

perspective of India — devoid of exaggeration but nourished with substance and blended by the rigours of analysis and sophistication. Indeed, this volume is an excellent rendition of India.

W. LAWRENCE S. PRABHAKAR
Department of Political Science
Madras Christian College
Chennai, India

***The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia: A New History.* Edited by Norman G. Owen. Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2005. Softcover: 541pp.**

This is the best introductory text on Southeast Asian History that the reviewer had come across in many years. Though there are many compilations reviewing the political and/or economic history of the region that came to be commonly recognized as Southeast Asia in the aftermath of World War II as well as numerous illuminating monographs and books on individual states located within the region, this volume stands out as a balanced and parsimonious account of how Southeast Asia has come to be what it is now. It is quite successful in capturing the essence of the region's trials and tribulations in coping with, first, colonialism and, later, globalization.

It is tempting to compare this product of collective endeavour by a group of Southeast Asianists with *In Search of Southeast Asia*, its distinguished and successful predecessor produced by almost the same group of scholars (with the exception of two new contributors) some 18 years ago. However, as indicated in the Preface, it is “a fresh look at modern Southeast Asian History”, intended as a “shorter more accessible text for the twenty-first century” (p. iv), perhaps cognizant of an audience belonging to a generation overwhelmingly accustomed to short audio-visual inputs — and altogether assumes a separate identity. As such, it will be treated as a different book in its own right and not viewed through lens coloured by the earlier book.

The book, organized into 37 chapters in five parts, manages to trace the “processes of historical transformation” as well as to portray the “chronological narratives of events” unfolding across time and space (p. xi) in a clear and concise narrative. The 13 “general” and 24 “country” chapters complement one another, especially on “developments that do not fit easily into conventional chronology and

are not unique to a single country” (p. xi). The thematic exposition of “common” issues in the form of lead chapters preceding country analyses (in Part 2 and Part 5) or as entire parts (Part 1 and Part 3) helps contextualize the socio-economic and political transformations undergone by the individual countries in a span of some three centuries and provides regional coherence in interpreting the seemingly disparate events and processes in individual countries. Here, the only quibble would be the absence of a chapter, in Part 5, dealing with the military’s role in Southeast Asian politics, political institutions and state building, and democratization. On the other hand, the inclusion of “Changing Names”, briefly describing “how the countries and peoples of Southeast Asia came to be called what they are today”, is a very useful bonus for the reader and serves as an appetizer for the remarkable main course. The extremely judicious use of tables (only two on demographics) and the visual depiction of the evolving region through a series of maps sequenced chronologically have enhanced the user-friendliness of the book.

There is no attempt to define “modernity” in the context of Southeast Asia, perhaps a deliberate omission to avoid being dragged into the controversies associated with various interpretations of the term. From the cover design, various illustrations (especially the cityscapes of “modern” Singapore and Kuala Lumpur), and the blurb on the back cover, it may be deduced that the book identifies “modernization” with material progress and enhanced welfare of the polities concerned and modernity as represented by objective conditions of state and society at the turn of the century.

The short list of “Further Readings” at the end of each chapter, in lieu of an extensive bibliography, caters for those who wish to dig deeper into the topics and countries concerned without overburdening the already lengthy book with additional pages of bibliographic material. Nonetheless, the reviewer was a little disappointed by the paucity of native authors among the references cited in those readings despite the admission that “[t]here is little we can say about such issues that has not already been said by Southeast Asian intellectuals with greater fervour, and in many cases, greater eloquence” (p. 409). The reviewer felt that it would do well to include some more references in the list of readings. Such a wish list of additions would be something like the following: “Introduction”: O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (reprint 1999), George McTurnan Kahin, ed., *Governments and Politics of Southeast Asia* (1964); “Chapter 2”: Trevor O. Ling, ed., *Buddhist Trends in Southeast Asia* (1993), Than Tun, ed., By Paul Strachan, *Essays on the History and Buddhism of*

Burma (1988); “Chapter 22”: Ba Maw, *Breakthrough in Burma: Memoirs of a Revolution 1939–1946* (1968), Khin Yi, *The Dobama Movement in Burma (1930–1938)* (1988), Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma* (2003); “Chapter 27”: Estrella D. Solidum, *The Politics of ASEAN: An Introduction to Southeast Asian Regionalism* (2003), Hal Hill, ed., *The Economic Development of Southeast Asia*, 4 vols. (2002); “Chapter 28”, Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Role of the Military in Asia* (2001), Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* (1972); “Chapter 29”: Shamsul A.B., *From British to Bumiputera Rule: Local Politics and Rural Development in Peninsular Malaysia* (1986); “Chapter 31”: Adam Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia’s Search for Stability* (1999); “Chapter 32”: Anek Laothamatas, *Business Associations and the New Political Economy of Thailand: From Bureaucratic Polity to Liberal Corporatism*; “Chapter 35”: Sorpong Peou, *Intervention and Change in Cambodia: Towards Democracy?* (2000), Harish C. Mehta and Julie B. Mehta, *Hun Sen: Strongman of Cambodia* (1999); “Chapter 37”: Christina Fink, *Living Silence: Burma under Military Rule* (2001), Martin J. Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (1999).

In the thematic and country chapters, there are a few instances in which the reviewer found some points of disagreement in terms of fact and interpretation as well as omission of some events which warrant inclusion due to their historical significance. For example, the historic Panglong Agreement which has been reified by both the Bamars and the ethnic groups and has assumed renewed significance in the post-1988 ethnic politics is a surprising omission in the important section on Myanmar’s independence (p. 332). Moreover, it is not true that Aung San had “the trust of the communists”, as asserted on page 332. In fact, information from primary sources suggests that the leaders of the Burma Communist Party regarded Aung San as a political novice whom they could outmanoeuvre and beat in the political game. Singapore’s remarkable switch to an economic strategy of foreign direct investment, export-oriented industrialization, and free trade that led to its success as a Southeast Asian “tiger”, though significant in its own unique circumstances, does not signify the “most important development in Southeast Asia’s economy” (p. 383) as there is no evidence that the other “high-performing” economies such as Malaysia and Thailand had been emulating the city state or that Singapore’s success has had a demonstration effect over their choice of economic strategies. The assertion that governments in “Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia, secretly condoned and profited from the [narcotics] traffic for many years even though nominally fighting it” (p. 405) is a sweeping allegation

and, therefore, misleading and inaccurate. It is more a matter of resource inadequacy, insufficient state capacity, and corruption of some officials than governmental collusion.

In the section on protests against military rule (p. 499) there is no mention of the use of military firepower against the demonstrators that resulted in scores of deaths in 1962 and 1974. The July 1962 shootings and the violent suppression of workers protests in 1974 are significant because they had assumed a symbolic dimension for those rallying to oppose military rule for the last four decades. With regard to the BSPP (Burma Socialist Programme Party) Chairman Ne Win's admission, in August 1987, of the party's failure (p. 502), instead of it being kept secret, the meeting and the speech were widely reported in the government media. Finally, with respect to the teashop brawl that precipitated the 1988 uprising (p. 503), it would be more accurate to say that the fight was between university students and locals from the neighbourhood.

Many editors and writers would understand how difficult it is to marshal the intellectual energies (and idiosyncrasies if not prejudices) of eight authors of varying age and experience to produce a coherent and readable volume out of the histories of ten states that had meandered along somewhat disparate trajectories. The authors, especially the editor, must be congratulated for "pulling it off" within a span of less than four years after inception. The book itself is the embodiment of "unity in diversity", the leitmotif of Southeast Asia.

TIN MAUNG MAUNG THAN
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
Singapore