

rest of the world will become more profound” (p. 331).

He also states that East Asian countries, including China, “must bring into play their own comparative advantages and conduct exchanges and undertake collaboration with one another in a bid to learn from one another’s strong points” (p. 336). In the judgement of this reviewer, China can learn much about civil states’ principles including workers rights, press freedom, equitable treatment of minorities and toleration of political dissent.

This superb and enthusiastically recommended volume will find a diverse audience composed of university students and faculty, officials who are responsible for directing East Asia’s economic development, and general readers who are interested in the “field of vision” that is the book’s contents.

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Vientiane: Transformations of a Lao Landscape.
By Mark Askew, William S. Logan and Colin Long. London: Routledge, 2007. Pp. 265.

Askew, Logan and Long have undertaken one of the most important works on Lao history in many decades. This book is an attempt to look at Laos through a new perspective, the rise and fall of the city, Vientiane, its historical past, while explaining it through the discourse of urbanism and within a context of changing political landscapes. The authors admitted that Laos, as a nation, has frequently been unjustly perceived as a marginal political and cultural entity in the eyes of its neighbours and even among its own populace. The core argument of this book counters such a traditional view on Laos, with a special focus on its capital Vientiane, by presenting historical

evidence unveiling the city’s glorious past, its political significance and Laos’s sustained culture which has provided a basis for the current regime to claim its legitimacy for what it has called “the defence of a national identity”.

Delving into the theme “urbanism”, the authors argued that the lack of population density and wider economic functions should not discount Vientiane as being a vibrant *meuang* among many in Southeast Asia (p. 6). One needs to pay a great attention to the spatial, temporal and social ordering of Vientiane, how it has been influenced by external forces, including today’s globalization, and how it has influenced them in turn. Therefore, Vientiane must not only be considered as a historical urban settlement, but also a political, social and cultural landscape on which a community was built for living and power play. The authors traced the subject from its first existential beginning, describing the conditions of the city before and after it was turned into the capital of Lan Xang Kingdom. As the subtitle suggests, the analysis was concentrated on capturing the transformation of Vientiane from a dense forest into an opulent city that housed many temples and palaces. The significance of Vientiane was not limited within the city wall, but transcended beyond the Middle Mekong region where the Lao and their principalities were acknowledged as a major presence for centuries (p. 20).

The transformation from the centre of wealth and power into a city under rubble took place when the Siamese troops totally ransacked Vientiane, one of Siam’s vessel states, in 1828 for fear of its disloyalty. The advent of French colonialism, the American occupation during the Cold War and the emergence of a communist regime in Laos deeply affected the destiny of Vientiane as the capital of the nation. The vulnerability of Vientiane has consistently been exploited by present-day leaders to spark Lao nationalism, to reject foreign influences, and ultimately to renew their legitimacy to govern.

What are the main takeaways of this book? First, although it has been widely accepted that

cities need to be studied separately from the country because they possess their own social and political orders, it would be a mistake to totally de-link Vientiane with the evolution of Laos as a nation. This is because Vientiane has always been a site of co-presence of multiple spaces, times and webs of relations, tying local sites, subjects and fragments into national networks of political, social and cultural change. Vientiane is therefore the face of Laos and the destiny of the nation. Vientiane's history has also lent itself as a part of the reconstruction of Lao-ness imbued in its pride as a long-established political entity, magnificent cultural heritage and all the distinctive qualities that might separate Laos from others.

Second, the traditional portrayal of Vientiane as a splendid, yet fragile and marginal, capital serves a political purpose. Today, the world media is being misled by such a traditional view of Vientiane as a sleepy capital of Laos, waiting for foreign funds and technical assistance to aid its collapsing historical architecture (p. 201). By projecting Vientiane in this passive way, political leaders have been very active in spurring a sense of competition among its neighbours, allowing them to fight for a sphere of influence over this impoverished country. In reality, the old clichés of a vulnerable Laos being overrun by expansive neighbours have become increasingly obsolete. Leaders in Vientiane have lately been preoccupied with rolling out the red carpet to welcome investments from Thailand, China, Vietnam — the three main hegemony in the Mekong region. Taking the costs and benefits into consideration, Laos is more than content to play one power against the other. Quiet Vientiane, mystifying with its perplexing past and rural image, is transforming and adjusting itself to the changing national and regional environment.

Third, realizing the benefits of exploiting the past for present consumption, leaders have embarked upon the moulding of Lao identity, using Vientiane as a canvas to paint their own version of Lao-ness. As always, identity-building is a fussy business, often abused for the interests of the elites. Lao-ness creation is a no-less-fussy

mission. A few examples confirmed the confusing state of Lao-ness, encapsulated within the cultural wall of Vientiane. At the base of the *Patuxay*, a pastiche of France's *Arc du Triomphe*, in the centre of Vientiane, a sign has been erected. It says, "At the northeastern end of the Lan Xang Avenue arises a huge structure resembling Arc du Triomphe. It is the Patuxay or Victory Gate of Vientiane, built in 1962, but never complete due to the country's turbulent history. From a close distance, it appears even less impressive, like a monster of concrete." Also inside Vat Ho Pha Kaeo, a statement has been posted, "The Emerald Buddha, once residing here, has been taken (stolen?) to Bangkok" (as a result of the Siamese invasion in 1828).

Is Lao-ness really about the preservation of what the leaders have perceived to be the national culture, unsullied by foreign influence? Is Lao-ness also a connotation of an unfortunate nation often being empowered by bigger neighbours? In 2003, the Lao government announced 5 January to be a national holiday to mark the birthday of the fourteenth century King Fa Ngum. It is the first time that the communist regime, which seized power in 1975 following the end of the Vietnam War, has acknowledged the role of the past monarchy. Fa Ngum is eulogized as a Great King owing to his success in integrating the kingdom that preceded the nation of Laos. As the authors argued, the changing political environment has forced the leaders in Vientiane to find new symbols for its legitimacy (p. 206), and therefore allowing royal symbolism and monarchical sentiment to blossom within a regime that once thrived on anti-monarchist measure, in order to shore up their own power position. Today, the statue of King Fa Ngum stands near the Novotel Hotel in central Vientiane.

Vientiane, or Laos, has indeed never been peripheral either in the context of its own nation-building or the country's relations with outsiders. This book reminds us that not only Vientiane, as a capital, an urban community and a powerful site of the Lao regimes, deserves a serious study, but that the history of a nation and the national

identity creation process are never free from state exploitation and arbitrary interpretation for a variety of reasons and interests.

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Arndt's Story: The Life of an Australian Economist. By Peter Coleman, Selwyn Cornish and Peter Drake. Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, Australian National University. 2007. Pp. 338.

Professor Heinz Wolfgang Arndt, who passed away on 6 May 2002, was a towering figure in the establishment of the Australian National University's (ANU's) study of Southeast Asian economies. He either directly supervised, or had substantial influence on, a large number of Southeast Asianist academic careers spawned at ANU. He established the *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies (BIES)*, which remains the standard journal in the field on the Indonesian economy. This book concludes that it was ANU's provision for student fieldwork in Indonesia (and other Asian countries) and *BIES*, under Arndt's leadership, that gave the institution an edge (p. 266). Arndt's contribution to understanding Indonesia's political economy is profound, and lives on with those whom he mentored. He also had some experience of the rest of Asia, including Afghanistan, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Singapore, South Korea, Soviet Central Asia, the Philippines and also Papua New Guinea.

Arndt, described in this volume as a German by birth and an "Australian by choice" (p. xiii), went on a difficult journey before finding his place as one of Australia's leading scholars of Asian development. Arndt's Jewish background necessitated the family's flee from Nazi Germany. Arndt himself ended up in the United Kingdom and despite his anti-Nazi credentials he was interned in Canada during World War II. After the

War he moved, first, to Sydney, and then ultimately to Canberra to what was to become ANU.

This coincided with an equally colourful intellectual journey. At Oxford University he was, in the words of this book, a "fellow-traveller" of the USSR (p. 21), although he was never a formal member of any communist party. Rejecting the "intellectual flabbiness" of political science and sociology (Arndt commented that "[t]hey seemed to be little more than journalism mixed with pedantry" — p. 43), he transitioned to development economics. His first major publication (with Chatham House), entitled *The Economic Lessons of the Nineteen-Thirties*, drew anti-free market lessons from the Great Depression (in contrast to the anti-government intervention lessons derived from the same experience by Hayek and others). By the time Arndt had moved to Australia in the late 1940s he had transitioned to Fabian Socialism (he once advocated the nationalization of Australian banks and attempted to influence Australian politics in the direction of economic planning) and later Keynesianism, and planted himself firmly with the left of the Australian Labour Party (ALP). His view of international relations had shifted to one of suspicion of both superpowers: "[my] own preference is for a critical attitude equally towards the USA and Russia" (p. 85). Years later Arndt would transition to free market economics and split with the ALP over its opposition to the Vietnam War. Arndt believed that the defence of South Vietnam was both a just cause and in the interests of the West.

What is not entirely clear from this volume is why and how all these ideological turning points occurred in Arndt's life. What the volume does tell us is that Arndt appeared to solidify his views against Marxism after reading Arthur Koestler's novel *Darkness at Noon*, and concluded that Marxism-Leninism was "destructive of all intellectual integrity" (p. 43). The volume also notes his trip to India in the 1950s, where he observed a debilitating central planning model that centred on import substitution and paid no regard to comparative advantage. According to the volume: "The hallmarks of Indian economic