BOOK REVIEW

Sociology of South-East Asia: Readings on Social Change and Development. Edited by Hans Dieter Evers. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980. Pp. x, 282.

This book of readings is centred on the four well-known theoretical themes, evolved from society and its development in Southeast Asia up to 1980. This review will deal with these theories on society and development in Southeast Asia, and the book's treatment of them. In the words of the editor, its designated dual purposes are: "to provide reading material for a course on South-East Asian Sociology, focused on theoretical issues rather than descriptive material" and "to establish a starting-point for research on South-East Asian societies from the South-East Asian point of view". In this light, this book is certainly useful to both students and teachers of society and its development in Southeast Asia. It has brought together various original papers connected with these theoretical issues, and has organized them within a very coherent framework.

The readings begin with Evers' excellent survey article (Reading 1) on the basic concepts and theories in the study of Southeast Asian societies. This is followed by Wertheim's comprehensive historical overview of the development of these societies — an essential reading for all students of Southeast Asian societies. Together, the two articles comprise Part I, the introduction to the book.

Parts II to V are each centred on one of the theoretical themes of "dual societies", "plural societies", "loosely structured societies", and "involution". Each part begins with a classical statement from the originator of its themes — Boeke on "dualism", Furnivall on "plural societies", Embree on "a loosely structured social system", and Geertz on "involution". Part VI consists of three articles which approach the study of Southeast Asian societies from some other theoretical perspectives.

As a collection of theoretical viewpoints on society and development originating from Southeast Asian studies, this book provides an answer to at least three groups of students. Those who quest for indigenous Southeast Asian theories will find it a valuable collection. Those who always lament that there are no indigenous Southeast Asian theories, will perhaps be comforted by the appearance of this volume. Those who seek greater under-

standing of human societies in general, and Southeast Asian societies in particular, will find in this book crystallized conceptions of society and its development which may add to their understanding.

The collection clearly shows that there is no dearth of theorizing that is indigenous to Southeast Asia. The problem of the "Captive Mind"[1] is no doubt real. But more important is the "academic freedom" which is not bounded by the conventional wisdom of established theories, where students of society are free to evaluate all existing theories in the light of new empirical evidences, and to formulate new conceptions and new theories,[2] which would provide a better understanding of the subject under study. This is the tradition set by the originators of the four basic theoretical formulations, around which the readings revolve.

If there is a common element among the four theoretical conceptions, it is culture. In "dualism", the incompatibility between foreign (often Western) and indigenous (Eastern) cultures is emphasized. In "pluralism", attention is drawn not only to the differences between foreign and indigenous cultures, but also to differences among different foreign cultures and among different indigenous cultures. The "loosely structured society" is a characterization of a society's culture. In this context, elements of foreign culture may be indigenized to become part of the local culture, taking on new "expressions" of the local culture. In "involution", the indigenous culture, being incompatible with the foreign culture, is pushed into an involuting system, replicating itself with continuing elaboration to maximize subsistence potentials. Both "dualism" and "pluralism" evolve from observations of contrasting society-types within the same society. The "loosely structured social system" is a model of a society-type. "Involution" describes a particular process of development of the indigenous society in the face of the imposition of foreign cultural system. The importance of culture has certainly not been overlooked in all these *notable* theories on society and development in Southeast Asia.

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NOTES

1. Syed Hussein Alatas, "The Captive Mind in Developmental Studies: Some neglected problems and the need for an autonomous social science tradition in Asia", *International Social Science Journal* 24, no. 1 (1972): 9–25.
2. These may be reformulations of existing ones.