it is difficult to confine the study of the legacies of significant events in China on the *Huaqiao* within a selected time capsule. Kenley's *New culture* should offer new lessons for those keen to further broaden the historiography on the Chinese Diaspora.

LIEW KAI KHIUN
University College London

Thailand

Redefining nature: Karen ecological knowledge and the challenge to the modern conservation paradigm

By PINKAEW LAUNGARAMSRI

Chennai: Earthworm Books, 2001. Pp. xv, 257. Plates, Notes, Bibliography.

DOI: 10.1017/S002246340434018X

Anthropologist Pinkaew Laungamsri has written a highly valuable contribution to the literature on the cultural politics of development and conservation in Thailand,

and a work of lasting importance for the growing global anthropology of conservation. In a book marked by lucid writing and skilled analysis, Pinkaew has delivered both a detailed critique of the modern Thai state's coercive conservation regime, and a nuanced ethnographic account of Karen adaptations and responses to it.

Pinkaew has done an admirable job of applying post-structuralist theory to Thai state conservationism. Her handling of complex theoretical issues stemming from the work of Foucault is both coherent and grounded in solid research and ethnography. Indeed, this is one of the few works of Foucault-influenced anthropology that this reviewer would assign to an undergraduate audience or recommend to the educated layperson. One comes away from the book with a clear idea of how Western notions of conservation have been adopted by powerful elite and middle-class actors in Thailand, setting the limits of what counts as 'knowledge' in 'scientific forestry' and bolstering the discursive and practical power of the state. Two chapters based on secondary research and historical background to state conservationism are supplemented by an 'anthropology of foresters and nature conservationists' based on interviews with members of both groups.

Chapters 4 and 5 are the ethnographic heart of the book. There, Pinkaew details the dynamic and creative ways through which her Karen consultants and their allies have sought to counter state efforts to separate them from their lands. She charts the subtle reworking of 'local knowledge' by Karen activists seeking to make themselves heard and understood by the powerful, the deployment of counter-discourses such as 'community forest' (*paa chumchon*) and 'rotating swidden agriculture' (*rai munwian*), and the use of counter-mapping by Karen communities under threat of land expropriation. Pinkaew recognises that local knowledge is not just an objectified 'wisdom' passed down from prior generations, but a work in progress, and one that always exists in tension and negotiation with powerful outside discourses. Thus, she avoids both romanticised claims for the Karen as 'ecologically noble savages' and the de-authorising tendencies that can stem from an honest and critical analysis of counter-hegemonic movements.

Another of Pinkaew's strengths is her overall denial of the infamous material-ideal dichotomy. She consistently points out the links between changing discourses of nature in Thai society and prevailing material interests while avoiding the reduction of one to the other. However, the reader may note a slight tendency towards a foundation in materialist analysis, to which this reviewer is sympathetic. Indeed, the material history of forest, people and state at Pinkaew's field site in Chiang Mai Province is particularly crucial to her demolition of the state's ahistorical and racialised forest ideology and of myths about the mechanical links between upland 'population pressure' and 'deforestation'.

Unfortunately, the production of the book is lacking in several respects. There is no index, for example. More troubling is the absence of many in-text citations from the bibliography, which could hinder the reader's ability to follow up on particular points of interest. However, these flaws in no way hinder the basic theoretical and ethnographic soundness of this important work.

HENRY D. DELCORE
California State University, Fresno

Timor Leste

Bitter dawn: East Timor, a people's story

By IRENA CRISTALIS

London: Zed Books, 2002. Pp. xiii, 306. Plates, Maps, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

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Since the UN's 1999 Popular Consultation in East Timor a number of academics, journalists and UN officials have penned observer accounts. Irena Cristalis, a journalist from the Netherlands, was one of three media representatives to remain in the UN's Dili compound, along with a remnant of UN volunteers and foreign observers who stayed behind after the abandonment of the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) mission during the violence that followed the referendum. This book is part travelogue and part political commentary. Cristalis meets and interviews many important East Timorese political and social figures along the way. She also puts herself at risk. Not content to just report on the Popular Consultation, she reacts to the injustice and violence that occurred, largely at the hands of the Indonesian army and pro-Indonesian militias, and seeks to expose it.

The book starts with East Timor's history provided in snatches, interspersed with the beginnings of the author's first-hand account. Her involvement with East Timor began with an attempted entry into the territory in 1994, when she was expelled by Indonesian authorities. She returned in 1999 at the time of East Timor's historic vote on its own future.

In her accounts Cristalis provides valuable material and insights on a number of East Timor's most important leaders – material that should inform wider scholarship on the country. For example, she spent some time with Xanana Gusmão (now East Timor's President) and was able to observe the future head of state in some detail, thus providing interesting details. Gusmão is revealed as having little interest in his nominal Catholic faith. Some UN officials also feature in the account, but usually in less than glowing terms. The UN's Special Representative, Jamsheed Marker, comes through as naïve in arguing that a peacekeeping force was not necessary (p. 215), while UNAMET head Ian Martin appears, from this account, to have been in denial about the role of the army in the violence (p. 228).

The author also spent time in Falintil (pro-independence) camps. At times she speaks of the Falintil in glowing terms: 'Falintil's story had become a legendary tale of heroism' (p. 6). Falintil's mixed history is not overlooked, however; she does not shrink from discussing accusations of human rights abuses in the past – correctly stating that Falintil, by 1999, had developed a reputation for never targeting civilians and renounced all violence (p. 175). Noting the laudable rhetoric of a colourful Falintil leader, codename 'L7', who states that men and women were equal in Falintil, Cristalis observes that women still did all the domestic chores (p. 190).

This volume works best as an account of the events, as the author observed them, in East Timor. Sometimes the book gets bogged down in details, even to the extent of describing the contents of meals. But trying to explain the wider picture has led to some minor difficulties. The author accuses the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) of not wanting to hear 'bad news' (p. 163). This is difficult to sustain: the UNSC deals constantly with bad news, including problems in UN operations. She also offers the

explanation that the UN mission was not so robust in the first instance because some Western countries did not want to upset Indonesia's fragile democratic transition (p. 162), when in fact these countries were probably as worried about undoing the ballot in East Timor itself. Although she asks the question many times as to why the UN and/or the international community did not act sooner, she correctly answers her own question near the end of the book when she notes that Malaysia (a non-permanent member of the UNSC), China and Russia would not support intervention against Indonesia (p. 228). But there is also the broader point that Indonesia's invitation for a multilateral peace-keeping (or peace-making) force was essential in avoiding a clash with Indonesian armed forces.

During East Timor's historic ballot, members of the Indonesian political elite portrayed East Timor as being in the grip of a civil war. The military did their best to ensure that this came true, through support of militia violence against suspected independence supporters. During the ballot, pro-Indonesia groups claimed that the UN mission was a massive Australian plot to destabilise Indonesia; they accused the United Nations of wholesale cheating. In reality, cheating, largely in the form of threats, intimidation, and actual violence was regularly employed by East Timor's pro-autonomy militias. Unfortunately, many Indonesian commentators have continued to ignore this, while the *ad hoc* trials in Indonesia on the violence in East Timor have refused to acknowledge the complicity of the military in the destruction there. Cristalis' account matches up with all the other first-hand accounts in positing that the ballot was fair, that its result reflected public opinion, and that the overwhelming majority of the irregularities were caused by the pro-Indonesia militia groups. As well as enduring the horror of Dili's destruction after the ballot, early on in the run-up to the referendum, the author was threatened with automatic weapons by pro-Indonesia militia groups (p. 132). This was all too commonplace in East Timor; it is little wonder that UN officials, foreign observers and journalists, from the far corners of the earth, lost all respect for such groups during their stay there.

ANTHONY L. SMITH

Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, Hawai'i

Vietnam

Changing political economy of Vietnam: The case of Ho Chi Minh City

By MARTIN GAINSBOROUGH

London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003. Pp. xi 188. Tables, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

DOI: 10.1017/S0022463404360182

This work traces the transformation of the local state in Vietnam, using Ho Chi Minh City as a case study. The author examines the development of political and economic power blocs within the local government structure and their increasingly fierce struggles for supremacy. The recurrent theme of the book is, in the author's own words, 'a situation in which power was apparently scattered among institutions that were frequently if not perpetually in competition with each other' and 'problems between different levels in the formal hierarchy' (p. 13).

Martin Gainsborough's arguments are conceptual and empirical elaborations of the arguments and observations put forward earlier by Adam Fforde ('The "political economy" of reform in Vietnam – some reflections', in *The challenge of reform in Indochina*, ed. Borje Ljunggren [Cambridge, MA: HIID, 1993], pp. 293–326) on the rise of state business interests during the period of transition from a planned to a market economy; Gerard Greenfield ('The development of capitalism in Vietnam', in *Socialist register 1994*, ed. Ralph Miliband and Leo Panitch [London: Socialist Register], pp. 203–34) on the illegal privatisation of state owned enterprises; and Thaveeporn Vasavakul ('Politics of administrative reform in post-socialist Viet Nam', in *Vietnam Assessment*, ed. Suiwah Leung [Singapore: ISEAS, 1996], pp. 42–68) on the breakdown of hierarchies and public administration reform. Chapter 2 discusses in detail the two patterns of the development of state businesses: local elite privatisation, whereby those running state enterprises assume greater control over company assets, and the siphoning of public funds or assets into newly established enterprises that operate as private firms (pp. 25 and 28). Chapter 3 identifies the structure of client networks held together by commercial interests and how such interests can be seen to exercise influence on the appointment process in a way that is out of step with the old logic of democratic centralism. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the rising political power of local economic and political blocs as well as bureaucratic competition as seen through (1) resistance to central directives on appointment and personnel; (2) resistance to the equitisation of state-owned enterprises; (3) conflict between the central and municipal governments, between the municipal government and provincial line agencies, between the province and the districts, and among business interests of different provincial departments; and (4) the privatisation of state property. Throughout the book, Gainsborough questions the label 'reformist' that is often given to Ho Chi Minh City, emphasising instead its primary rent-seeking ethos.

The book contributes substantially to the understanding of the development of Vietnamese state and bureaucratic politics in the 1990s. However, additional work still has to be done to gain a more complete picture of the local situation in Ho Chi Minh City. In the first place, the arguments the book puts forward would have been strengthened enormously if the author had placed his discussion in the context of the reform of the Vietnamese political system as a whole. This process includes the rethinking of the development role of the state as seen in the reform of state-owned enterprises. The reform of the political system also includes the redefinition of authority relations between the central and the municipal/provincial government and among local government agencies. One of the key changes has been the decentralisation of administrative and fiscal responsibilities from the central to the municipal government, and from the municipal government to the district and commune level.

Secondly, it is essential to point out the inherent conflict between decentralisation in administrative and financial responsibilities and the lack of decentralisation in the decision-making process. The power of local economic and political blocs is not absolute. Although they form networks based on local business and political interests, their patrons or protectors are often central figures or at least are linked with the central leadership structure. The Nãm Cam corruption scandal, the most recent instance of government officials and police protecting organised crime, confirms this point. The organisation's network of protectors encompassed key central government leaders and Central Committee members.

Third, the analysis needs to take into consideration the different political actors involved. *Changing political economy of Vietnam*, while thorough in investigating competition and conflict among bureaucratic units, is less systematic in identifying the role of the local Vietnamese Communist Party units and their involvement in the local competition for power. The book's analysis of the local party structure focuses merely on party committees at the provincial and district level. In reality, the party structure also includes units in state-owned enterprises, provincial line ministries, and bloc government agencies. The discussion of state-owned enterprises and reform necessarily takes into account the position of enterprise workers and local labor unions, while discussion of the 'one stop, one stamp' model at the district level necessarily includes the role of local inhabitants *cum* customers in the bureaucratic in-fighting process.

Finally, Gainsborough extensively uses explanations drawn from China's experiences to discuss the case of Ho Chi Minh City. Given that the city's experiences under socialism were relatively short, it might be more useful to compare its situation with that of Vietnam's counterparts in the Southeast Asian region.

THAVEEPORN VASAVAKUL

Institute of Security and International Studies, Bangkok

Postcolonial Vietnam: New histories of the national past

By PATRICIA M. PELLEY.

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002. Pp. xi, 326. Notes, Bibliography, Index.
DOI: 10.1017/S0022463404370189

Patricia Pelley's study of Vietnamese historiographical projects of the early post-colonial period is the second recent examination of 1950s Vietnamese political and academic contestations, following closely on the publication of Kim Ninh's *A world transformed* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002). It is exciting to see that a new generation of scholars is beginning to explore the fascinating cultural and historical debates that took place among Vietnamese intellectuals in the post-1954 period. These debates have heretofore been overlooked, with academic discussions in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) being depicted as monolithic, reflecting an ideologically standardised viewpoint – the end product – rather than being seen for their intricate debates and contestations – the process. It is an exploration of these debates that lies at the heart of Pelley's book and that holds together a work whose structure resembles a collection of essays rather than a continuous narrative.

The first chapter, 'Constructing history', introduces the main theme of Pelley's work, which is a critical examination of the complex processes, debates and frequent contradictions that go into the production of national histories. Specifically, she explores the difficulties that official Vietnamese historians of the postcolonial period faced as they sought to forge a consensus in the writing of a national history. Pelley demonstrates that this project was an inherently complex one, in which historians struggled over questions concerning the periodisation and interpretation of the past. The mandate to reach consensus led the historians in Hanoi repeatedly to reopen discussions which could not resolve these fundamental questions. Moreover, they were forced constantly to respond to changing political objectives and circumstances that rendered establishing a single, fixed narrative virtually impossible.

Pelley argues that the multiple historiographical traditions to which the postcolonial historians were heir only made this search for consensus all the more difficult. As the scholars tried to create an acceptable periodisation and definition of Vietnamese history, they had to reconcile an imperial historiographical tradition with a colonial historical project, all the while seeking somehow to tie Vietnam to what were seen as the globalising historical trajectories set forth by Marx and his Soviet interpellators. The chapter is a skilful exploration of the complex ways in which national histories are constructed, and functions as a useful reminder of the many issues that lurk beneath the surface of such accounts. It is somewhat frustrating, however, that Pelley offers so little background information on the key figures at the centre of these debates, including such figures as Trần Huy Liệu, Văn Tấn, and Đào Duy Anh.

The second chapter, containing Pelley's discussion of the debates about the role and place of ethnic groups within the postcolonial state, is also very well developed. Here she reveals that post-1954 historians were wrestling not only with the issue of periodisation, but also with such questions as ethnic identity: who exactly are the Vietnamese people? Specifically, these scholars were confronted with trying to explain the historical relationship between the 'Kinh' majority (ethnic Vietnamese) and other groups including lowland dwellers like the Cham and Khmer, but particularly the wide range of upland dwellers. Pelley shows that this crucial question centred on issues of ethnic identity and ideas about the political autonomy of various 'minority' groups in the postcolonial period. The complexity of this relationship is suggested by the fact that while the emergent historiographical narrative spoke of a unified tradition of 'resistance against foreign aggression', this narrative had to suppress an equally long historical trajectory in which geographically marginal groups often fought against the lowland Vietnamese, seeing the latter themselves as a kind of foreign aggressor.

Pelley's third chapter, 'National essence and the family-state', is less successful than the first two. Although it offers a good discussion of the ways in which historians attempted to place peasants at the centre of their histories, the exploration of evolving conceptions of 'culture' is unsatisfying, particularly when compared with Kim Ninh's much more nuanced discussion of this topic. The chapter, moreover, devotes just four pages to the concept of the 'family-state', which, although it allows Pelley to put forward some useful observations on changing pronominal usage, does not permit a sustained argument or a viable link to the concept of 'national essence'. Pelley's final chapter, 'Chronotypes, commemoration' – again only very loosely linked to the rest of the book – explores the commemorative impulse in postcolonial Vietnam, in which various kinds of 'anniversaries' are promoted and appropriately interpreted for public consumption. Pelley effectively demonstrates the many ways in which the state's instrumental use of the past led it to deploy particular historical figures and events to serve as commentary on the present. A brief epilogue helps to pull the various threads together and to assess the accomplishments of the historical committees.

Finally, two brief observations on mechanics. First, it is nice to see the inclusion of full Vietnamese diacritics in the text itself, part of a welcome trend in recent works on Vietnam. On the other hand, it is rather frustrating that the text itself uses translated titles of journals and books, while the bibliography and endnotes often do not, leaving Vietnamese titles of individual articles and books untranslated. Thus, Trần Trọng Kim's survey history is referred to in the text as *Summary of Vietnamese history*, and in the

endnotes and bibliography as *Việt Nam sử lược*. In other words, the text appears aimed at the non-specialist, while the notes appear directed at Vietnam scholars, which is ultimately confusing for both sets of readers.

Pelley's book is, overall, both an important contribution to our understanding of postcolonial Vietnamese historical debates, and a very useful study of the historiographical processes that produce national histories. Pelley reminds us that the debates behind the scenes are often far more revealing and important than the final product. This book should serve to stimulate further explorations of modern Vietnamese historiographical debates (of which there are many), and may be a useful springboard to studies that might next engage similar issues among historians in the southern part of Vietnam.

GEORGE DUTTON

University of California, Los Angeles