

BOOK REVIEWS

Southeast Asia over Three Generations: Essays Presented to Benedict R. O'G Anderson. Edited by James T. Siegel and Audrey R. Kahin. Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2003. Softcover 398pp.

Though now known most widely for his contribution to understanding nationalism on a global basis, Benedict Anderson's most lasting and important legacy will be in the field of Southeast Asian Studies. This book, by seventeen of his students from six countries, four disciplines and "three generations", was put together to celebrate his forty years of teaching at Cornell University. It might have been a moment to reflect more fully on the nature of his enormous influence on the field, but the authors have left us to draw our own conclusions from the nature of their work. There is no biographical or analytic tribute to Ben Anderson the man; the separate introductions by the two editors are brief — Siegel's quirky; Kahin's businesslike; and the substantial authors say little about their mentor.

Nevertheless much is implicit in the kinds of work done by these seventeen scholars (and by many others not represented here). Immediately striking is their variety. Not only did anthropologists and historians learn as much from Anderson as political scientists; those working in three different cultures — Indonesian, Thai and Filipino — found in him a cultural and linguistic sensitivity to test and probe their own. The contribution from Southeast Asians is unusually strong, representing almost half the essays, including the most interesting, and underlining the influence Anderson earned in the region through writing and teaching empathetically but always critically about it.

The critical stance towards establishments and established paradigms of every kind is another feature of Anderson's teaching and writing that shows here. Kasian Tejapira describes well the "disillusioned and yet unrepentant" mind-set which he took to graduate study in Cornell, after leaving the jungle and the failed communist project in 1981. "I carried my remnant of ideological baggage with me from Thailand in a self-assigned mission to think my way out of the defeat. As a result, most of my Cornell professors had a particularly hard time trying to teach me anything, but a few among them, especially Benedict Anderson and Susan Buck-Morse, did not try. No universal truths, general laws, big theories, or ready-made answers were dispensed by them, just questions, a whole lot of tough, unusual, mind-boggling questions which haunted me day and night" (p. 251). The essay Kasian introduces in this way, "De-Othering Jek Communists", bristles with suggestive ideas about the way "Thainess" was used to ethnicize opposition into "non-Thainess", the way communists, usually in a double marginality as half-assimilated Chinese, sought to combat this process through translations and the use of Thai poetry to domesticate radical ideas.

Patricio Abinales examines Tagalog documents of another fringe-dwelling communism, that of the Philippines, in order to investigate its strangely controlling attitude to sex and marriage among cadres. Two other papers also document important and understudied marginalized groups. Francis Loh shows through a study of conflict between Hindu and Muslim groups in West Malaysia how fragmented and poorly served Indians have been by the Malaysian developmental model. Douglas Kammen returns to rural (predominantly Central) Java to investigate village-level Javanese politics, once thought central but relatively little studied since the 1970s. He shows an extraordinary level of conflict over village elections in the period 1997–99, the domination of the system by village elites, and the relevance of Barrington Moore's dictum on India — "To democratize the village without altering property relations is simply absurd".

A particular attraction of the book is the prominence of literary themes. Partly because Southeast Asian literatures were almost untaught in the United States, Anderson ensured that students read vernacular novels, and in much of his own work pioneered the use of text as method. Five of the most substantial chapters discuss particular novels, or in Tsuyoshi Kato's case, urban themes in six different early Indonesian novels. All of the four novels singled out for treatment are heavily political in purpose and content. While Vicente Rafael reassesses a familiar novel in Rizal's *El Filibusterismo*, three more chapters open completely new ground and reveal unexpected dimensions of character.

Peter Zinoman examines the glamorous and sympathetic portrayal of an internationalist communist (with some similarities to Ho Chi Minh), in Vu Trong Phung's 1936 novel, *The Storm*. Even more surprising is the militant female hero, Praphimphan, in Luang Wichit Wathakan's wildly popular 1949 novel *Sea of Love, Chasm of Death*, as described by Thak Chaloemtiarana. She murders three of her many lovers, studies in Europe and masters English, travels the world often on the run, is always ready to fight for her race and country, and is clearly seen by her creator as "the exemplar of the modern Thai woman". Finally Caroline Hau sensitively explores a post-Mao (1983) Chinese bildungsroman, *Adrift in the Southern Sea* by Bai Ren, as a window on the nationalist identities and loyalties of *huaqiao* and specifically Chinese-Filipino actors of the 1930s and 40s.

Other chapters usefully revisit better-known events in a comparative light. Mary Callahan asks why Burmese troops killed unarmed civilians in 1988 while their Indonesian counterparts for the most part did not in 1998. John Sidel develops a complex argument for global and local-national factors in jihadist movements in the Philippines and Indonesia. Eva-Lotta Hedman chronicles the "People Power II" movement against President Estrada in the Philippines. Takashi Shiraishi charts newer terrain by clarifying for the first time how the Dutch political police became established as a major factor in colonial Indonesia of the 1920s.

It is fitting to end this review with some of the more playful unexpected sidelights with which Ben Anderson's work abounds, and to which some of his students responded. Danilyn Rutherford uses Furnivall's *Making of Leviathan*, a favourite Anderson text, as a key to unlock the comic side of Dutch rule in New Guinea. John Pemberton uses a collection of colonial photographs to muse upon the ghosts which inhabited Central Java's most modern sugar factory. Joshua Barker explores the "imagined communities" created when Indonesian kampung-dwellers illegally fix telephone lines joining each other's houses so they may communicate directly. And Charvut Kasetsiri, in the opening essay, tells of a trip to Riau with Cheah Boon Kheng in the retinue of Taufik Abdullah, to participate in the elaborate Indonesian ritual of selecting a new "national hero". Something here for everyone.

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