

self-interest, why are they so keen to seek Japanese ODA? Is it sought because it benefits the narrow interests of the local élites or because, in some cases, it indeed benefits not only the giver but also the receiver? Despite these reservations, this book is highly recommended for those who are interested in foreign aid and Japanese foreign policy in general.

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“A Strong Showing”: Britain’s Struggle for Power and Influence in South-East Asia 1942–1950. By Rolf Tanner. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994. 299 pp.

Rolf Tanner’s book is the latest volume (the sixtieth) in a series devoted to Colonial and Overseas History that began more than twenty years ago. This manuscript, which was originally written as a doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Professor Rudolf von Albertini, is a bit like the curate’s egg — good in parts. It certainly has some virtues — not the least of them being the broad canvas on which the main regional events are drawn — but its weaknesses (structural, grammatical, technical/editorial) are sufficiently grave or unnecessary as to undermine the good impression created by the former.

In Tanner’s words, this piece of research was conducted in the hope of providing “a comprehensive assessment and synthesis of Britain’s role in South-East Asia between 1942 and 1950” (p. 10). Although this is a grand and welcome scheme in conception, it is less comprehensive and ambitious in practice, particularly since it largely eschews any temptation to trace British military activities in wartime in favour of lavishing attention upon the Churchill administration’s often halting progress towards regional planning for the post-war period. If the author had really intended to avoid the military dimension from the fall of Singapore in February 1942 to the surrender of the Japanese in August 1945, perhaps he would have been better served by restricting the time span of his study exclusively to the post-war period. As it stands, however, the early history is deficient and can hardly do justice to the overriding theme of his work. Moreover, his choice of the term, “A Strong Showing”, for the title of his work looks distinctly odd since it represents more a case of wishful thinking by Sir Esler Denning than an appropriate descriptive motif for the performance of the British in Southeast Asia during the 1942–50 period.

As the author admits in his conclusion: “The come-back of 1945 was far from the ‘strong showing’ Denning had promoted” (p. 265), a fact which makes it even more mysterious that Tanner should have adopted the term for his book in the first place!

In the first of three main sections of the book, the author discusses the official plans that were developed by the United Kingdom for the reoccupation and rehabilitation of its colonial territories in Southeast Asia, as well as the attitude it expressed towards the colonial possessions belonging to the French and the Dutch in the region. He also considers the type of relationship that the authorities in London felt that they should try to cultivate with the independent kingdom of Thailand. While soundly rooted in both primary and secondary sources, this section does not spring any major surprises or uncover anything radically new. Nevertheless, it represents a decent synthesis of the evidence accumulated on these topics by scholars since the early 1970s when the Public Record Office began releasing documents for the wartime period that were no longer covered by the restrictions of the Thirty Year Rule.

In the second section entitled “The unexpected challenge”, Tanner looks at the host of practical problems the United Kingdom faced in the immediate post-war period as its new Labour government came to terms with the capitulation of the Japanese after the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This section goes on to describe the emergence of nationalism as a potent force in the region and the efforts that were made to deal with it in the years from 1945–47. As a diplomatic-political overview, this part of the book is reasonably smooth and assured, but the military situation is handled less satisfactorily, with the Royal Navy hardly being mentioned at all.

In his third section which reviews the Cold War scenario in Southeast Asia, the author trawls through the dramatic events of the 1948–50 period to paint a sober picture of the British struggling to withstand communist pressure in the Far East and seeking to find the most appropriate policy to do so. Discussion of the geopolitical ramifications of the Korean War and its aftermath is reserved for a smaller and much less satisfactory chapter entitled “Outlook: An uneven descent”. Here the author sweeps over the 1950–57 period without his customary attention to detail. In a final hurried paragraph the author applies the broadest of brush strokes to take the story from the era of *Konfrontasi* to the withdrawal of the last British soldier from Singapore in 1976. In telescoping thirteen years of Southeast Asian history into ten lines of text, some developments are bound to be hideously compressed while others are squeezed out altogether — the ousting of Singapore from Malaysia in August 1965 being a case in point!

Although his previous chapter left a good deal to be desired, Tanner’s

set of conclusions are far more reliable and summarize the main points of his thesis very fairly. His final sentence encapsulates the tone of his study: "Although she (the United Kingdom) was no longer the commanding force in South-East Asia, nor even the dominating one, she continued to be (sic) play an important role in the region." (p. 265).

Most authors have suffered at the hands of pedantic reviewers at some time or another in their careers. Tanner should brace himself for a tidal wave of criticism if "A Strong Showing" falls into their hands, for as it stands his book contains a substantial number of typographical, grammatical, syntactic, and idiomatic mistakes to enumerate and gloat over. Most of these errors come from either translation difficulties and/or inadequate copy-editing. Some lines of text are clearly deficient at present — a function no doubt of the fact that some material has actually been missed out altogether by those setting the pages of the book, an unfortunate omission which managed to elude the gaze of those examining the manuscript before it was finally published. Footnote 24 is a case in point; its number is printed without any reference to accompany it! Of all the omissions, however, the strangest and most incomprehensible is deliberate, and concerns the decision not to include an index with this work. This reviewer feels that books ought to be made as reader-friendly as possible — an index helps immeasurably to fulfil this aim for scholars as well as the general reader.

More serious than these gaffes, however, are the structural defects of Tanner's work. A chronological time frame is used to divide his study. While this has some value in revealing the crowded simultaneity of events and the extent of the conflicting demands that were made upon the British in those hectic years, the narrative has to switch from one scene to another very swiftly. In the process, a certain confusion can easily arise and a somewhat repetitious feel is given to the material. A more rigorous thematic, or country-based, division might have dealt with some of these problems. Another area for legitimate concern lies in the overall scope of the work. Perhaps constraints of time or wordage may have been determining factors when the author was pursuing his doctoral work, otherwise it is difficult to understand why Tanner chose to bring his research to an end in 1950 when he could have profitably continued until much later in the decade. Indeed, a study of the post-war period from, say, 1945 to 1957 might have provided far more valuable insights about British policy in Southeast Asia than the existing work does.

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