

to dominate the second-level streams in both the science and arts tracks, and their position is analysed in terms of the marginalized position of the Indian community, for whom statistics demonstrate low levels of tertiary education, professional occupations, political standing or national wealth relative to their share of Malaysia's population. The majority of Malay students are found in the lower streams of the school. Yet their future, thanks to affirmative action, remains more privileged and secure than those of either their Indian or Chinese schoolmates.

I found the book's descriptions of various strategies of success a good but most depressing read. They suggest an exam-obsessed, prosaic "boot-camp" grind of punitive educational attitudes where the love of learning plays little part. Strategies of resistance include adopting the camouflage of traditional gender norms and associated piety. However, the latter chapters of the book, in which the follow-up of participants is reported, make clear that top performers achieve success — primarily by leaving Malaysia, like the author — but that strategies of resistance may be of little use in challenging the status quo. This is particularly true for less-privileged young Indian women.

In summary, this book is a useful and insightful addition to a research canon concerned with analysing the shifting and curious convolution of ethnicity and state politics that characterize contemporary Malaysia. A recommended read.

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Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development. By Daniel Immerwahr. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015. xii+253 pp.

The publication of *Thinking Small* brings Northwestern University historian Daniel Immerwahr's important 2011 Berkeley dissertation to

the broad readership that it deserves. While the book is fundamentally a contribution to the study of twentieth-century American history, that readership ought to include Southeast Asianists.

Thinking Small presents little less than a compelling alternative intellectual history of public policy in the United States over the course of the past eight decades. That history centres on “the quest for community ... an effort to shore up small-scale social solidarities, to encourage democratic deliberation and social action on a local level, and to embed politics and economics within the life of the community” (p. 4). This American quest also helped prompt an intense vogue for community development programmes in what the book calls, somewhat jarringly, “the global South” (p. 8) starting in the 1950s. As Immerwahr tells the story, the international community development vogue had its roots, at least in part, in the concern over the atomizing impact of mass society in the United States of the 1930s. This concern gave rise to an interest in the dynamics of the small group and in the possibility — *pace* Norman Jacobs (1971) — of “development without modernization” (p. x). Figures ranging from Walt Disney, Sinclair Lewis, E.B. White, Norman Rockwell, Thornton Wilder and Granville Hicks to Lewis Mumford, Frank Capra, David Riesman, Frank Lloyd Wright, William Whyte, Robert Redfield and Jacob Levy Moreno shared this interest. Moreno even established an academic journal, *Sociometry*, to give the study of “‘networks’ of social relations between individuals” institutional standing in American social science (p. 26).

What Riesman would later call “groupism” (p. 37) motivated the work both of rural sociologists in the Division of Farm and Rural Welfare of the United States Department of Agriculture’s Bureau of Agricultural Economics in the same years that saw Washington undertake the vast, centralized, technocratic programme that was the Tennessee Valley Authority. It also informed the work of the Community Analysis Section of the War Relocation Authority (WRA), responsible for running internment camps for Japanese-Americans during the Second World War. The work of these agencies thus exemplified the manner in which small-scale efforts rooted in communitarianism and sweeping programmes defined by bureaucratic centralization

coexisted; in Immerwahr's words, "the urge to modernize and the quest for community shared space" (p. 71). And, as the communitarian quest fell out of fashion domestically, the United States began in the 1950s to export to the rest of the world both the ideology that underlay it and the "rural experts" (p. 53) who had pursued it.

In 1954, America's foreign-assistance bureaucracy gained a Division of Community Development. Soon, the governments of tens of countries in the developing world initiated community development programmes, the majority of which seem to have drawn on the ideas of American advisors. *Thinking Small* devotes a pair of chapters to close studies of "the rise and fall of community development" (Holdcroft 1976) in two among those countries. One of these chapters focuses on India, the other on the Philippines. Each is rich and rewarding, though the Southeast Asianist reader will learn more from and perhaps have fewer misgivings about the former chapter than the latter. Each of the two chapters narrates a story of the failure of community development to live up to the extravagant hopes first associated with it.

In the case of India, where American involvement in community development actually dated from the late 1940s, what grew into a gigantic programme covering every village in the country foundered on two realities. First, emphasis on mobilizing villages as units of development had the perverse effect of reinforcing the power and influence of village elites. Second, in the early 1960s New Delhi shifted its priorities in the countryside away from "nurtur[ing] community participation" to "generat[ing] abundant harvests" (p. 97). In effect, in Immerwahr's narrative, the Green Revolution supplanted community development. In addition to these two factors, the sheer scale of the Indian government's community development programme had turned it from an exercise in communitarianism into one more arm of the centralizing state.

These same issues helped account for the disappointing record of community development in the Philippines, too. In the mid-1950s Ramon Magsaysay committed the Manila government to a national community development programme. This programme trained young

Filipinos for deployment to the country's *barrios*, or villages, to work with "natural leaders" to organize meetings focused on the identification of "felt needs" and the preparation of "community-designed development plans" (p. 113). The effort benefitted from the intellectual support of the University of the Philippines and other institutions of higher education, support that, as Immerwahr writes, made "community development ... *the* problem within Philippine social science" for decades (p. 115). Even as a generation or two of researchers focused on that problem, however, the focus of community development on process rather than on the delivery of material or technical support gave it limited appeal to the rural people whom it was meant to mobilize and thus benefit. And in time the Green Revolution in any case challenged the place of community development on the Philippine government's agenda for the countryside.

As with reference to Immerwahr's treatment of this last development in the Indian context, one might quibble that he neglects continuities between community development and the Green Revolution in the Philippines. One needs to recall, for example, the work of agricultural extension agents in introducing new varieties of rice and other inputs to groups of farmers, those agents' work with "contact farmers" who had influence among their neighbours, the inclusion of social scientists in the International Rice Research Institute's research on yields across Philippine villages and those researchers' collaboration with Filipino counterparts who had begun their careers in the heyday of community development. Its large scale and top-down nature notwithstanding, then, the Green Revolution in the Philippines, and in other parts of Southeast Asia, represents another instance of "shared space" in which the modernizing and the localizing coexisted.

As the involvement of Ramon Magsaysay suggests, Philippine community development served as a component of counter-insurgency. And Immerwahr views the country's community development programme as one of mild and ultimately palliative reformism. It allowed, he argues, Manila and its American patrons to avoid undertaking the serious land reform that would have addressed

the root causes of the Huk Rebellion by challenging local power structures in the Philippine provinces. In contrast to the chapter on India, however, this chapter pays little attention to the diversity of the Philippines. Readers will be left wondering how Philippine community development programmes played out in areas beyond the Tagalog provinces in which the Huks were most active — in, for example, Ilokos with its relatively strong traditions of village solidarity or among the Christian settlers who were flocking, often in groups held together by bonds of solidarity, to Mindanao from Luzon and the Visayas during the 1950s. One wonders if the reams of research generated by Filipino scholars and students focused on the “problem” of community development might not speak to such questions.

The apparent success of community development as a means of counter-insurgency in the Philippines led to its introduction into other contexts, not least in Latin America, in which agrarian unrest preoccupied governments unwilling to address the underlying causes of that unrest. A brief discussion at the end of the chapter on the Philippines in *Thinking Small* even notes apparent affinities between community development and the “Personalist” ideology espoused by Ngô Đình Nhu in the Republic of Vietnam. This discussion will doubtless strike many readers as a bridge too far, just as Immerwahr’s extravagantly hedged contention that “Historians have not always fully acknowledged the communitarian items in the United States’ Vietnam repertoire” (p. 128) will remind readers that *Thinking Small* is in the end pitched at Americanists rather than at students of the history of modern Southeast Asia. Just as I write this review, in fact, none other than Nguyễn Be has emerged as a topic of discussion on the list-serve of the Vietnam Studies Group of the Association for Asian Studies.

The final substantive chapter of *Thinking Small* treats the “community action” programme undertaken in the United States as the centrepiece of Lyndon Baines Johnson’s War on Poverty and the transformation of its initiatives into “vehicles for militant social protest” (p. 15) in American cities. The chapter documents the boomerang of “groupist” thinking, in the form of community

development, from the United States to the developing world and back again. It is this superb chapter that makes the book such a striking contribution to the study of recent American history. But what of the book's value to the Southeast Asianist? That value may lie above all in two areas.

First, a central premise of *Thinking Small* is that, as an important chapter in the history of the twentieth century, community development has been forgotten. Indeed, in the case of the War on Poverty Immerwahr contends that scholars — and politicians — have badly misread history because of their failure to appreciate the “experience with community strategies” (p. 150) outside the United States of those who planned it. In Southeast Asia, however, the situation is somewhat different. Along with, to be sure, the imperatives of counter-insurgency, bureaucratic inertia meant that a number of national community development programmes continued to operate long after the great hopes initially invested in them had faded. Millions of Southeast Asians of all ages — along with specialists on the region who have spent appreciable periods of time outside the circles of what we once knew as its metropolitan supercultures — have memories of community development workers visiting the places in which they lived. And it was not only in the Philippines that community development took on a life of its own in academic institutions; tens of thousands of Southeast Asians, now working in a wide range of professions in both provincial and metropolitan settings, hold degrees — whether at the bachelor's, master's or doctoral levels — in community development. Likewise, rare is the social scientist working on the region who has not drawn in her or his work on reports or studies emanating from community development projects. To write that community development has been “forgotten” in Southeast Asia is, therefore, impossible. But this is not to say that those who remember the importance once attached to it or the energy once devoted to it think about it very often, or that they have much perspective on it.

Thinking Small offers the Southeast Asianist nothing less than a means of gaining perspective on community development as part of

the recent history of the region and of its component countries. It suggests linkages between recalled experiences, activities and reports, on the one hand, and broad developments that unfolded in dozens of countries around the world and the ideas that gave rise to those developments, on the other. If in the American context recuperation of the history of community development proves its value most vividly in the revised understanding of President Johnson's War on Poverty that it makes possible, in the Southeast Asian context that recuperation has similar value in improving our understanding. It can serve as a foundation for perspective on what was in fact going on, as non-communist Southeast Asian states sought to engage their rural populations by means of community development programmes. Not least, it can help us think about rural counter-insurgency and its manifold long-term consequences.

Immerwahr counts William J. Lederer's and Eugene Burdick's classic 1958 novel of village Southeast Asia during the Cold War, *The Ugly American*, as work of community development literature (pp. 1–4). A best-seller in the United States long before American forces became bogged down in the proverbial “jungles and rice paddies” of Vietnam, the book clearly spoke to concerns about the menace of international communism among readers who, just two years later, would focus those same concerns on the putative Soviet–U.S. “missile gap”. In another instance of “shared space” in other words, even during the High Cold War the story of an eccentric American helping Southeast Asian villagers help themselves by making pumps of their own design merited attention. The line connecting these two arenas of the Cold War ran, of course, through the same ideas about the salience of the small group that motivated community development.

As programmes of counter-insurgency gained momentum in Southeast Asia during the next decade, the non-communist governments of the region and their foreign partners would, not least through the medium of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization itself, devote attention to winning the war at the level of “the village” and to winning it at that level through community development — or

in any case bastardizations thereof — rather than through force of arms alone. Again, this dimension of Southeast Asia's Cold War has hardly been “forgotten”. But neither have historians of the region contextualized it effectively, understood the linkages between international politics and village-level policies, or begun to view that linkage in a perspective that will, in turn, open up a series of further research questions — including one addressed in the paragraphs that follow.

Writing of the programmes of Ferdinand E. Marcos, Immerwahr notes,

It was precisely the threat of centralized authority that had launched the quest for community in the first place. And, yet, while the ideology that stood behind community development was staunchly decentralist, its institutional logic was intriguingly Janus faced.... [C]ommunity development opened up channels between the small scale and the large. Those channels ... might allow the tentacles of central power to reach further down into the localities. (p. 122)

Of course, community development programmes that served as instruments of central power undercut the “staunchly decentralist” ideology out of which the approach had grown. At the same time, the creation of national community development agencies, and not just in the Philippines, made the operation of a centralizing “institutional logic” inevitable. In suggesting a research agenda of great fertility for the historian of modern Southeast Asia with its reference to the opening up of “channels between the small scale and the large”, this passage leads us to the second area in which *Thinking Small* is of value to the Southeast Asianist reader.

This value grows directly out of a puzzling weakness in Immerwahr's book. At the centre of “groupism” and the community development movement to which it gave rise stands a matter of no small ambiguousness. To wit, is “community development” an approach whose goal is further to “develop” extant “communities”, or is its goal the development of community where none exists? Curiously, for all the scrutiny that it brings to the performance of community development programmes, *Thinking Small* never directly

considers how the proponents of those programmes would answer these questions. What the book does suggest, however, is a long history of trying to have it both ways. This is a point worth considering in some detail, as its implications for the relevance of Immerwahr's book to the work of the Southeast Asianist are significant.

The opening pages of *Thinking Small* characterize "the quest for community" as "an effort to shore up small-scale social solidarities" (p. 4); this language hints at what amounts to a sustained fudge on the part of Immerwahr's community developers. Community, that is, existed, but it needed reinforcement. Or did it exist? Just a few pages later, we learn that, "Rather than being an always-longed-for point of origin, the small town in the United States was an 'invented tradition' ... invented particularly to express a growing discomfort with industrial society" (p. 17). This is Immerwahr talking, and there is no reason to doubt him. But there is also every reason to think that his communitarians would not agree with him and that they believed that community in America was no invention. Consider, for example, the most extreme possible case, that of internment camps for Japanese-Americans. Here one had people forcibly removed from settings in which they had established themselves socially and professionally and herded into barracks surrounded by fences. And yet, in its effort to turn the camps into schools for democracy, Immerwahr tells us, the WRA sought to recreate "social worlds" that internment had "unraveled" (p. 48). To be sure, the detainees' Asian ethnicity reinforced the agency's conviction that it could rebuild community among them, even while they remained imprisoned. John Embree, the anthropologist and Japan specialist who within a decade would gain lasting renown with a short article on the atomization and lack of community that marked Thai society (Embree 1950), urged the WRA to draw on "traditional, (and useful) Japanese culture patterns" in its work (p. 49).

As they began during the post-war period to focus their efforts overseas, American community developers took a cue from Embree. They regarded, Immerwahr writes, "Southern peoples as particularly well suited to community life" and subscribed to "a sympathetic

orientalism associating nonwhite peoples with tradition, community, and locality” (p. 51). This putative suitability and these associations notwithstanding, however, the ambiguousness central to the project persisted. American communitarians worked, for example, under the assumption that rural Indians lived in corporate villages distinguished by solidarity. Nevertheless, they saw those villages as, in Immerwahr’s words, “nascent communities” (p. 86) in which they would work, in the words of the Ford Foundation’s point man for community development in India, “to *recreate* a significant village culture” (p. 77, emphasis in the original).

In the Philippines, community development workers were trained to identify “natural leaders” among and the “felt needs” of “barrio residents” (p. 113). But Immerwahr traces the history of community development there to the arrival in the country of Y.C. James Yen and to his work on “rural reconstruction” (p. 103). This last term has long merited more scrutiny than it seems to have received; Immerwahr, for his part, subjects it to none. But the term appears to reflect the same have-it-both-ways ambiguousness central to community development: rural Asia and its communities needed, that is, not construction but reconstruction. Empirically, community had existed in the past, but it now required revival or at least reinforcement.

The ambiguousness at the heart of community development became clear during the course of President Johnson’s War on Poverty back in the United States. In American cities, community action confronted not “urban villages” but, in the terminology of the time, “dark ghettos” (p. 151) and “slums” (p. 153). These were in fact places with the potential to be organized, not least politically, but no one could mistake them for places marked at that time or at some time in the not so distant past by social solidarity and communal spirit. And, as the War on Poverty made clear, the potential to organize them had above all an extra-local dimension.

Late in *Thinking Small*, Immerwahr comments, “Community developers floundered when, their hearts overruling their heads, they squinted hard until the communities they wished to see blurrily appeared” (p. 178). Evidence presented in his book suggests, however,

that this contention is not entirely fair. That evidence indicates that American community developers operated in a context of studied ambiguousness; the villages on which they focused their efforts might already function as communities, or they might have the potential to develop into such communities.

As states in non-communist Southeast Asia sought to address the large-scale challenges of the Cold War at the small scale of “the village”, rural settlements in the region became the object of centralized bureaucracies charged with implementing community development programmes. Sometimes these bureaucracies acted on communities marked by strong organic patterns of solidarity. At other times, they acted on mere collections of dwellings defined as “villages” for official administrative purposes alone. In our assessment of these programmes, historians of Southeast Asia must not permit ourselves the puzzling lapse that Immerwahr permits himself in *Thinking Small*. We must not simply assume that the states in question fudged the distinction between these extreme variants of “the village”, or even that that distinction mattered at all. Rather, we must consider the possibility that, regardless of what foreign advisors and funding agencies may have thought, the political elites of non-communist Southeast Asia suffered from no blurriness of vision as they deployed field workers from their states’ dense social and political centres to their countries’ provincial peripheries. Allowing for that possibility suggests that these elites and their local agents were not squinting hard to see communities where none existed but rather that the communities that they actually sought to develop were — imported rhetoric notwithstanding — national and not local at all.

The rhetorical idea of the village community predates the Cold War in Southeast Asia. To cite just one conspicuous example, consider the thinking of the British Fabian socialist scholar-official John Sydenham Furnivall and his writings on Burma (Furnivall 1935, 1948). This earlier history notwithstanding, long after the end of the region’s counter-insurgency era the continued influence of ideas bearing the unmistakable imprint of community development programmes is striking. In Singapore for example, the idea of “*gotong*

royong” (mutual assistance) promoted by the Soeharto dictatorship in Indonesia will occasionally crop up in official discourse even today. Likewise, the ideas of “*watthanatham chumchon*” (community culture) and “*phumpanya chao ban*” (local wisdom) retain their apparently stultifying hold on many in today’s Thailand. But what if we do not take the invocations of these concepts at face value? What if, for example, we recall that the same regime that promoted *gotong royong* also envisioned Indonesian society as a “*massa mengambang*” (floating mass)? What if we consider *watthanatham chumchon* and *phumpanya chao ban* — and with them the “*setthakit phophiang*” (sufficiency economy) — in Gramscian perspective? What, finally, if we think hard about the place of the *barangay* (as the Philippine *barrio* was rechristened) in President Marcos’s stillborn *Bagong Lipunan* (New Society)?

Southeast Asia is today a region of mass societies, just the sort of societies whose troubling nature gave rise to the “groupism” of the 1930s in the United States. And in taking inspiration from Immerwahr’s work to gain perspective on Southeast Asian states’ encounter with rural society during the heyday of community development, historians of the region would do well to consider that era a chapter in the development of those mass societies, rather than a story of failed, dead-end undertakings. Looking to the future, we would also do well to note that ASEAN itself has put “community” at the centre of its supranational project to build a regional market and regional mass society.

Thinking Small concludes with a provocative epilogue, one whose sweep belatedly clarifies Immerwahr’s use of the term “global South” earlier in the book. This epilogue also builds on the references in the book’s introduction to Hillary Rodham Clinton’s cringe-worthy invocation of the “village” (Clinton 1996) and to the predictable, persistent keenness to support “microfinance” among affluent would-be cosmopolitans the world over to note that, once again, the pendulum has swung, both in the United States and in the field of international development, back towards an interest in community. But this epilogue will prove cold comfort to “glocalists”.

It juxtaposes “the current obsession with helping poor people help themselves” (p. 183) — evident, for example, in the recent discovery among *Fachidioten* at the World Bank and elsewhere of the merits of “community-driven development” and “community-based development” (pp. 175–76) — with a bracing perspective on the last four or five decades in the history of international development. This perspective calls attention to the “structural patterns ... unfair trade rules, border controls, and global warming” that most significantly worsen the lives of the world’s poor, the people with whose lot the community developers of the twentieth century were ostensibly concerned. To think that “fostering local solidarity” (p. 183) might serve as a meaningful way to address these massive, decidedly large-scale, problems, Professor Immerwahr concludes his brilliant history of the thinking and failed programmes of those earlier communitarians, is “a fantasy” (p. 184).

The notes to this valuable and engaging book testify to the impressive, gratifying range of materials on which its author has drawn. But the book’s index does not cover those notes. And Harvard University Press has taken the incomprehensible and frankly shameful decision to publish *Thinking Small* without a bibliography. This decision serves poorly researchers who would — as we must — build on Daniel Immerwahr’s work.

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