

## BOOK REVIEWS

*South-East Asia: Languages and Literatures — A Select Guide*. Edited by Patricia Herbert and Anthony Milner. Arran, Scotland: Kiscadale Publications, 1989. Pp. x, 182. 18 illustrations.

This guide to the languages and literatures of Southeast Asia covers all the modern countries of Southeast Asia, mainland and insular, except for two (Brunei and Singapore). Presumably these two were excluded because much of the guide deals with the pre-modern periods (Malay manuscripts in Brunei are dealt with in the section on Malaysia). By contrast, literature in Chinese outside the People's Republic of China and Taiwan has been included. The editors, Herbert and Milner, are modern historians, specializing in Burma and Malaysia, respectively.

This publication is the result of a collaboration of scholars working in the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Australia, and one from Malaysia. They are well-known in their field and include the following: Allott, Bee, Brown, Cordell, Jones, Kratz, Manas, Okell, Phillips (School of Oriental and African Studies [SOAS]), Herbert (the British Library), Hooker (Kent, reporting on law codes), Grijns, Huismans, Raas, Robson, Roolvink, Teeuw (Leiden); Khing Hoc Dy, Lafont, Mak Phoeun, Nguyễn Thê Anh, Ragean, Salmon (Paris); Mackie, Miller, Milner, O'Malley (Australia), and Ibrahim bin Ismail (Malaysia).

The contributions (arranged here in order of length of contribution) deal with the languages and literatures of Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Burma, Vietnam, followed by those of Cambodia and the Philippines, Laos, and China.

The *rationale* for the publication of a new guide lies, the editors claim, in the fact that no such up-to-date guide exists for students entering the field; while the state-of-the-art as presented here may well be questioned (see below), it is certainly true that basic literary surveys are rather dated

(it is curious that these have not been mentioned in the Preface, nor elsewhere in this guide), such as the *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade's* volume, *Histoire des littératures*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1955), with contributions by such scholars as Denise Bernot and Solange Thierry; or *The Penguin Companion to Literature IV: Classical and Byzantine, Oriental and African*, edited by D.R. Dudley and D.M. Lang (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969).

The Southeast Asian section in Dudley and Lang was originally conceived by J. Bottoms (of SOAS), and included articles on major regional literatures of Southeast Asia, such as Acehnese (by E.C.G. Barrett), Balinese and Javanese (by C. Hooykaas), Minangkabau (by Barrett), and Mon (by H.L. Shorto). Different from the format of Herbert and Milner's *Guide*, Dudley and Lang feature articles on individual authors, and have entries on titles of particular works. In my judgement, Dudley and Lang's *Companion* is in many ways superior to the *Guide* reviewed here. The second volume of *Current Trends in Linguistics (CTL)*, edited by T.A. Sebeok (the Hague: Mouton, 1967), devoted exclusively to East and Southeast Asia, is referred to here only in the sections on Vietnam (*CTL* contribution written by Thompson and Thomas) and Indonesia (*CTL* contribution by Uhlenbeck). By contrast, F.E. Huffman's comprehensive bibliography, *Bibliography and Index of Mainland Southeast Asian Languages and Linguistics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986; 640 pp.) is mentioned in all sections, except Malaysia (and obviously maritime Southeast Asia).

In terms of its coverage and organization the *Guide* is a contradiction in terms; while (quite laudably) a large proportion of each country-section deals with pre-modern texts, the book is organized along modern ASEAN lines. It would have been preferable to proceed by language-families, or ecologically or culturally defined regions. The victims of the survey presented here are quite easily identified: we find no contributions on Mon, Shan, Cham, and regional Tai literatures (such as Lao in Thailand, in Tham script, Lanna in Northern Thailand, and its presumed derivatives such as Khoeun and Lue).<sup>1</sup> We find nothing on modern Karen: some annual magazines used to be published in Burma (a few items can be found in the National Library of Australia, where I identified them in 1984). Javanese is dealt with briefly.

This is especially unfortunate as the most challenging research in the field of pre-modern literatures lies in the *regional* textual traditions of Southeast Asia.

The bibliographies included here are nothing less than a mess. The chapter on Burma lists Matisoff's grammar of Lahu (a Tibeto-Burman language spoken today mostly in Thai territory) and Bradley's description of Lahu dialects in Thailand, but one finds no references to Blagden or Shorto and their work on Mon in Burma. But then one does find Hla Pe's *Journal of the Burma Research Society* (1965) article on Mon loanwords in Burmese. The Cambodian chapter provides a reference to Kiernan's *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, but omits P. Jenner's and S. Pou's work on early didactic literature (published in *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 1975–81). The journal, *Mon-Khmer Studies*, is listed with a publication date of 1964–79, when in fact it has never ceased publication.<sup>2</sup> In the Vietnam chapter, Thompson's reference grammar of 1965 is quoted, but not its reprint twenty years later as a special double-issue of *Mon-Khmer Studies* (vols. XIII–XIV). While at least *Mon-Khmer Studies* is mentioned, no reference is made to its Tibeto-Burman equivalent, *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* (published by the Sino-Tibetan etymological dictionary project at the University of California, Berkeley). Missing are references to collections of articles such as *Language Policy, Language Planning and Sociolinguistics in South-East Asia*, edited by D. Bradley (Canberra: Department of Linguistics, RSPacS, Australian National University, 1985). After the publication of Huffman's comprehensive *Bibliography*, one cannot, of course, expect the mere duplication of such a reference source, but collections such as Bradley's, which cover themes of a more general nature, should have been included. Even more grave is the absence of any reference to electronic (text) data bases, concordances, and Key Word in Context (KWIC) indexes, as is the omission of published catalogues of manuscript collections (see below).

The bibliographies are certainly not up-to-date.

Each chapter is organized along the same lines: a brief résumé of the country's political history, languages, writing systems, dating systems, manuscripts, and printed books, is followed by a bibliographical section. The production of the book itself (paper quality, reproductions) is

generally good, although there are tell-tale signs that this is one of the first productions of an emerging publishing company. There are typesetting errors on pp. 59, 66, 75, 119, 169. On p. 65 *Ramayana II* should read *Ramayana II*; on p. 61 Jacob 1986b should follow the 1982 entry. For a publication with scholarly pretensions it is surprising that no diacritics for Vietnamese or for Indo-Aryan words (Pali, Sanskrit) seem to have been available. German-language references abound with spelling mistakes.

What follows are comments arranged according to subject.

(1) *History*: Although not dealt with in a separate section, a brief historical survey introduces each country-chapter. For Burma, no reference is made to G.H. Luce's *Phases of Pre-Pagán Burma — Languages and History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1985; 2 vols.). Dvāravatī-Mon (in the Chao Phraya basin) is mentioned here but, curiously enough, absent in the Thailand chapter. The Thai section tries to incorporate some up-to-date information about current historical debates ([a] Thai speakers “may have begun to move into the Chaophraya basin as early as the 7th century AD” [p. 23]; it can be shown linguistically that the onset for such a migratory current is far too early. [b] By the thirteenth century AD “Thai were in a position to assume control of the Chaophraya basin” [ibid.]; however, linguistic interference from Mon in Thai inscriptions at Sukhothai suggests otherwise, or at least raises doubts). Terms by now discredited by historians emerge in the chapter on Cambodia (“Funan”, “Chenla”); “Sri Vijaya” emerges from the Indonesian chapter. Lafont ignores in his contribution on Laos that the earliest attested language there is Mon, ante-dating Khmer-style “Indianization” by at least a couple of centuries. (Mon sites, or rather a complex has been identified, together with an 8c–9c inscribed pillar, some 30 km. north of Vientiane in the early 1970s. This site is part of a larger complex of Mon sites in the northern part of Isan [Northeastern Thailand], in the provinces of Udorn and Loei.) In Malaysia pre-European history is hardly touched upon. The impression one gains is that not only have “received views” been uncritically reproduced here, they are also, in most cases, out-dated by at least a couple of decades.

(2) *Languages*: In the first two chapters we find references to so-called minority languages: in the Burma chapter these are brief remarks

arranged according to language family; in the Thailand chapter passing remarks refer to Mon, Khmer, Kuy, and Malay, as well as highland populations. It is not mentioned, though, that there are a number of official “minority” languages in Burma, such as Mon, Karen, Shan, Chin, and Kachin. Present-day Mon are mentioned in Thailand (less than 100,000) but not in Burma (more than 1,000,000). There are in both chapters (Thailand and Burma) passing references to inscriptions, but no guide to epigraphy is given. Instead of reproducing eighteen meaningless vignettes, it would have been preferable to have maps showing (a) the present distribution of ethno-linguistic groups, (b) epigraphic sites (language, type of inscription, date), and (c) an isogloss-type map featuring the regional distribution of traditional scripts. The plotting of epigraphic sites on a map would also show patterns of language-shift over a period of thirteen centuries in Southeast Asia. The Thailand chapter distinguishes between “Thai”, “Tai”, and “Non-Thai” (*sic*) languages, and mentions at least the Gedney-Li versus Benedict debate of the affiliation of Tai (or, more precisely, Tai-Kadai). Statements such as “spelling is rather complicated due to the survival of much original spelling in loanwords” (p. 26) or “with the advent of printing spellings have become standardized” (*ibid.*) are inaccurate (Indo-Aryan and Mon-Khmer loans had been mostly well integrated into Thai by the fourteenth century, and present-day spelling conventions do not, on the whole, antedate the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. It is equally untrue to say [for early Southeast Asia generally, and Thailand specifically] that spellings in epigraphs do not show standardization. It is only now emerging that certain spelling variants imply the encoding of features of the spoken language; for instance, the spelling of a word found in an unstressed position should not be compared with the spelling of a word in a stressed position). In the chapters on Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia, linguistic “minorities” are only referred to in the general introduction, and not in the section discussing languages. According to the *Guide* Malaysia does not appear to have aboriginal populations. In “Cambodia” only Thai linguistic contacts are mentioned, but no early Mon contacts (nor contacts with speakers of a Dravidian language and Javanese in Java in the tenth century). In “Vietnam” we are told that “phonetic, dialectical [*sic*] and lexical variations . . . must be considered relatively minor” (p. 79); in fact,

in the north we find Vietnamese in contact with Tai languages, in the south with Khmer, and tone systems, consonants and grammar differ considerably. In the *Guide* Vietnamese is a “mixture of elements from Mon-Khmer and Thai [*sic*] language groups” (ibid., *pace* Maspero, *Bulletin de l’Ecole Française d’Extrême Orient* 12 [1912]), as if Haudricourt (nowhere quoted here) had never conclusively shown (forty years ago!) that Vietnamese is a Mon-Khmer/Austroasiatic language. “Indonesia” asserts that “the study of Austronesian languages is perhaps next in importance to that of the Indo-European and Semitic language families” (p. 125). May we ask on what grounds? The “Philippines” gives at least a breakdown of population figures according to ethno-linguistic groups. Authors of other chapters might of course argue that such census figures were not available (some limited figures are given for Burma); provided this were true (which is not so in some cases), we should ask why government census data do not indicate speaker-populations. All chapters covering “Indian” Southeast Asia mention Sanskrit and Pali loanwords in their respective local languages, but assumptions about social “register” are frequently misleading (court language, literate élite) when in fact research has shown that some Indo-Aryan and Dravidian loans were transmitted by way of mercantile and nautical activities. Buddhism is a mass-religion, and consequently ritual vocabulary is not confined to an élite. One should also ask why, for instance, in early Mon communities (from the sixth to the sixteenth century) much of the Buddhist vocabulary was actually vernacular, and not borrowed. J. Gonda’s *Sanskrit in Indonesia* (1952) and several other specialist publications discussing these issues are nowhere quoted in the *Guide*. Research tools, such as language-maps have been ignored: for instance, Salzner, Theraphan, and Gainey, Wurm and Hattori et al., and Bradley, for the mainland; LeBar et al. are quoted, but nowhere is it mentioned that their volume contains a map; the *Journal of the Siam Society* (vol. 76 [1988]) includes a Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique/Mahidol ethno-linguistic map of Tai-speaking populations; and dialect surveys such as Nothofer’s for Java.

(3) *Scripts*: The chapters on Burma and Thailand mention problems of romanization. “Thailand” refers to the current debate about the authenticity of “Inscription 1”. In Thailand three scripts are identified,

apart from modern Thai and its early varieties (although not mentioned by name, such as *Fak Kham*), (a) “Khom”, at least here acknowledged as being Khmer (the “Mul”, or round, variety), (b) “Tham”, a variety used in northern Thailand, described here as having “clear affinities, through Shan, with Burmese script” (p. 28), and (c) “Northeastern Thai script” (actually also called “Tham”) “which is best considered as a branch of Lao script” (*ibid.*). In fact, (b) and (c), that is, Northern Thai and Northeastern Thai scripts are not only derived from Mon — and this is acknowledged even in traditional scholarly circles in Thailand — but it might eventually be shown that Isan Tham is derived from Northern Tham, which would pose some interesting problems with respect to “discontinuous literacy” in post-Khmer (probably post-thirteenth century) northeastern Thailand. Problems of variant spellings are again referred to, this time in the Cambodia chapter, in the section covering scripts (p. 52): “In the past, the spelling of words was free . . .”. Spelling variation is *systematic*, and provides valuable clues for the dating of texts. Lafont, in “Laos”, recognizes three scripts: (a) Lao, (b) Lao Tham (= Northeastern Thai, although not mentioned), and (c) scripts used by other Tai-speaking groups such as Lue, Black Tai, and Red Tai.

(4) *Manuscripts*. Considerable space could have been saved if materials and techniques of writing were presented and explained only once, instead of repeating essentially the same information in each chapter. Nothing is said about restoration and conservation of traditional writing materials; the standard reference work I know — not mentioned here — is O.P. Agrawal’s *Conservation of Manuscripts and Paintings in Southeast Asia* (London: Butterworths, 1984). The National Library of Thailand, Bangkok, has also issued a booklet on the manufacturing of traditional paper-manuscripts and the processing of palm leaves for writing — again not mentioned here, presumably because the *Guide* restricts itself, except for dictionaries, to publications in Western languages; that booklet was reprinted several times (the latest issue being 1987) and has the advantage of being amply illustrated (as is Agrawal’s book).

(5) *Printing and the Media*. Few comments need to be made here; the period is well documented. It should be noted that Mon books were printed in Thailand at the turn of the century (c. 1907–22). Although

printing in Karen and Mon is mentioned in the Burma chapter, it is not stated that printing in those languages, in addition to Shan, continues to this day. The Burma Broadcasting Service also features weekly radio programmes in the official “minority” languages. Thailand also has a weekly radio programme in Mon. I have heard that there are similar broadcasts for [some?] Orang Asli languages in Malaysia, but am unable to confirm this.

(6) *Literature*. This section is the largest of each country-chapter. Again, shortcomings are numerous. With the exception of the *Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland (VOHD)* [Catalogue of Oriental manuscripts in Germany] (Wiesbaden: Steiner [various editions]) for Southeast Asia, which is mentioned here — at least! — for example, Wenk on Thai and Lao, Bechert and Braun et al. on Burma, and Ricklefs and Voorhoeve (on Indonesian manuscripts in the United Kingdom), no catalogues are mentioned. At least another two references, which exceed in coverage and importance the German holdings, should have been added: A.R. Peltier on Khoeun (Bangkok: Duang Kamol, Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai University and Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1988) and the Lanna manuscript conservation project (catalogue published in 1987, Chiang Mai University). Catalogues produced in Thailand based on regional surveys are not referred to. For Burma we read (p. 9) “There are, as yet, no published catalogues of these holdings in Burma” (Okell mentions holdings at the Central University Library, Rangoon, the National Library, Rangoon [formerly Bernard Free Library], the Library of Religious Affairs, and various Mandalay libraries). For Mon this is certainly not true, and I will write on the subject elsewhere. Nothing is said about indigenous writing in Pali. The discussion of Burma does not even mention Bode’s classic *The Pali Literature of Burma* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1909; reprinted Rangoon: Burma Research Society, 1965), nor do we find a reference to K.R. Norman’s *Pali Literature* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), where a number of specific references are made with respect to Southeast Asian Pali texts. According to this guide (except for references to Phillips [Indonesia] and Sweeney [Malaysia], as well as the Philippines) oral traditions do not seem to exist. Performance aspects of literature (recitatives, be they accompanied by an instrument or not) are not even



touched upon; “Laos” refers to Compton’s 1979 monograph on Lao courting poetry (Mo Lam traditions), but in the Thailand chapter we find no reference to Miller’s extensive 1985 study on Mo Lam in northeastern Thailand. While “Thailand” and “Burma” discuss some basic aspects of prosody in their respective literatures, “Cambodia” does not include references to Khmer versification by Roeské and Jacob (the information given by Im Proum in Huffman’s *Literary Reader* [Yale, 1977] could be misleading to the uninitiated). The *Guide* suffers from a lack of coordination on the part of the editors. Literary classifications, especially pre-modern, can be open to question: Should one conform to a vernacular taxonomy, or establish one’s own classification based on historical and/or linguistic principles? Traditional and modern Khmer scholars characterize the *Cbap*-‘genre’ as “didactic”, yet almost all pre-modern Southeast Asian texts, unless they are *Fachprosa* (technical texts), are didactic. The dichotomy of court versus popular literature resurfaces (readers are referred to Bizot’s introduction to his French translation of one version of the Khmer *Rāmāyaṇa*, Paris/Chiang Mai/Bangkok: Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1990, where such a distinction is dismissed).

In general, the chapter on Indonesia — partly because of its greater awareness of *regionalism* — is superior to all the others.

One may be allowed to ask what the purpose of this whole enterprise was. This guide is not complete in its coverage (it is about present-day *national* languages and literatures, at the exclusion of regional traditions, except for “Indonesia”); it is not up-to-date about current historical and literary research, both in Southeast Asia as well as outside; with the exception of dictionaries, it does not provide information about major reference works in vernacular languages — and this is its greatest shortcoming. What is needed now are bibliographical indices of theses,<sup>3</sup> manuscript catalogues and surveys, and proceedings of conferences and workshops in the vernacular languages. The study of regional literature in Thailand, for instance, has been a very active field for a number of years, but this impression cannot be gained by a reading of the Thailand section of this guide; according to Bayan Imsamram (conference on Thai regional literature, Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University, 20–22 July 1989) over 150 theses and formal research reports have been submitted to Thai universities since 1970.

An alternative guide should be arranged according to linguistic groups or ecologically defined regions, and/or following a chronological order for each region; one could also proceed according to text-typological criteria. The reference section should include, as mentioned, maps, teaching materials (dictionaries, course manuals, discography), and a list of institutions, both Western and Southeast Asian, with manuscript holdings, as well as references to projects on electronic data bases, collections of microfilm duplicata and the like.

To students I would strongly recommend the reading of Stuart Robson's *Principles of Indonesian Philology* (Dordrecht: Foris, 1988);<sup>4</sup> for linguistic references up to 1985, Huffman's *Bibliography* (referred to above) is still unsurpassed. The information provided in this guide is outdated and inaccurate; some of the underlying ideas are anachronistic.

## NOTES

- 1 To be fair, Herbert and Milner state that they had tried to include a section on Cham.
- 2 Although stating "ongoing publication", only volumes 1–8 are referred to; volume 20 is due to be published before the end of 1991.
- 3 Theses in linguistics submitted to universities in Thailand and Vietnam are now systematically indexed in Mon-Khmer Studies (University of Hawaii Press, beginning with volume XV [1989]).
- 4 Working paper 1 of Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië, Leiden, the Netherlands. Robson is one of the collaborators of the Indonesia chapter of the *Guide*.

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