

The Golden Peninsula: Culture and Adaptation in Mainland Southeast Asia. By Charles F. Keyes. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995. Pp. xii, 370.

On first appearances, this looks like a new edition of Keyes' widely read and generally very well received volume of the same name published in 1977 by Macmillan. Closer inspection reveals it to be — and notwithstanding the striking new black and gold cover — a reprint of the original. The only thing that is new, other than its cover, is a Preface explaining the reprint in terms, it would seem, of continuing sales: "It is gratifying, if also surprising, to find that there is still a demand for my text nearly two decades after it was written". The author also accepts that life has moved on some way since the mid-1970s, writing that he is "acutely aware that *The Golden Peninsula* lacks attention not only to recent changes that have taken place in the region but also to new scholarship".

This last sentence anticipates the criticisms that could be levelled at a book that was published almost twenty years ago. In terms of the picture it paints of mainland Southeast Asia, it is very dated. And in terms of the conceptual tools and terminology that are brought to bear in the interpretation of that picture, it reads as a book, to coin a phrase, which is past its sell by date. I have some sympathy with the argument that changing terminology only serves to disguise stagnant thought, but this is a volume which students of mainland Southeast Asia should approach with care. Clearly, it is not a book that can in any sense be described as lying at the "cutting edge" — and nor could it be. It is this which makes it hard to review: to criticize a book written in 1977 for not addressing events that occurred after that date would be churlish to say the least. Yet the fact that it *appears* to be a new edition is unfortunate and leads one to describe it in just these terms.

Reading *The Golden Peninsula* once again illustrates the degree to which Southeast Asian studies has moved on from the 1970s. This is reassuring. There is no attention paid, for example, to moral and rational economies, everyday forms of peasant resistance, "sustainable" develop-

ment and the environment, extended metropolitan regions, issues of gender and women in development, Orientalism, indigenous scholarship and local thought, and so on. There has been important work undertaken in Southeast Asia on all these — and numerous other — areas. More to the point, many would probably be regarded as essential for discussion in any introductory volume written today.

Nor is it just a question of scholarly endeavour moving on; the Southeast Asian world has also moved on — and probably to an even greater degree. At the time of its original publication, the region was recovering from a catastrophic conflict, there were sharp political and economic divisions between the countries of the mainland, and “development” in many areas had barely begun to bite. Today the countries of mainland Southeast Asia are on good terms and regional economic integration is fast progressing. Thailand and Malaysia, meanwhile, have also made the leap into the World Bank’s division of “miracle” economies. So at a practical level, the book cannot, by dint of its birthdate, address such issues as economic reform in Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar, the expansion of ASEAN, or export-led and foreign investment-driven growth. We read, for example, that “efforts to build a Socialist and then a Communist society [in Vietnam] are still very much in progress” (p. 245), that there are “serious doubts ... whether Thailand can continue to sustain in the 1970s the rate of economic growth it enjoyed during the 1960s” (p. 313), and that Ho Chi Minh’s vision of a “Communist Vietnam, structured in terms of Communist ideals ... is finally realized” (p. 231).

Thus the main problem with the book is that it is dated. It still has important things to say which have not been affected by the passage of time, but if this is meant to represent an introductory text on the region, as the jacket blurb claims, and therefore to be inclusive and wide-ranging, then it must be viewed as flawed. Nonetheless, Keyes’ tight prose style and clarity of expression are still a delight, especially given the trend towards tortuous, jargon-laden, and opaque English. In the Preface, Keyes writes that he has begun work on a new edition. If this new volume is as good in the 1990s, as the original was in the 1970s,

then it will become required reading. But until it leaves the presses, the simple advice is: “wait”.

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