

transfer of the last three of these in electronic communication. Yet boundaries and nation-states that still maintain some control of their borders continue to obstruct globalizing processes. Reassuringly, this volume confirms the importance, in area studies terms, of linguistic competence and grounded knowledge of regions and communities and the value of inter- or multidisciplinary approaches. These practices have been the rationale for area studies since their emergence in academic deliberations in the late 1940s. The volume also engages in a dialogue with the academic disciplines, but it does not, in conceptual terms, suggest to me that area studies can produce something that it is arresting and distinctive. In my view, the mid-range concepts proposed in this volume have already been generated within disciplines. They are not the product of a multidisciplinary area studies approach or perspective.

Victor T. King

Professor of Borneo Studies, Institute of Asian Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Jalan Tungku Link, Gadong BE1410, Negara Brunei Darussalam; email: victor.king@ubd.edu.bn.

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A History of Southeast Asia: Critical Crossroads. By Anthony Reid. Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley Blackwell, 2015. xxv+450 pp.

The principal challenge of writing general histories of Southeast Asia lies in the construction and justification of this heterogeneous region as a concept. Thomas Pepinsky (2016) referred to this challenge as the “fundamental anxiety” of Southeast Asian studies. Moreover, the further one goes into the past, the more difficult it becomes to give coherence to an area with such great variation in culture, governance, language and religion. There is also the danger of projecting the existence of modern states back into earlier periods. In *A History of Southeast Asia: Critical Crossroads*, Anthony Reid satisfactorily addresses these problems to produce an excellent textbook that covers over a thousand years of the region’s history.

Reid defines Southeast Asia as a distinct “humid tropical environment” that “produced many common features of material culture and social structure” and “preserved political and cultural diversity”, to a certain degree, from assimilation by foreign models (p. 26). In particular, he emphasizes the limits of Indic and Sinic influences, even as he charts the profuse connections between South and East Asia on the one hand and Southeast Asia on the other. The historical character of the latter was that of a “crossroads”, into and through which trade, people and ideas flowed with relative ease (p. 420). To remedy the outsize attention to political elites characteristic of much historiography, Reid “dethrones” the state (pp. xix–xx) and spends most of the book examining the role of culture, demography, environments, gender, health and ideas in shaping the lives of Southeast Asians. Indeed, he takes the reader on a whistle-stop tour of modern Southeast Asian nation-building only late in chapter 19. In dealing with the pre-nineteenth century period, he takes care to describe locations using geographical terms, rather than the names of present-day countries, where possible.

But how does the book compare to other general works on Southeast Asia, such as the two-volume *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* edited by Nicholas Tarling (1992a and 1992b)? The unique contribution of Reid’s book to the literature is its synthesis of a vast scholarship, distilled through the efforts of a scholar singularly well versed in the history of the region. It is meant to be a comprehensive introductory history, one that accentuates the themes deemed most important to Reid. He regards the study of Southeast Asia and its history as vital for three reasons: the region’s status as an active tectonic environment with the potential to affect the global climate; the relative socioeconomic autonomy of its women; and the limited role of the state in shaping the coherence of some of its societies (p. xvii). These are subtle but important elements in the region’s long history, and they are raised in the book where most relevant.

The book is divided into twenty chapters ordered by theme and with chronological overlaps. This organization proves an effective

way of circumventing the issues related to strict periodization; the nineteenth century, for example, was as much the era of high imperialism as it was of state-building and of encounters with “modernity” in Southeast Asia. Chapters 1 and 2 provide a sketch of Southeast Asia’s geographies, peoples, economic systems, and relationship with Buddhism and Hinduism, from its earliest times to the fourteenth century. Chapters 3 to 6 examine trade, religion, and “Asian European encounters” in the early modern period. Chapters 7 and 8 examine the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with a focus on the crisis and recovery following a slowdown in global trade. Chapter 9 charts the expanding influence of the “sinicized world” in the region, beginning in the fifteenth century in Đại Việt, before it skips to the “Chinese century” from 1740 to 1840.

The rest of the book deals with the region’s experience of colonialism and modernity. Chapters 10 to 13 explore Southeast Asia’s colonial period and its effect on reshaping the environment, states and peoples. Chapters 14 to 16 focus on the region’s encounter with “modernity” through the introduction of new products, practices and politics — particularly the “national idea”. This encounter culminated in a series of upheavals during the mid-twentieth century — the Great Depression, the Japanese Occupation, and independence movements. Chapters 17 to 20 discuss the post-colonial political economy of Southeast Asia’s new states up to the contemporary era.

Reid should be lauded for integrating recent historical scholarship into the book. For example, he addresses the “global turn” in historical research by touching on the Great Divergence in chapter 7. He explains how a combination of aggressive Dutch monopolies, the decline in Chinese trade, the Little Ice Age, and a series of natural disasters plunged seventeenth-century Southeast Asia into a commercial crisis. This sequence of events underscored the fact that the fundamental openness of the region served as a double-edged sword. Here, Reid briefly engages arguments from scholars such as Geoffrey Parker, Kenneth Pomeranz and Victor Lieberman. Such valuable discussions present readers with insights into ongoing historiographical debates. Unfortunately, the frequency of these discussions is uneven. For instance, a more detailed examination

of recent ideas on the decolonization of Southeast Asia during the Cold War would have been welcome in chapter 19 or 20. But given the extensive scope of the book, this is a mere quibble.

With *A History of Southeast Asia*, Reid has set the standard for academic textbooks on the region's history. He includes an impressive list of references and further readings, another reason that this will appeal to readers new to the study of the region. And while his book is clearly focused on Southeast Asia, Reid effectively illustrates the region's extra-regional linkages. His book will thus be of interest to scholars and students of world and global history.

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Michael Yeo Chai Ming

Faculty of History, University of Oxford, George Street, Oxford, OX1 2RL, United Kingdom, and School of Humanities, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, 14 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798; email: michael.yeo@history.ox.ac.uk, m.yeo@ntu.edu.sg.

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Nalanda, Srivijaya and Beyond: Re-exploring Buddhist Art in Asia. Edited by Gauri Parimoo Krishnan. Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum and National Heritage Board, 2016. 296 pp.

Gauri Krishnan's volume takes its place among a series of recently published books rethinking early Southeast Asian history through the lens of international networks and cultural exchanges. Still, being among the few works to focus on art instead of texts, Krishnan's book was awaited with great expectations.