

convey an image of a dynamic — not decaying — Javanese society that contrasts sharply with that of *The History of Java*.

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Thai Art: Currencies of the Contemporary. By David Teh. Singapore: NUS Press and Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2017. xi+274 pp.

The central premise of David Teh’s book concerns the complicated inheritances of the “nation” as the dominant framework for analysing contemporary Thai art. Rather than simply replacing this framework with that of the “global” or the “regional”, Teh holds these interpretative scales in tandem, exposing their contradictions and convergences. The same can be said for his use of the terms

“contemporary” and “modern”. As he argues, we are not “likely to find many ‘clean breaks’ separating the national modern from a global contemporary. But a history of the contemporary cannot simply be soldered onto a given history of modern art” (p. 2).

If these terminologies are never clearly defined in Teh’s book, it is perhaps because he understands classificatory schemas as contingent upon the investments of those who wield them. Teh’s adoption of the rhetorical device of “currencies” (p. 4) thus provides an apt way to critically conceptualize the modalities through which these investments are exchanged. For example, the contemporary is “the primary currency of a no longer national economy of appearances, where local and global demands, and ambitions, converge yet often fail to correspond” (p. 5).

By examining these “marked asymmetries of understanding” (p. 5), Teh addresses the radical disjuncture between interpretations of artworks within and outside national art contexts. In chapter 1, he examines the historical precedents for the Thai state’s involvement in the promotion of the country’s contemporary art, a situation that led to a bifurcation between those artists who engaged with the nation’s legacies and those who stridently avoided them. According to Teh, both of these groups were equally haunted by the “unfinished story” (p. 44) of the “national experience” (p. 44).

In the following three chapters, Teh expands on these uneven exchanges between national and international art worlds. Of particular note is the author’s remarkable use of “more or less indigenous currencies” (p. 17) of space, power and movement to illuminate the careers and works of contemporary artists. In chapter 2, Teh argues that artistic references to Thailand’s agrarian landscapes are convergent with the anti-globalization rhetoric of international exhibitions, as well as nationalist renderings of Thailand’s sufficiency economy. The book’s third chapter draws upon the Thai literary genre of *nirat*, defined by Teh as “a versified narrative” (p. 90), in order to explain peripatetic artistic careers that transcend the borders of the nation whilst remaining reliant on it as the “ultimate frame of reference” (p. 100). Similarly, chapter 4 utilizes the concept of

baramee, defined by Teh as “charisma” (p. 130), in order to explain the recalcitrance of Thai relational artists in dealing with national political realities.

By using these concepts in a manner so different from their original applications, Teh stretches them to their very limit. His de-essentialization of these terms is not only intellectually stimulating but also illuminates the syncretism between his evocative writing and theoretical orientation. Nevertheless, a more detailed treatment of this vocabulary could have revealed other dimensions of Thai contemporary art. For instance, the gendered implications of *baramee*, as a power based on paternalism, and *nirat*, as a genre frequently characterized by an author’s expressions of longing for an absent — female — lover, could have provided greater depth to Teh’s analysis of the work of women artists and their positions in relation to “Thailand’s all-male canon” (p. 126).

While these earlier chapters reveal the precarious ways in which Thai art has been allied with either national or international contexts, the final two chapters of Teh’s book pursue the possibility of understanding Thai art as simultaneously within and beyond the nation. In the first case, Jacques Derrida’s notion of the parergon (Derrida 1987, p. 88) allows Teh to bring to the fore art practices that complicate neat oppositions between insides and outsides, both in terms of their formal qualities as well as their “ontological” (p. 147) framing vis-à-vis the national. The “preter-national” (p. 175) similarly functions as a way in which to conceptualize artistic careers, such as that of the modern Sino-Thai artist Chang Tang, which are “defined in relation to nation, yet not reducible to its terms or its logic” (p. 175). For Teh, exemplars of the preter-national are found not only in the modern but also in Southeast Asia’s premodern geographies, in which fluctuations of power guaranteed degrees of autonomy.

The strength of Teh’s text is found in the author’s commitment to destabilizing binaries which have often characterized interpretations of contemporary Thai art. Nevertheless, occasionally the text inadvertently reaffirms the structure it seeks to deconstruct. For

example, Teh's treatment of neotraditionalism as a "mute product of Thailand's cultural globalization" (p. 186) occludes practices that might complicate such framing, such as the work of mural painter Paiboon Suwannakudt. Similarly, his positioning of premodern Southeast Asia as a model for radical autonomy does not take into account forms of cultural power that, as Thompson posits, may reconfigure the implications of "free will" (Thompson 2016, p. 179) in this context. However, these should be taken as minor criticisms that do not detract from Teh's nuanced and theoretically sharp scholarship, which will be of immense value to a wide readership interested in contemporary art.

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Imperial Intoxication: Alcohol and the Making of Colonial Indochina. By Gerard Sasges. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017. viii+280 pp.

This study stands out, first and foremost, for its meticulous and original research: the author has made fine use of previously unutilized library collections in Dijon, France, of archives in several locales in Vietnam, Cambodia, Paris, Aix-en-Provence and beyond. In addition, *Imperial Intoxication* makes original contributions to multiple fields: political economy, the history of science and technology, the study of environment and space, the history of the colonial state, the study