

REFERENCE

Roff, William. 1967. *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

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Southeast Asia's Modern Architecture: Questions of Translation, Epistemology and Power. Edited by Jiat-Hwee Chang and Imran bin Tajudeen. Singapore: NUS Press, 2019. 321 pp.

Edited by Jiat-Hwee Chang and Imran bin Tajudeen, *Southeast Asia's Modern Architecture* emerges from anxieties about “the validity and utility of Southeast Asia as a geographic entity and taxonomic device for framing and understanding the built environment” (p. 1). By offering a selection of texts that engage with social, cultural and political dimensions of the built environment, the book hopes to explore the histories and historiography of Southeast Asia’s architecture in the twentieth century and, consequently, question “the self-certainties of both regional and global architectural histories” (p. 1). In so doing, the book intends to be an antidote to the “existing regional architectural histories of Southeast Asia” that, according to the editors, are “either compilations of discrete architectural histories of individual nations or component parts in larger global architectural histories” (p. 1).

To achieve their objective, Chang and Imran Tajudeen have compiled the work of nine scholars whose academic activities centre around the Pacific Ocean: Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Australia and America. The authors’ contributions are selected and organized around three themes: translation, epistemology and power. The first section on “Translation” offers chapters on Rabindranath Tagore’s visit to Saigon in 1929 (H. Hazel Hahn), the connection between colonial methods and the creation of a nation state by the Thai monarchy in the twentieth century (Lawrence Chua), and the emergence of the so-called Bali Style in Indonesia from the 1960s onwards (Peter Scriver and Amit Srivastava). The second

section on “Epistemology” discusses issues related to conservation and national and regional identities. The last section on “Power” discusses memorials in Bangkok (Koompong Noobanjong), mosques in Yogyakarta (Tutin Aryanti), and state-run projects in colonial Manila (Gerard Lico) and postcolonial Singapore (Eunice Seng). The book’s epilogue by Mark Crinson puts the premise and themes of the book in a wider perspective.

The case studies provide some insight into Southeast Asia’s twentieth-century built environment and offer lenses through which this environment may be studied. By bringing together research and researchers with various backgrounds and disciplines, the case studies move beyond earlier approaches to Southeast Asian modern architecture that emerged initially from a nostalgia for the alleged heyday of colonial architecture and, in a later phase, from the notion of architecture as a political device for nation building. From this point of view, the book does succeed in letting go of “certain frames of reference that have restricted scholarship [on Southeast Asian modern architecture] from breaking new ground” (p. 5).

As an architectural historian specializing in late colonial and postcolonial architecture in Indonesia, I recognize and wholeheartedly agree with the editors’ plea for fundamental and inclusive research on modern architecture in Southeast Asia. Compared to scholarship on the twentieth-century built environment in Europe and America, examination of modern Southeast Asian architecture and its historiography has lagged far behind. While I welcome this publication though, I am not convinced about its self-proclaimed innovative character. The main reason for this is that many architectural historians have already adopted the multifocal, interdisciplinary and transnational approach without abandoning their discipline’s core values and methodological paradigms. Placing the book within this global perspective, the case studies individually and collectively are therefore not as ground-breaking as the editors argue. This is not a problem but potentially a caveat for anybody interested in architectural history at large and expecting something entirely revolutionary. Within a Southeast Asian context however, the book offers an interesting

first glimpse into a plethora of thematically and nationally varied narratives about twentieth-century modern architecture.

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Hearing Southeast Asia: Sounds of Hierarchy and Power in Context. Edited by Nathan Porath. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2019. xxv+384 pp.

This significant collection of essays officially introduces contemporary sound studies—issues, theories, approaches and epistemologies—to the evergreen analytical topic of power and hierarchy in Southeast Asia. In so doing, it brings anthropological, ethnomusicological, linguistic, historical and political research on the region into direct dialogue with the burgeoning field of sound studies.

This book's focus on sound in Southeast Asia is not unique. Other recent publications have focused on the sound worlds of Southeast Asia (see Abels 2011; Barendregt 2012 and 2014; Cobussen 2016; Greene 2004). Over decades, myriad others have focused on the nature of power and hierarchy in Southeast Asia (see Anderson 1990; Atkinson and Errington 1990; Chua et al. 2017; Day 2002; George and Venkiteswaran 2019; Ong and Peletz 1995). What makes this collection important and unique is its penetrating examination of the many ways in which power in Southeast Asia is rendered present—heard, exerted, accepted and contested—through a panoply of sonic phenomena.

In his theoretically rich introduction and first chapter, editor Nathan Porath uses descriptions of his lived experiences in Southeast Asian places to explain to readers not only the ways in which sound shapes and organizes our perceptions of place and time, but also how the particularities of Southeast Asian hierarchies are ensounded.