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BOOK REVIEWS

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***The Political Economy of Southeast Asia: Politics and Uneven Development under Hyperglobalisation*, 4th ed., edited by Toby Carroll, Shahar Hameiri and Lee Jones.** London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. Pp. 412.

The 2020 edition of *The Political Economy of Southeast Asia* is the fourth in the eponymous series produced by the Murdoch School (MS). The school was very influential in the late 1980s and 1990s, notably through the work of Garry Rodan, Richard Robison and Kevin Hewison, founders of the Asia Research Centre at Murdoch University in Western Australia and noted experts on Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand, respectively. The reputation of the editors and the MS more generally was cemented by deeply insightful works on these countries as well as the first three editions of the book, which analysed the manifold effects of the Asian Financial Crisis and its aftermath.

Coming fourteen years after the third edition, and with new editors (Toby Carroll, Shahar Hameiri and Lee Jones), this volume features work from the first generation of scholars, as well as a number of younger academics. In a break from the first three, this edition has no country chapters, but is instead thematic. The first section sets out the aims and contributions of the MS and, using its approach, provides a historical overview of Southeast Asia. The second looks at economic governance issues including regionalism, the decline of the left, and populism. The third looks at subaltern issues such as labour migration, gender, and politics of the poor. The final section looks at environmentally related issues including extractive industries, land and agrarian relations and climate change.

What, then, is the Murdoch School? First, it distinguishes itself from orthodox economics in embracing the analysis of how political factors influence economics and vice versa, as opposed to seeing political factors as unwelcome intrusions or “distortions” of the market. Also called “social conflict theory”, the MS is sensitive to how institutions incentivize certain courses of action, but is more interested in how specific institutional configurations are developed, given that they “reflect and entrench existing distributions of power among constellations of social forces—especially class forces—with particular historical junctures” (p. 5).

More than an adhering to a set of shared theories, the MS school is “an approach” (p. 6). The principal focus is on social conflict between actors from different classes, who are engaged in “dynamic and evolving struggles for power and resources”. The reality depicted by the MS school is grim, populated as it is by a motley crew of crony capitalists, rapacious international financiers, sprawling conglomerates, and assorted rent-seekers engaged in a series of no-holds-barred conflicts. These struggles proceed in dialectical fashion, and are affected not just by the players themselves, but also by how “global capitalism” affects social and economic reality.

While similarly sceptical of orthodox economic approaches, the MS differs from the Developmental State school in its depiction of the state and bureaucrats. The former contends that policies are not formulated by enlightened policymakers operating at a remove from interest groups and their pressures.

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Rather, bureaucrats are compelled to take decisions in response to different pressures and in an ever-evolving international economic environment. While sharing an abiding interest in the "rules of the game" with Historical Institutionalists, MS adherents contend their approach is more able to explain why events transpire the way they do, particularly during critical junctures, which is precisely when the latter approach is at its weakest.

MS work excels at studying how Southeast Asian countries are affected by external dynamics such as changing modes of production, global and regional financial crises, and changes in conventional policy frameworks. The Murdoch School is also very good at studying change, and how different groups compete with one another to advance their interests. In essence, their writing lays out political conflict as it happens, and weaves together the actions of players active at the global, regional and local level. This is more insightful than assuming that policymakers know what to do and just need "political will".

Due to its different starting position from that of orthodox economics or the Development State school, the MS studies issues that are often overlooked. Consequently, the environment, concerns facing organized labour, and the poor loom large—constituting a welcome corrective and making for often depressing reading.

There are some gems in the book. The first chapter by Hameiri and Jones is insightful, setting out the MS's contribution to knowledge on the region and to social conflict more generally. Concise and clear, it is useful in enabling the reader to situate the school empirically and theoretically.

The chapter on the rise and decline of the Left by Nathan Quimpo explores the question of why leftist movements across the region were very influential in the post-war period, but subsequently have largely been unable to seize power or even perform well in elections. Rich with cross-regional comparisons to leftist movements in Latin America, the chapter is a perceptive treatment of an under-researched topic.

The chapter on Poor People's Politics by Jane Hutchison and Ian Wilson is also very insightful. Through analysing how poor people participate in urban politics in Jakarta and Manila, they set out the effects their priorities and time horizons have on the choices they make. The end result is one where poor people strive to protect the status quo and make often surprisingly conservative decisions, rather than seeking to rewrite the rules in their favour.

That said, while enlightening, the Murdoch School is not without its issues. The criticism its adherents make of the Developmental State school or Historical Institutionalism is that they explain "what" happens and not "why" it happens. However, no unifying theory unites the MS, other than its focus on social/class forces and conflict. Indeed, they state: "the precise forces involved necessarily vary across cases, as does the predisposition towards, and utility of, different ideologies of representation for contending forces" (p. 105). The underlying arguments are that: all decisions are about resources, and that elites—usually, but not always—get their way; and capitalism expands and transforms all in its wake. This approach, too, can fall into description, rather than theoretically-informed analysis.

While the MS lists its rejection of ideal types or end goals as a strength, its reference to a "humanist, flexible tradition of Marxist analysis" (p. 15) does not provide much in the way of theoretical benchmarks. After reading the MS analysis, one is inevitably left feeling that the end result of a given conflict is lacking in one or more of a number of dimensions—justice, equality, environmental awareness, or gender, inter alia. Yet, time and financial resources are finite, boundaries to knowledge prevail, and many of the desired ideals compete with one another.

The MS approach is at its best in analysing change and conflict, lavishing attention on the largest and most avaricious players in the room. However, it also means that the enduring influence of institutions—from foundational ones such as constitutions to intangible ones such as ideals and shared values—fades into the background. And, the everyday and unglamorous work of public servants and policymakers receives but the scantest of acknowledgement.

Last, because of its lack of a unified structure or an agreement on which social forces to concentrate on, the work carried out by the MS is wide-ranging and diverse. Consequently, it does not lend itself well to structured comparison and contrast across countries. Indeed, this seems to be less and less the focus of the MS, as they contend that social relations are no longer contained within national boundaries, rendering so-called "methodological nationalism" effete. This open-endedness also precluded the writing of a concluding chapter.

Consequently, the work of the MS should be seen as a complement, rather than a substitute, to orthodox economics or other political economy schools. This volume and the Murdoch School work in a wider sense should be consulted by all scholars of the region—as its analysis is bracing, occasionally unpalatable, but always enlightening.

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***Striving for Inclusive Development: From Pangkor to a Modern Malaysian State*, by Sultan Nazrin Shah.** Malaysia: Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. 560.

Striving for Inclusive Development: From Pangkor to a Modern Malaysian State, as the title indicates, chronicles both a nation's formation and its enduring socio-economic quest. Author Sultan Nazrin Shah, already distinguished for his contributions to Malaysia's historical economic growth, from colonial times to the present, widens the scope of inquiry. This richly informative and deeply thoughtful book is about Malaysia's development path across multiple dimensions.

The chapters follow a thematic outline, with chronological exploration within each theme. The 1874 Pangkor Agreement, which marked the start of organized and formalized indirect British rule in Malaya, coincides with the book's timeframe of 150 years and is assuredly of special significance to the author's home state of Perak. The colonial government imposed political structures and pursued economic interests in ways that left legacies of inequality and exclusion as well as various administrative institutions—notably, the legal system, civil service and a federal structure.

Various communities had long established a presence in present-day Malaysia, but the land also experienced rapid immigration. This book decidedly and positively frames its overview of these processes through the lens of inclusiveness, emphasizing the continuous multicultural, multilingual and multireligious composition over centuries. The author also helpfully avoids homogenization, notably by highlighting Javanese immigration as one subgroup within the Malay populace.

The book also commendably devotes the following section to Malaysia's record in enhancing well-being, which precedes the chapters on growth. This is in line with the multi-dimensionality of inclusive development and may intentionally, if subtly, send a message that the human dimensions ultimately matter more than economic production and material prosperity. The overarching story is one of steady progress in education and health, although challenges persist in terms of quality of education and the amount of healthcare expenditures and of equity in access to higher education, especially among different ethnic groups.

However, while articulating well-being in this expansive manner, the analysis is rather narrowly limited to physical health. Some attention to other factors, including personal freedom, gender equality (or