

topic. The second edition is identical with the first up to page 472, and technical reasons have made it impossible to change the obsolete Wade-Giles transliteration system to the Pinyin system which has gained wider acceptance in recent years. A chapter (42 pages) about recent developments in China's frontier relations with the Soviet Union and Burma, a bibliography, an index, better quality maps and a short English summary have been added in the second edition, but it is nevertheless questionable whether these improvements make it worthwhile for those who own the first to buy the second edition.

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***“How the Dominoes Fell” Southeast Asia in Perspective.* By John H. Esterline and Mae H. Esterline. Boston: Hamilton Press, 1986. 429pp. ISBN 0-8191-5111-4. US\$19.95.**

The dominoes which John and Mae Esterline refer to are not the countries of Southeast Asia falling like dominoes to communism, which Eisenhower and Kennedy feared. The falling dominoes are societal dominoes — human values, human rights and economic development. According to the Esterlines, these dominoes are falling in the countries of Southeast Asia because of the inability of these countries to break away from the crushing weight of their old traditions and political cultures.

In successive chapters, the authors review the pre-colonial and colonial history of each of the nine countries which make up Southeast Asia to identify how their past continues to influence the present. This identification is neatly and succinctly presented as a series of “political indicators”. For example, one “political indicator” the authors identified for Malaysia is that “the powerful political offices of *bendahara* and *yang di pertuan muda*, which developed early, enabled their occupants to rule while the Sultans reigned, a tradition that prepared the sultans for their roles in the British residency system.”

The major part of each of the chapters on the individual countries, however, evaluates trends in their political development up to 1985, and measures their economic and social development. The overall assessment which the authors arrive at is that “disturbed over minimal economic

progress — whether within a socialist or capitalist context, frustrated in their attempts to build a national rather than purely ethnic identities, and disillusioned over western-style political institutions, the Southeast Asian nations re-adopted in a new guise the political authoritarianism associated with their histories from earliest times. Each of them in 1985 was governed by a narrowly-based elite; political pluralism, i.e. where power is disbursed among disparate groups, is little in evidence”.

The authors have made out a simple, straightforward and uncomplicated case for historical continuity in Southeast Asia. And many of the judgments and evaluations made within this framework are perceptive and incisively stated. For example, on the external security threats confronting Singapore, they conclude that “the greatest potential danger to Singapore would be the rise of Muslim fanaticism in Malaysia or Indonesia”.

The authors are correct in stressing the crucial importance of history and the weight of tradition in Southeast Asia today, but the case for continuity and change in Southeast Asia may be slightly more complex than they make it out to be. History is not only about continuity; it is also about change. We in Southeast Asia have changed and will continue to change. The political challenges and problems confronting a President of Indonesia today may be similar to those confronting a nineteenth century Governor-General, and perhaps a sixteenth century Mataram *susuhunan*. But the technology and bureaucratic techniques and mechanisms available to the President of Indonesia to respond to these challenges and problems are quite different from those available to the Governor-General or the Mataram *susuhunan*. And arising out of these different responses is historical change. To suggest that the political authoritarianism of some Southeast Asian countries today has gone unchallenged by their populace because of the surviving vestiges of pre-colonial authoritarian political cultures may, therefore, be anachronistic and a *non sequitur*. Perhaps the issue is how we in Southeast Asia today perceive our historical heritage and how we are re-adapting it.

More importantly, the pace and nature of change in Southeast Asia may not be in the direction envisaged by the Esterlines. There is no reason why there should be a plurality of political parties and groups dividing political power among themselves. We in Southeast Asia will work out in our own manner how we want to channel political power. And the solutions and strategies we arrive at will be our own, according to what we perceive to be our traditions.

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