

Southeast Asia over Three Generations (Essays presented to Benedict R. O'G. Anderson), James T. Siegel & Audrey R. Kahin (eds.)

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, 2003, 396 p.

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LIVRES/BOOKS

• *Southeast Asia over Three Generations (Essays presented to Benedict R. O'G. Anderson)*, James T. Siegel & Audrey R. Kahin (eds.), Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, 2003, 396 p.

By Ariel HERYANTO

Students of Southeast Asia are very fortunate to have the scholar, guru, and colleague Benedict Anderson, whose contribution to the area study is of the highest quality, and perhaps unparalleled, and well respected beyond it. This book is dedicated to him, following his retirement from Cornell University, and co-edited by his close colleagues. The chapters were prepared, presumably, by those who have enjoyed the special privilege of a close contact with Anderson in the course of their intellectual growth and academic career over the past three or four decades. The precise relationships of these authors of three generations with Anderson are not specified, although brief biodata are included at the back of the book.

Given the breadth of multi-talented Anderson's areas of interests, and the large number of younger scholars who have been heavily inspired by him, it is only to be expected that the book appears a little bulky, covering quite a wide array of topics, approaches, and styles of presentation.

Chapters that follow an introductory chapter by the co-editors include: (1) Charnvit Kasetsiri, "The Construction of National Heroes and/or Heroines"; (2) Danilyn Rutherford, "Laughing at Leviathan: John Furnivall, Dutch New Guinea, and the Ridiculousness of Colonial Rule"; (3) Takashi Shiraishi, "A New Regime of Order: The Origin of Modern Surveillance Politics in Indonesia"; (4) John Pemberton, "The Specter of Coincidence"; (5) Tsuyoshi Kato, "Images of Colonial Cities in Early Indonesian Novels"; (6) Peter Zinoman, "Hai Van, *The Storm*, and Vietnamese Communism in the Inter-war Imagination"; (7) Thak Chaloemtiarana,

"Move Over, Madonna: Luang Wichit Wathakan's *Huang Rak Haew Luk*"; (8) Vicente L. Rafael, "Foreignness and Vengeance: On Rizal's *El Filibusterismo*"; (9) Caroline S. Hau, "The Question of Foreigners: Bai Ren's *Nanyang Piaoliuji* and the Re/making of Chinese and Philippine Nationness"; (10) Francis Loh Kok Wah, "The Marginalization of the Indians in Malaysia: Contesting Explanations and the Search for Alternatives"; (11) Kasian Tejapira, "De-Othering Jek Communists: Rewriting Thai History from the Viewpoints of the Ethno-Ideological Other"; (12) Patricio N. Abinales, "*Pag-ibig, Pagtatalik at Pakikiba*: Love and Sex inside the Communist Party of the Philippines"; (13) Eva-Lotta E. Hedman, "The Dialectics of 'EDSA Dos': Urban Space, Collective Memory, and the Spectacle of Compromise"; (14) Douglas Kammen, "*Pilkades*: Democracy, Village Elections, and Protest in Indonesia"; (15) Mary P. Callahan, "When Soldiers Kill Civilians: Burma's Crackdown in 1988 in Comparative Perspective"; (16) John T. Sidel, "Other Schools, Other Pilgrimages, Other Dreams: The Making and Unmaking of *Jihad* in Southeast Asia"; and (17) Joshua Barker "Interkom in Indonesia: Not Quite an Imagined Community".

Of course, certain approaches and styles appear more salient than others, and in varying degrees they share those of Anderson. For example, many of the chapters show a spirit of subalternism, and cynicism with the powerful, both in society and scholarship of relevance. Issues pertaining to language, sex, power, and nationalism do not fail to feature among the chapters. Like in Anderson's publications, and presumably also in his teachings, novels enjoy a special position as a prime source of materials for analysis in many of the chapters.

Peter Zinoman's preface in a footnote describes the nature of his own contribution, but these words may well describe many other chapters as well: "[...] inspired by three preoccupations threaded throughout Benedict Anderson's work on the history and politics of Southeast Asia. The first is

his concern with the historical development of Southeast Asian political thought. The second is his interest in the Southeast Asian novel as a site for historical and political analysis. And the third is his insistence that radical political movements in Southeast Asia must be examined in their local contexts and rigorously historicized before they can be fully understood" (p. 125).

Less clear is the order of, and connections among the chapters. Neither theme, approach, period, nor country of analysis has been consistently adopted as the organizational principle. Indonesia received more attention than any other countries (six chapters; in comparison to four for the Philippines, two for Thailand, and one each for Vietnam, Malaysia, Burma, and Southeast Asia). Understandably, as one of the co-editors noted, Anderson's contribution to scholarship on Southeast Asia is particularly strong on Indonesia (p. 10), and more than few Indonesian scholars graduated from Cornell University under his tutelage. Curiously, no single Indonesian (by birth or nationality) has contributed a chapter to the book. There are three Thais, two Japanese, three Philippino/a/s, and one Malaysian.

One of the book's main attractions is its combination of works adopting the more conventional social scientific approaches and works with a more "writerly" and semiotically inclined analysis. We have fine pieces from each, including the chapters by Shiraishi, Kammen, and Sidel, in the former category, and the fascinating and innovative works of Pemberton, Rafael, Tejapira, and Hedman, in the latter. Examples from the first list present very solid data and forceful analysis; those from the second list are impressive and compelling in their narrative eloquence, imagination, and interpretation.

Although nationalism features significantly in all chapters, the first nine (after the introduction) deal with nationalism and colonialism more seriously than most others. Kasetsiri narrates a journey with fellow historians in Southeast Asian islands for a joint project on the construction of national heroes and heroines. Rutherford revisits the spread of colonialism, especially Dutch in New Guinea and British in Burma, focusing on the ridiculous aspects of colonialism that are not unconnected with violence and exploitation. Shiraishi offers admirable details that make it possible to construct a solid

narrative with rich nuances, which is powerful thanks to the vividness of the events that unfold about the origin of state surveillance in the 1920s and the development of a complex network of intelligence services in the context of the rise of Pan Islam and Communist Party. The focus of the analysis is the logic of surveillance of the time, leading the author to conclude that "[t]he Government [...] was as much a hostage of its own political policing as the Indies population" (p. 74).

As announced by its title, Pemberton's "The Specter of Coincidence" is a highly poetic account of a ghost in a colonial factory. It may be unfair to the author to say this, but one would find it difficult not to notice the ghostly traces of the Cornellian Indonesianist – if not specifically Andersonian-cum-Siegelian – writings in this chapter, as the following excerpt exemplifies: "In their capacity to startle, ghosts resemble photographs, including many of those appearing in the Mangkunagaran palace albums. Like ghosts, photographs bring into view something that has passed away and is not usually seen, something that perhaps should no longer be seen and yet will not stay away. Photographs remain as unintended traces of a ghostliness within the machinery of the modern. It is no accident that in the early days of the camera, such ghostly implications were developed into spirit photography" (p. 87).

The next five chapters analyze novels; not all are as literary in style as the one above. Kato presents a prosaic analysis of early Indonesian novels, investigating the representation of cities as loci of love and freedom. Zinoman invites us to reexamine Vu Trong Phung's 1936 novel *The Storm* (*Giong To*), depicting the mysterious communist figure Hai Van (with apologies, all proper orthographic markers in the original have been deleted here due to technical difficulties). He convincingly argues that controversial elements in the Vietnamese semi-historical novel and the reactions it received from its national audience cannot be adequately understood unless one considers an incident of relevance on the other side of the globe.

Like Zinoman's, the subsequent novel-focused chapters by Chaloeintiarana, Rafael, and Hau, respectively, all show how discourses of the nation in a given setting are deeply intertextualized with those of the foreign. This is especially problematic in the cases critically analyzed by Rafael and Hau.

The latter's compelling analysis of the life experience, semi-autobiographical novel of Bai Ren, and its reception in the Philippines leads her to ask broader and extremely important questions that have no easy answer: "If one's experience of nationness bears the ineluctable traces of other 'nations', other loyalties, what does it mean to claim that one 'belongs' to any given nation? What does it mean to immerse oneself in a 'collectivity,' to call oneself one of the 'people' when this 'national self' is not unitary, but rather irreducibly marked by something 'foreign?'" (p. 222).

Hau's questions about the problematic status of ethnic minorities in Southeast Asia's new nations serve as a prelude to the following two chapters. Loh analyzes the ethnic Indians in Malaysia, while Tejapira focuses on those stigmatized in Thailand as "Chinese-cum-communists." Two things give the latter chapter additional value of interest. First, a significant part of the study is based on the author's first-hand experience as an academic-turned-guerilla fighter (something that most scholars of Southeast Asian studies simply have neither the option nor the inclination to pursue). Second, Tejapira shows the specific linguistic material conditions in Thailand that made it possible for certain success in propagating Marxism and Communism in that country despite the brutal repression by the state to prevent that. He refers to the art of translation and the salient position of poetry in Thai discourse.

The next two chapters focus on anti-government movements in the Philippines. Abinales examines a topic that has been largely understudied: how a key document expresses an attempt by the Communist Party (CPP) to regulate the sex and marital life of its members, and the critical responses it received from the latter in the forms of songs, short story, and novel. Excerpts from the document are provided throughout the analysis, with translation. Ironic as it might be, the conclusion drawn from the analysis is not entirely surprising: a striking similarity of views held by this seemingly "progressive" movement and its "reactionary" antagonist, the Catholic church.

Hedman's is an extremely innovative chapter on the politics of urban space as inadvertently determining, rather than being determined by, human agency or consciously political agenda. She analyzes the multi-layered significant memories and everyday activities of the residents of Manila and

the architectural and multinationally industrialized environments of Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (better known as EDSA), as the key site of the 1986 "people power" rallies and the series of anti-Estrada protest movements fifteen years later. Rephrasing Marx's adage, she concludes with these words: "Men and women make history, but not in geographical imaginaries of their own making" (p. 301). Highly globalized industrial capitalism has radically altered the urban space of Manila, and generated paradoxical effects. It facilitated the sequels of 1986 "people power", but at the same time blunting its political power, making it largely a spectacle in the broader context of urban entertainment and "mallings."

Indonesia is a focus in the remaining chapters, two dealing with local politics, the other two with a comparative analysis with a neighboring country. Focusing on numerous protests in villages at a time of political decentralization and village elections, Kammen asks a series of good questions: "How is it that villagers came to protest around elections rather than some other theme or event? Why did protest over village elections erupt in late 1997 rather than at some other time? Still more troubling, why were these protests concentrated in some parts of Java while absent elsewhere? Finally, what is the relationship between protest over village elections and the eruption of urban protest demanding Suharto's resignation and national political reform?" (pp. 304-305). This leads him to the argument that "collective action at the village level must be taken seriously on its own merits, and should not be interpreted simply as a distorted image of the national Reformasi movement" (p. 305).

In her chapter, Callahan compares Burmese and Indonesian military responses to the civilian protest movements at the critical junctures of government transitions. In 1988 Burma, the military used force to repress civilian protestors, whereas in Indonesia they did not. Any comparative study necessarily requires more work than twice that for a single-country study, and thus deserves extra commendation. While Callahan demonstrates an admirable balance in comparing the two cases, her analysis would have been strengthened had she given more consideration to two factors of immediate relevance, at least in the Indonesian case. The first is the international dimension,

especially the intervention of external forces (or the lack thereof) in the process of regime transition and the military's autonomy. The other factor that emphatically distinguishes the 1998 Indonesian situation from that in Burma in 1988 was the politics of Islam. Fortunately, an in-depth analysis of these two factors is precisely the major strength of the next chapter, by Sidel, whose main area of interest is broader than Indonesia's 1998 government succession.

Without necessarily agreeing with Sidel in every detail, I think his chapter is the best in the book. Incidentally (but not ironically, see my concluding note below), this chapter appears to bear the least features that often mark the legacies of Cornelian Southeast Asian studies. It is fairly comprehensive within its given scope, based on solid data, and cogent in its presentation, refuting the widespread propaganda of "war on terrorism" and "pseudo-academic writings" on the subject by governmental bodies, think-tanks, and what he called "self-styled terrorism experts." Instead of focusing on the link of the Islamist movement in Southeast Asia with comparable organizations in the Middle East, he shows a long history of home-grown networks within and across this region. Instead of taking the jihad movement as simply an effect of economic frustration and ideological or psychological confusion of the poor and manipulable masses, combined with "malignant foreign influence [...] or of malevolent elite conspiracies" (p. 352), Sidel argues for the contrary premise, of *jihad's* potential plausibility and legitimacy. And "[i]nstead of viewing these networks and links as somehow external to Southeast Asia, the essay shows how the long-standing connectedness of Muslims in the region and beyond has run up against other transnational currents and circuitries – those of capitalism, Christianity, and the global system of modern nation-states" (p.353).

In the concluding chapter, Barker examines the political significance of localized network of "interkom," which is "a network of cables linking together tiny food stalls [...] ramshackle city homes, rooms in migrant workers' rooming houses, and farms among rice paddies" (p. 384). He claims that this is "completely indigenous to Indonesia" and "exists very much outside the networks controlled by the state" (p. 384). His ethnographic narrative is interesting, but he attempts more than this, as

hinted at in the chapter title. He asks the right and long due question, but does not offer an answer, and cannot possibly do so with the materials at hand: "If we accept Anderson's argument that the imagined community of the nation has its origin in a very particular discourse network, namely print capitalism, it behooves us to raise the question of what other types of subject and ideas of community emerge in concert with other modern discourse networks that are not based on print" (p. 383). To this big question, his response is: "Interkom represents a community that is not quite imagined, but also not quite face-to-face. Perhaps we could call it 'voice-to-voice' instead of face-to-face" (p. 395).

This book has something to offer to various students of Southeast Asian studies. In this sense, it is successful in representing the breadth of Anderson's contribution. In 1984, Anderson wrote an introduction to the posthumous re-publication of Rex Mortimer's (1926-1979) essays as *Stubborn Survivors*(1). As I was preparing this review, I recalled that, in his highly complimentary note, Anderson suggested that, if Mortimer had indeed set an excellent example for younger scholars, this was an example that others could follow by not imitating the guru in the specifics. Some of Anderson's best students must be among the first to appreciate the value of such an important message.

Note

- 1 *Stubborn Survivors: Dissenting Essays on Peasants and Third World Development*, Herbert Feith & Rodney Tiffen (eds.), Clayton: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984.

• *Asie du Sud-Est : enjeu régional ou enjeu mondial ?*, de Hugues Tertrais, Paris : Gallimard, 2002, 280 p.

Par Laurent GÉDÉON

Dans *Asie du Sud-Est : enjeu régional ou enjeu mondial?*, Hugues Tertrais se livre à une analyse précise de la situation en Asie du sud-est au regard de la crise économique qui a secoué cette région du monde en 1997 et de ses conséquences. Soulignant la fragmentation de cet espace politique, caractérisé par sa très grande diversité culturelle et linguistique, l'auteur rappelle qu'il s'est édifié sur l'ancienne ligne de fracture entre monde chinois et puissances européennes,