

DOI: 10.1355/sj33-1m

Tourism and Monarchy in Southeast Asia. Edited by Ploysri Porananond and Victor T. King. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2016, 266 pp.

Several Southeast Asian countries — Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia and Brunei — have retained or reintroduced monarchy in its constitutional form. In the case of other countries, royalty has been removed but its heritage has been reinvented. These latter include Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Indonesia and Singapore. In spite of these disparate trajectories, Southeast Asian monarchies have become nearly everywhere a resource available for translation from their symbolic role to one useful in the generation of tourism revenue. The book provides various examples of this “refashioning” of Southeast Asian monarchies through eleven case studies covering eight countries: Brunei, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Indonesia and Singapore.

Three main themes run through the book. The first one relates to the decisive role of monarchy in the creation of specific travel practices and places of interest. On Java, as in Vietnam or in Thailand, travels on the part of members of the elite lay the foundation for later mass tourism. This process differed across the various national contexts, however. On Java, tourism clearly emerged as an emulation of a colonial practice and reflected the structure of Indonesian society. In Vietnam, aristocratic travel long predated colonization and combined sightseeing with political and diplomatic motivations. In each case, earlier habits of travel were instrumental in the creation of resorts and places that later became major destinations for domestic mass tourism in the colonial and the post-revolutionary contexts.

Thailand offers still another case, as it was never formally colonized. But, like the Javanese elite earlier, its aristocracy imported the travel practices of European elites. Its travels paralleled the progressive centralization of the political power and the internal colonization of the geographic and social margins of the kingdom. Emblematic of this process, the monarchy launched, at the end of the

1960s, agricultural development projects in ethnic-minority highland communities located near the winter palace of the king, where the monarch used to go trekking. In the early 2000s, the Royal Projects also entered the tourism business. They now offer the opportunity to spend a night or two in the mountains to a mostly domestic clientele that comes to enjoy the scenery “in the King’s footsteps” (p. 69) while having little interaction with local people. In this sense, tourism focused on royal heritage expresses an extension of belonging rather than a desire for encounter.

In contrast, other chapters in the book stress “centrifugal” or outward dynamics. Tourism oriented towards royal heritage caters initially to domestic visitors, but it can also grow to include international. While the chapters devoted to Brunei and Malaysia suggest that their monarchies control this process, other contributions show that it surpasses the royal realm. In Chiang Mai, for instance, the branding of elephants as a symbol both of the monarchy and of the Northern city dates from the 1920s when a troupe of pachyderms carried King Prajadhipok and his queen from the railway station to the city proper during their official visit in 1926. Later on, the tourism industry intensively commoditized the image of the elephant in various ways, including through the sale of woodcarvings and the establishment of elephant camps to attract foreign visitors. Another chapter shows how a Balinese royal house in Ubud used its global social network to promote the tourism industry and simultaneously encouraged the local communities to use the benefits of tourism to maintain local arts and crafts. Tourism then grew and diversified largely beyond the control of the *puri* or royal residence, so that neither the local tourist industry nor the royal house are overly dependent on one another.

Finally, the book also covers the ambiguous and sometimes conflicting relationships between tourism, royal heritage and national narrative. In Vietnam and Laos, the legacy of monarchy was denied during the post-revolutionary period and then resurrected for mainly economic reasons. The labelling of the ancient royal capitals of Hué and Luang Prabang as UNESCO World Heritage Sites facilitated

not only the reinterpretation and promotion of material remnants of the royal past but also the exclusion of the history and meaning of that past. Similarly, Myanmar has witnessed the resurrection of the concept of royalty for the benefit of tourism, but its display is limited to the museum created in the recently reconstructed Mandalay palace (and it omits mention of the British colonial period). The chapter on Singapore also mentions the simplification of national history in the display of Singapore's royal past at its Malay Heritage Centre.

The editors write in their introduction that the book is only a first and incomplete attempt to unveil the dynamics and the social implications of tourism based on royal heritage in Southeast Asia, and that another volume is in preparation. That second volume would certainly be a valuable contribution to the anthropology of tourism, provided that they strengthen their theoretical framework and fill some of the gaps in their bibliography. One wonders for instance why they do not discuss in their introduction the political nature of tourism (see for example Franklin 2004) and its relation to place-making, nationalism and sovereignty. This discussion would help them to conceptualize the relationships between domestic and international tourists — mentioned in passing in several chapters but never discussed directly — and the refashioning of the past, including the rewriting of history. Also, one cannot help noticing surprising omissions from the bibliography. These omissions include, for instance, Maurizio Peleggi's work on the politics of ruins (Peleggi 2002), relevant to the chapter on Hué, and Grant Evans's book on the Lao royalty (Evans 2011), relevant to the chapter on Luang Prabang. Reference to such works would have certainly been useful in conceptualizing the material that contributors to this volume collected in their fieldwork.

REFERENCES

- Evans, Grant. *The Last Century of Lao Royalty: A Documentary History*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2011.
- Franklin, Adrian. "Tourism as an Ordering: Toward a New Ontology of Tourism". *Tourist Studies* 4, no. 3 (December 2004): 277–301.

Peleggi, Maurizio. *The Politics of Ruins and the Business of Nostalgia*. Bangkok: White Lotus, 2002.

Olivier Evrard

UMR Patrimoines Locaux et Gouvernance, L'Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD), 43 rue Buffon, 75005 Paris, France; email: olivier.evrard@ird.fr.

DOI: 10.1355/sj33-1n

Photography in Southeast Asia: A Survey. By Zhuang Wubin. Singapore: NUS Press, 2016. 522 pp.

Zhuang Wubin is a photographer who has been interviewing fellow practitioners in Southeast Asia since 2004; he received funding to spend a year travelling around the region to complete the research for this encyclopaedic survey. The resulting book represents a snapshot of photographic practices in Southeast Asia in the first decade of the twenty-first century, with most of the background material dating from the 1990s. As a survey it tends towards the list, rather than to the integrated social analysis monographs such as Strassler's study of Javanese photography (2010). Nonetheless, the survey structure is informed by broader arguments for photography receiving its due place in art criticism and appreciation. Rather than reiterating the common hierarchical binaries of "art" versus "vernacular" photography, Zhuang recontextualizes and reimagines photographic practices along the lines for re-evaluation originally proposed by Batchen (2002). Drawing on anthropology, cultural studies, art history, the politics of representation and media ethics, he focuses on embeddedness and embodiment to move away from "reductive dichotomies [and] back to the multivariate ways in which photography becomes entangled in politics, culture, religion and the arts" (p. 13).

Just as photography is usually neglected in the study of art, so Southeast Asia, despite the efforts of so many scholars, continues to be overshadowed by China and India. This book thus has a dual agenda, and it will make a significant contribution to bringing the