

BOOK REVIEWS

Social Science Research in Malaysia. By Tham Seong Chee. Singapore: Graham Brash (Pte) Ltd., 1981.

Malaysian Studies: Present Knowledge and Research Trends. Edited by John A. Lent. Northern Illinois University, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Occasional Paper No. 7, 1979.

These two books, one published in 1979, the other in 1981, represent the latest overviews of social science research in Malaysia. A comparison of the contents of the two volumes provides interesting insights into assessing the "the state of the art".

Tham Seong Chee, Associate Professor, at the Department of Malay Studies, National University of Singapore, has prepared his book "specifically for the researcher in social science or the librarian dealing with the documentation of social science research materials covering Malaysia." He divides his book into eight chapters, and the main disciplines discussed are: Sociology and Anthropology (Chapter II), History and Political Science (Chapter III), Economics (Chapter IV), and Education and Mass Communication (Chapter V). Professor Tham also includes chapters on Social Science Research in East Malaysia (Chapter VI), an overview of research organizations (Chapter VII), and a concluding chapter on research trends.

The volume edited by John A. Lent (Professor of Communications at Temple University) is the published, augmented version of the set of papers emanating from a panel on "Malaysian Studies: State of the Field", which the editor organized at the 1978 Association for Asian Studies Conference in Chicago. Five panelists contribute disciplinary overviews: Sociology (Charles Hirschman), Anthropology (Vinson H. Sutlive, Jr.), Political Science (Felix Gagliano), Mass Communications (John A. Lent), and Education (R. Murray Thomas). In addition, there is a very useful chapter compiled by Frank Joseph Shulman titled: "Doctoral Research on Malaya and Malaysia, 1895-1977: A Comprehensive Bibliography and Statistical Overview". There is also a summary chapter, "An Overview of Malaysian Studies", by Ronald Provencher.

Although Tham's volume provides an overview of a wider range of disciplines, the book edited by Lent has a more substantial bibliographical reference section. This is primarily due to the fact that each of Lent's contributors is a specialist in his discipline.

It might be useful for comparison to devote a more detailed discussion to a field treated by both books: Sociology/Anthropology. Tham organizes his chapter by beginning with those areas which have attracted the most attention in Malaysia in the 1970s. He, thus, first introduces the topic of Research on the Malays (2.01), Values and Participation of Malays in the Economy (2.02), Values and Various Areas of Malay Life (2.03), Islamic

Values and Beliefs (2.04), Malay Women (2.05), Family and Socialization (2.05), and Poverty among the Malays (2.07). The second set of issues which Professor Tham deals with is Ethnic Relations (2.08), and he observes that "no other area of research dominates the interest of both local and foreign scholars as much as does ethnic relations in contemporary Malaysia." Charles Hirschman, who contributes the Sociology chapter in the Lent volume, echoes this observation: "The primary focus of this chapter is on ethnic inequality — a dominant issue in contemporary Malaysia." The fact that Tham chooses the term "ethnic relations", while Hirschman prefers the term "ethnic inequality" typifies the two authors' perspectives on the subject. Although Hirschman devotes fourteen pages to the subject, and Tham only one and a half pages, their conclusions are surprisingly similar: both offer essentially negative judgments of the majority of work done in the field. Hirschman admits that "I am skeptical that the product has led to a store of knowledge or understanding of ethnic divisions, their causes, or consequences." Tham metes out an even harsher judgment: "However, research on race relations up till now has not contributed to a better understanding . . . because of the tendency of researchers and scholars in general to over-emphasize the centrifugal forces undergirding the race situation. Indeed, in a sense, it might be said that such studies have aggravated the situation."

Tham, in his concluding chapter offers some opinions on future trends. For instance, he mentions the decrease in the number of foreign scholars, and the increase in the number of local scholars, and in this light, more reliance on Bahasa Malaysia. Because many of these local scholars are just beginning their careers, he sees them as inheriting a tremendous challenge to raise both the quality and quantity of social science research work.

The Lent volume is in general more critical in its assessment of constraints on academic research, on forbidden topics, on politics within academia, and the under-representation of certain important fields and methodologies. Ronald Provencher, in his concluding chapter to the Lent volume, however, articulates an assessment which would probably be shared by many Southeast Asian scholars: "With all the problems of the research establishment . . . it is probably the best overall research establishment in Southeast Asia. And it is the native sectors, the Malaysian researchers in government and academia, which provides the comparative advantage."

Sharon Siddique
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies

Straits in International Navigation: Contemporary Issues. By K.L. Koh. London: Oceana Publications, 1982. Pp. 225, with diagrams, tables, index, bibliography.

This book on the problems of navigation through international straits, written by a professor of law, deserves to be more widely known. This is because from the legal foundations of the international negotiations and postures taken by the various countries in the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) the writer has attempted to relate purely legal issues to wider maritime problems, such as safety of navigation, defence, and the preservation of the marine environment. For example, the question of navigation through straits is closely and directly related to the now generally accepted concept of the

twelve-mile territorial sea, and the implications of this relationship are brought out clearly as the author discusses the problems faced by the various straits states.

This book helps fill a gap in the literature on international straits. While purely legal interpretations abound, legal analyses which take into account the broader problems involved are scarce. In this book, however, the topic is studied in a manner which allows for the introduction of concerns of disciplines other than law. The author has attempted, and in most instances quite successfully, to examine the legal issues in a wider context. This concern is reflected in the bibliography which includes items from a number of disciplines and should prove useful to practitioners and researchers dealing with the legal as well as other issues of straits navigation. The bibliography, in fact, runs the gamut of disciplines which deal, even remotely, with the issue of international straits.

The study is divided into six chapters, opening with a discussion of the issues of the twelve-mile sea claim, passage of ships and aircraft, safety of navigation and the prevention of pollution, the issue of innocent passage, and the problem of enforcement. There is also a discussion of what exactly constitutes a geographic straits and a review of the various straits which are used for international navigation.

International jurists, students of strategic affairs, political geographers, and those interested in the maritime aspects of international relations would find this book rewarding, especially the chapters dealing with the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. Although much attention is paid to the major international straits, other less known straits and the negotiating postures taken by countries with interests in straits are also included. For example, little-known views of the People's Republic of China are dealt with in some detail in Chapter Five. Furthermore, a number of appendices giving the text of agreements provide useful basic documentary material.

Although readable and written in a flowing style, the general format tends to be "legalistic" in appearance with a considerable portion of the text presented in note form. However, it is gratifying to know that highly technical legal terms have been kept to a minimum. With so much material presented and with revealing analyses scattered appropriately throughout the book, one would have expected the conclusion to have been fuller, tying together all the relevant threads of argument presented. This small drawback, however, does not detract from the overall usefulness of a study which should find its place in all libraries and collections which have an interest in Southeast Asia, in the problem of navigation and straits in general, in maritime strategy, defence issues and international relations as they pertain to the law of the seas.

Lim Joo-Jock
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies