

## BOOK REVIEW

*Women's Work and Women's Roles. Economics and Everyday Life in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.* Edited by L. Manderson. Monograph No. 32. Australian National University, Development Studies Centre, 1983.

As Manderson has cogently argued in her introduction to this collection of twelve papers on women's work and women's roles in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, the productive nature of the wide range of activities which women in this region, both past and present, have engaged and continue to engage in, has been consistently ignored and undervalued by latter-day administrators and academics alike, a fact which makes this volume a rare and welcomed addition to the increasing corpus of research publications on development issues in Southeast Asia. However, it has to be added that the range, approach and quality of the individual papers are as disparate and diverse as the activities they describe. In spite of Manderson's attempt to draw together the common themes which she sees as uniting the various papers, the term "monograph" employed in the abstract is clearly an exaggeration.

Regrettably, the introduction, which forms the first chapter of the volume, bases its theoretical argument — that of the increasing loss of female economic independence and autonomy due in part to the take-over of Western notions of the woman's role as primarily that of wife and mother, in part to the fact that newly-created job opportunities favour men — more on literature published elsewhere than that assembled in the volume itself. In fact, the evidence here seems rather ambivalent. Connor's paper on "Healing as Women's Work in Bali", for example, reports of the creation of lucrative job opportunities as masseuses for tourists along Kuta Beach; Price concludes in her chapter entitled "Rich Woman, Poor Woman: Occupation Differences in a Textile Producing Village in Central Java" that while women did lose their pre-eminence in cloth production in the course of technical changes, "it is important to recognize the wide range of skills which women have developed in the new processes, as well as the extent to which the old processes of hand-drawn batik have been maintained"; Fett, in her study of "Land Ownership in Negri Sembilan, 1900-1977" documents the substantial increase in female landholdings over the seventy-year period and Woodcrof-Lee's analysis of Indonesian Muslim perceptions of the roles of women reveals an Islamic image of woman as a devoted wife and mother that is as exacting if not more so than the Western one.

In addition to the above-mentioned papers, all worthwhile reading for the fine eye for detail which testifies to a close-range familiarity with the everyday lives of the women under study, two other papers stand out in this volume: those by Abeyasekere and Barnard.

Barnard's study of Malay women in the Muda Irrigation Scheme provides us with a highly differentiated picture of the nature of rural Malay households and the role and significance of female contribution to household income according to household type. Based on this intimate knowledge of farming households, she documents with great care the inadequacy of rural development programmes which see women merely as housewives, and overlook their dual roles as housewives and farmers.

A pleasure to read and exemplary in its penetrating illumination of the normally "bidden" and unrecognized women's work is Abeyasekere's "Women as Cultural Intermediaries in Nineteenth-Century Batavia". The integrating role of women as cultural intermediaries in a closed, multi-ethnic society, demonstrated by the everyday lives of everyday Batavian-born women, bear testimony to the creative role which women also play in the process of cultural change, normally seen to be the preserve of male culture heroes.

Most of the remaining papers in the volume betray less interest in the "everyday life" of women, preferring to dwell on conventional data and conventional arguments. Nonetheless, their inclusion in the volume does broaden the picture of women's work in the region and is certainly useful.

Altogether, the papers make a convincing case for the indispensability of women's work, the obstacles which they encounter due to the cultural definition of gender relations, and for the extraordinary resilience which they nevertheless continue to display, despite these odds, in order to ensure their survival and the survival of their families. Each individual paper is prefaced by a useful introduction by the editor, who is to be congratulated for having put this volume together. One only wishes that papers by scholars stemming from and working in the region itself could have been included as well.

Diana Wong  
*University of Erlangen/Nürnberg*