

*Writing for eternity: A survey of epigraphy in Southeast Asia*

Edited by DANIEL PERRET

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In the first half of the twentieth century, the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) conducted epigraphic research particularly in Cambodia and Vietnam. After a marked decline for the next five decades, epigraphy has enjoyed a revival since the beginning of the twenty-first century. These collaborations led the volume's editor, EFEO's Daniel Perret, to co-organise an international workshop with the Ikatan Ahli Arkaeologi Malaysia (Malaysian Archaeologists Association) entitled 'Epigraphy of Southeast Asia' in Kuala Lumpur in 2011. This workshop became the starting point of this book, with ten of its participants contributing chapters.

This volume is divided into three parts: 1. Corpora of inscriptions in Indian scripts and local variants; 2. Corpora of inscriptions in Chinese scripts; and 3. Corpora of inscriptions in Arabic, and Arabic-derived scripts. The first part contains thirteen chapters by fourteen authors in a geographically ordered sweep: Myanmar first, followed by Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, then Island Southeast Asia. The second part contains two chapters, and the final part, three chapters. Two of the thirteen chapters in the first part are by Perret, who also wrote a very informative Introduction. All but two chapters, written in French, are in English.

The two main aims of this book as stated by Perret in the Preface are: to show current developments of the discipline through a corpus perspective, and to review the 200 years of epigraphical research in Southeast Asia. Perret is the right person for such an undertaking considering his long-term involvement as a researcher, and now Research Director of Southeast Asian history, at EFEO.

*Writing for eternity* provides an overall view of the richness and diversity of inscriptions, their chronological extent, similarities and differences, and their geographical distribution beyond current political boundaries. The book also shows the state of progress in the field, as well as different ways of approaching inscriptions. Given that many, if not most, publications regarding the epigraphic history of former French Indochina are only available in French, this publication, which is largely in English, adds to the value of an already excellent book.

The corpora approach helps to clearly define the scope of the contributions. Perret defines a corpus as 'a set of texts brought together according to various criteria for a comprehensive approach' (p. 16). Perret reminds us in his Introduction that Southeast Asian corpora are not limited to those in Indic, Arabic or Chinese scripts, but also in other scripts such as Japanese, Armenian, Hebrew and Latin.

Three chapters are dedicated to Islamic inscriptions, in almost all cases on grave-stones, mainly from northern Sumatra, Patani in southern Thailand, the Malay Peninsula, Brunei, the Sulu Archipelago and Java, which shed new light on the Islamisation of the Malay Archipelago. Roderick Orlina (Murdoch University) describes two tombstones from the Sulu Archipelago which show the cosmopolitan relations during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries linking Sulu to China and beyond.

Two chapters are dedicated to inscriptions in Chinese scripts: Claudine Salmon provides us with a historical survey of epigraphic studies conducted by Sinologists in Southeast Asia and discusses the historical significance of these studies, whereas Philippe Papin (École Pratique des Hautes Études) examines the corpus of steles in Vietnam.

Designed as a survey, it comes as no surprise that the contributions are very diverse. Yet, given the nature of the subject, many authors adopt a geographical criterion to discuss 'their' corpus of inscriptions, while other authors prefer a historical, bibliographic, or a more analytical approach.

Kyaw Minn Htin (National University of Singapore) and J.P. Leider (EFEO) describe the preliminary results of an ongoing project aimed at producing a catalogue of Arakan/Rakhine inscriptions that not only contains texts in Arakanese, but also in Sanskrit, Pyu, Mon, Pali and Arabic.

Michel Lorrillard (EFEO) discusses the corpus of inscriptions from Laos. Marek Buchmann (Humboldt University) covers the corpus of 173 stone inscriptions from northern Thailand, while Christian Bauer, also from Humboldt University, covers sixth to ninth century Mon inscriptions from Thailand, Laos and Burma.

In his chapter on Myanmar epigraphy, Tilman Frasch from Manchester Metropolitan University concludes that the compilation of an online database to electronically document the tens of thousands of Southeast Asian inscriptions should have highest priority:

The first and probably most urgent task is the compilation of a revised and updated 'List Inscriptions' to take stock of the amount of inscriptions currently known. [...] This list should contain all relevant data such as dates, place of origin, main person of donor, present location and references to editions and translations as far as they are available.

Both Dominique Soutif (EFEO) in 'The corpus of Khmer inscriptions: State of the art, methods and first results' and Julia Estève (Mahidol University) in 'Mapping the sacred: Towards a religious geography of ancient Cambodia through a Toponymic Atlas of Cambodian inscriptions' emphasise the usefulness of electronic databases as a research tool. The *Corpus des inscriptions khmères* (CIK; cik.efeo.fr) is currently limited to a list of 1,360 inscriptions, but ultimately will also contain the original texts, translations and commentaries on the descriptions. Despite its current limitations, Estève demonstrates in her fascinating study that 'in the long run, the Toponymic Atlas [based on the CIK] will allow us to map the sacred places of Ancient Cambodia through time, producing a religio-geospatial database that will depict its religious geography and history and help us understand its religion'.

The Malay Archipelago is well covered in this volume. Perret himself contributed two excellent chapters, 'A historical survey of epigraphy in Maritime Southeast Asia' and 'Building the corpus of Indianised inscriptions in Sumatra', while Titi Surti Nastiti compiled a comprehensive description of all known Batu Sima border markers of Java with transliterations and translations of selected inscriptions. Arlo Griffith wrote a worthy chapter about the corpus of 36 Old Malay inscriptions dating from the seventh to fifteenth centuries.

Helpfully, there are abstracts of each chapter, and brief details of the 18 authors, citing their institutional affiliations, research interests, and major or most recent

publications. The volume ends with a consolidated bibliography and a comprehensive, bilingual index. These details show the hard work and dedication involved in the compilation and publication of this volume. The book is printed on high-quality glossy paper which nicely reproduces the many illustrations.

Perret unpretentiously describes his book as a 'panorama', with no intent of answering the multiple and complex questions raised by the history of epigraphic research in Southeast Asia. Yet, *Writing for eternity* is much more than a panorama, or a 'survey', as indicated in the subtitle. It is the first publication introducing the major corpora of epigraphic sources in Southeast Asia, which are essential sources for historians.

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*Human rights and participatory politics in Southeast Asia*

By CATHERINE RENSHAW

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Catherine Renshaw's *Human rights and participatory politics in Southeast Asia* is a tale of two stories. The first story (Part 1) is about the 'Foundations' and queries the 'legitimacy of a regional human rights regime in the absence of liberal democracy' (p. 15). It starts with a general exposé on Southeast Asia and ASEAN (chap. 1), then elaborates on post-ASEAN Charter developments (chap. 2), to finally present a specific appraisal of the 2012 ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (chap. 3). The second story (Part 2) is about 'Applications' and focuses on 'the regional dynamics of human rights commitment and compliance' (p. 95), based on specific case studies of 'the rights of women', 'trafficking in persons' and 'Myanmar' (chaps. 4, 5 and 6 respectively).

Both stories revolve around 'the overarching question ... whether and to what extent ASEAN's new institutions could shape the human rights behaviour of member states and improve the lives of the peoples in Southeast Asia' (p. 4). To those who are familiar with Southeast Asia's colonial and post-colonial histories, and the 'ASEAN Way' of regional integration and institution building, Renshaw's findings that 'at the time of writing, the ostensible achievements of ASEAN's *human rights institutions* are meagre' (p. 12) might not come as a surprise. Disenchanted with ASEAN's 'ostensible achievements', Renshaw then considers the possibility that these institutions have a '*potential* to influence human rights practices in ways that global human rights institutions cannot' (my italics, p. 13). The moderate optimism, or should one say hope, that is displayed in the Conclusion is based on this rather latent 'potential'. This hope is undermined by Southeast Asia's 'democratic deficit' (p. 167), which is the recurring theme in this publication. 'The absence of liberal democracy' is the author's foundational perspective and as such informs the narrative beyond and