

Moreover, while situated in the Southeast Asian region, how have Mahua authors interacted with other local literary realms such as Malay, Tamil and other indigenous literatures and cultures, which also share common marginality in world literature? To what extent do literary crossings not circumvent but confront the common issues surrounding Third World national literature—the intractable non-cosmopolitan predicaments? *Malaysian Crossings* offers a fresh perspective that suggests that multiscalar peripherality and marginality can also be rescaled within and across the margins. Malaysia, with its distinct cultural and linguistic diversity not mirrored in other Sinophone regions, emerges as an ideal site to test the boundaries and meanings of literary crossings.

Show Ying Xin

School of Culture, History and Language, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University; 9 Fellows Road, Acton, Australian Capital Territory 2601, Australia; email: yingxin.show@anu.edu.au.

DOI: 10.1355/sj40-10

Colonizing Animals: Interspecies Empire in Myanmar. By Jonathan Saha. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022. xiv+234 pp.

Colonizing Animals is Jonathan Saha's second monograph that, following his previous work on corruption, again brings a new, thought-provoking perspective to the colonial history of Myanmar/Burma. This time, he focuses on animals, or, to be precise, the interspecies empire. Historiography on colonial Myanmar has been dominated by the single species, *homo sapiens*, if occasionally joined by a few plant species that became the colony's main export commodities, like rice or teak. The book investigates the changing relationships between humans and multiple non-human species through an animal-history lens and raises a critique against colonialism and anthropocentrism.

This work has a wide theoretical scope. Saha steps into the vast jungle of literature on related subjects, sorts through the theories of scholars including Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Donna Haraway, among others, and neatly carves out his own path of reasoning. Especially important is his sophisticated argument for linking critical animal studies with postcolonial studies. According to Saha, both fields share an imperative “to recover and re-centre histories of marginalized actors”, but there are “some significant divergences in the meanings of ‘difference’ as it has been applied in each field”. That is, “species were *different* from one another; humans had to be *differentiated*” (p. 24). Thus, he argues for uncovering interspecies relationships “in order to trace the concurrent negotiation of species differences and differentiation of humans that occurred under colonial rule” (p. 25).

On such theoretical grounds, Saha aims to describe how colonialism and ecologies interacted in Myanmar and fostered new interspecies relationships. For this purpose, the author advocates the integration of socio-economic and politico-cultural histories. Chapter 1 introduces the key concepts throughout the book. One is “undead capital”, which means the specific commodity form that working animals took in the colony. In this form, the value of animals was “derived from their living capacities, while surplus value from their work could only be realized through the attendant labour of subordinated human workers” (p. 61). The author also expands Foucault’s “biopolitics” to better explicate the notion of interspecies empire and to see how the governmentalizing gaze renders animals (including humans) into the three categories of subjects, objects or abject.

Subsequent chapters are topically arranged, and each takes up different animal species. Chapters 2 and 3, from a relatively material point of view, deal with timber elephants and plough cattle as vital “undead capital” in the colony’s main industries, and crocodiles and snakes as abject vermin to be slaughtered. Chapters 4 to 6 examine the place of these and other animals (including rodents, primates and legendary *galons*) in imperialist as well as anti-colonial nationalist discourses.

Saha addresses a wide range of topics insightfully and illuminates various aspects of the multifaceted interspecies empire. For example, in his excellent analysis of the commodification of elephants, he focuses on elephants' sensitivities and their interactive relationships with their Burmese mahouts to pave the way for discussing colonial governmentality while highlighting animal subjectivities (pp. 54–68). Another strength of this study is Saha's extensive use of historical sources, including imperial administrative documents, corporate archival materials, periodicals, travelogues, novels and pictures. The use of various Burmese writings especially enables him to examine how anti-colonial discourses mingled with imperial ones. According to his analysis of vernacular representations of primates, Burmese nationalists intertwined narratives of evolution from monkeys to humans and civilization from wild to tame while countering hegemonic perceptions positing Europeans at the apex of both processes (pp. 143–55).

While there are numerous virtues, challenges—if not shortcomings—remain. Where the attempt to synthesize socio-economic and politico-cultural histories is concerned, the author's approach is weighted towards the latter. Indeed, quantitative data “rested on shaky practices” (p. 106) of colonial administration and, therefore, may not adequately substantiate a socio-economic history approach to analysing interspecies empires. However, examining the interaction between ecologies and empire still necessitates efforts to objectively capture material phenomena. In this connection, I have a minor complaint from an area studies perspective. While the author describes the peculiar colonial settings of Myanmar such as its incorporation into British India, he insufficiently explains its ecological distinctiveness except for one rather abrupt mention of “the colony's charismatic bio-diversity” (p. 182). The interspecies relationships this book examines are a variety of dyadic relationships between humans and some animal species, but not a web of relationships, including those among non-human species. Without considering the latter, it would be impossible to capture the ecological changes that affect humans and their relationships with animals beyond human perception.

Understanding ecologies in their entirety means taking everything into account, not only living species but also non-living things such as soil, water and air. Writing a history of ecologies as such might be a task beyond the capacity of an individual researcher. However, it might be done if interdisciplinary dialogue emerges in the field of, say, area studies, and incorporating environmental humanities. For Myanmar studies and beyond, *Colonizing Animals* paves the way for that dialogue to begin.

Noriyuki Osada

Area Studies Center, Institute of Developing Economies, 3-2-2 Wakaba, Mihama-ku, Chiba-shi, Chiba, 261-8545, Japan; email: Noriyuki_Osada@ide.go.jp.

DOI: 10.1355/sj40-1p

Constitutional Bricolage: Thailand's Sacred Monarchy vs. The Rule of Law. By Eugénie Mérieau. London: Bloomsbury, 2021. xi+326 pp.

Constitutional Bricolage is a book of graceful sophistication in structure and of inspiring academic passion in substance. As the author intends, the book successfully provides an accurate and detailed account of the Thai constitutional monarchy from before the revolution in 1932 to the current period after the promulgation of the 2017 constitution. With the depth of historical facts and attention to primary sources, the book is the most comprehensive study of Thai constitutional history in both Thai and English to date.

Mérieau situates her book within the field of comparative constitutional law, filling the gap in three main perplexing areas often overlooked or oversimplified: constitutional monarchies, secularization and the rule of law, and methods of constitutional borrowing. However, while Thailand is known as an exemplary case of problematic constitutional borrowing and abuse, the book does not provide any solution to Thailand's constitutional ills, nor does it seek to do so. Indeed, the book is mainly driven by descriptive, doctrinal and historical approaches, refraining from judging and criticizing problematic constitutional theories and practice through