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<Book Review>

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Vikram Lall. *The Golden Lands: Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam (Architecture of the Buddhist World)*. Kuala Lumpur: JF Publishing, 2014, 280p.

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social and ethnic marginalization as a cultural minority in a Muslim state” (p. 151). Johnson labels the *Thammathut* project as “politically non-threatening” (p. 154), but it is difficult—at least for a Southeast Asianist who focuses on Islam—to not see this project as a mirror image of the much feared and condemned Wahhabi expansion started in the 1970s, and more generally the orthodoxization of Muslims in Southern Thailand, which in this book is consistently branded as a terrorist threat.

The Buddha on Mecca’s Verandah is a captivating narrative of how a marginalized minority inhabiting the complex reality of a borderland area manages its cultural and political identity. It is unfortunate that Johnson opted to not engage with the reality across the border, as a more nuanced understanding of Muslim-Buddhist/Malay-Thai relations in the Thai South would have further enriched his perspective on the Malay North, but maybe that will be addressed in his future work. This book presents the results of a much-needed investigation that further contributes to our understanding of inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia, Thailand’s own religious politics, and the legacy of British colonialism in Southeast Asia to mention just a few. More generally it is a welcome addition to the literature on ethno-religious diversity, borderland histories, and identity construction.

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The Golden Lands: Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam (Architecture of the Buddhist World)

VIKRAM LALL

Kuala Lumpur: JF Publishing, 2014, 280p.

This is a large-format (335×260 mm) book with a hard cover, printed on glossy art-quality paper, and contains numerous color photographs by professional photographers as well as sophisticated maps and other graphics. It is thus in danger of being lumped with coffee-table books.

The author is a practicing architect based in Delhi. According to his LinkedIn description, the book is the first of a series which is planned to consist of six volumes on the architecture of the Buddhist world, (not specifically “Buddhist architecture,”) employing an interdisciplinary perspective including architecture, history, religion, and philosophy. The company with which he is associated, Lall and Associates (established in 1969) has obtained commissions for a wide range of projects, in the fields of urban planning and design, education (22 schools), hospitality and tourism, residential, offices, transport, industry, and medicine, in addition to institutional and religious buildings. In the latter category are a Japanese temple at Bodhgaya (one of the eight places where

Buddha's relics were originally interred), and the Buddha Smriti Park, Patna.¹⁾ The firm's client list reads like a who's who of corporate and official India: *The Hindustan Times*, Tata Power, the United Nations, the governments of Bihar and Sikkim, State Bank of India, Indian Railways, etc.

One of the clients on the list which is relevant to this topic is the Nalanda Educational Society. Vikram Lall's architectural study of Nalanda has been published by the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi. An interesting project listed under "scientific study/research papers" on his website is "Schematic conjecture of the ancient city of Pataliputra (327 BC) through historical & archaeological study—developed a scale model of the conjecture that is displayed at the museum at Patna, 1997."

The book is organized by country; chapters are devoted to Myanmar (50 pages), Vietnam (38 pages), Indonesia (32 pages), Cambodia (32 pages), Thailand (51 pages), and Laos (44 pages). The book opens with a section which develops a theoretical framework (23 pages). The Myanmar section focuses on 19 monuments, including the Bupaya, which is the oldest in the book (third century). Ten monuments in Vietnam, 8 in Indonesia, 9 in Cambodia, 10 in Thailand, and 8 in Laos are listed in a chronology of selected Buddhist monuments on pages 6–7.

The preface (p. 9) which introduces the series of six books, acknowledges that the terms "Buddhist" and "architecture" have no generally accepted meanings. The preface asserts that the architecture of buildings associated with Buddhist worship has been neglected in comparison with the amount of study devoted to other aspects of Buddhism. It also states that the buildings devoted to Buddhist activity are highly diverse, because Buddhism spread over a large part of the ancient world before declining in popularity in some areas such as India. The diversity of Buddhist architecture can also be connected to the different symbolic and functional roles played by various types of structures, which together formed a network of meanings. Future books in the series will be devoted to "the Heavenly Lands" (China, Japan, and Korea), the "Ancient Lands" (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka), the "Mountain Lands" (the Himalayas and Tibetan plateau), the "Hidden Lands" (central Asia, Mongolia, and the Silk Road), and the "Modern Lands" (contemporary Buddhist architecture).

The author is more interested in "collective development" than in individual monuments. Thus each country section begins with a general overview, and ends with a discussion of a few selected structures. Given the broad span of Buddhism's distribution in Southeast Asia, the region's renowned cultural diversity, and Buddhism's tolerance of local tradition, it is interesting to note the strong continuity in the use of certain architectural forms and decorative motifs over the six countries discussed here. The history of Buddhist development in Indonesia is shorter, since most of the archipelago nation converted to Islam between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, but it is no less rich in interest; despite the religion's limited lifespan there compared

1) <http://www.lallassociates.com>, accessed 28 November 2014

to the rest of the region, Indonesians were the creators of some of the most original and complex Buddhist monuments in the whole of the Buddhist world.

As in India, the *caitya-grihas*, buildings meant to shelter images of Buddha, in Southeast Asia were similar in many ways to those used in Brahminical worship. The Vajrasana or stone seat on which Buddha attained enlightenment survived as an icon in Java into the Islamic period; in Javanese palaces of the early twentieth century, such stone seats were still used during coronations. The image of the ruler as an ascetic who could constantly renew and increase his power by meditation also survived into the late twentieth century. The stupa form seems to have appeared in west Java by 500 CE, though only foundations of them have survived. The ground plans of early Southeast Asian monasteries or Buddhist complexes are not well understood, due to the disappearance of all structures built of wood.

One unfortunate aspect of the book is its assumption that Buddhism was spread by Indians who came to Southeast Asia. Archaeological and historical research has not revealed any evidence of early Indian ships reaching this region, although individual Indian travelers certainly did. In the seventh century the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Yiqing explicitly notes that he sailed on ships belonging to the ruler of the south Sumatran kingdom of Srivijaya from China to Southeast Asia, thence to India, and back again (Takakusu 1896). Yiqing also praised the huge monastery of Srivijaya and the standard of instruction in Sanskrit available there. Rather than constituting an example of “cultural colonization of the region by India” (p. 33), it is preferable to view the essence of the interaction between Southeast Asia and South Asia (in which Sri Lanka played a major role) as one of voluntary appropriation by Southeast Asians rather than imposition of cultural traits on a lower culture by a superior one. This is a minor flaw, since the author does not attempt to deal in detail with the process of transmission of architectural ideas, but in a book which gave greater emphasis to the mechanism of communication, this would be a major issue.

A second problem is the acceptance of the old assumption that the idea of divine kingship in Southeast Asia came from India. As Hermann Kulke (Kulke 1978) and other historians have noted, in India the institution of kingship was viewed as divinely inspired, but kings were not considered to be incarnations of Brahminical deities or Buddha. The origin of the concept of kings who were “detached portions” of Siva, and later bodhisattvas, or both, can be traced to the tenth century, not earlier. This too has important implications for the interpretation of the involvement of Buddhism and royalty in early Southeast Asia. These constitute the pitfalls which often confront the expert from one subject who endeavors to incorporate data from an unfamiliar discipline.

One of the book’s main attractions is its original architectural drawings. These include models of wooden buildings as well as stone facades. The book’s main contribution consists of the numerous sketches, including cutaway drawings and plans of different stages of construction of Buddhist structures. The reader should focus on the sections on “Architectural Characteristics” and the accompanying descriptions of the forms used while reading the historical accounts with

caution. There are also some errors in the captions to the photographs; for example on page 136 the structure in the photograph at upper left, known as Bajang Ratu, is a gateway or *gapura*, not a stupa. On page 160 the map of Cambodia includes the site of Oe-èò in the far southeastern corner; this site actually lies in Vietnam.

One could take issue with the choice of structures to include in “Selected Examples” sections of the book. For instance the Shwedagon in Yangon is only represented by a single drawing. Given the vastness of the topic, however, even a 280-page-long book cannot include all the important Buddhist structures in Southeast Asia.

Aside from the lapses in the historical section, the book is beautifully produced. Architectural historians will find much of interest in it, and will not doubt be eager to see the rest of the volumes in the projected series.

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The Palm Oil Controversy in Southeast Asia: A Transnational Perspective

OLIVER PYE and JAYATI BHATTACHARYA, eds.

Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Publishing, 2013, xxi+283p.

This book of 12 chapters demonstrates the effects of rapidly growing palm oil industry in Southeast Asia from a variety of angles: geographically (Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, and Europe); that of the background of authors (academics, industry, policy analysis, and NGOs from Asian and European countries); and at different levels (from local to transnational). This book arose out of a workshop “the Palm Oil Controversy in Transnational Perspective” that was held in Singapore, March 2–4, 2009.

The first part of the book describes the development of palm oil industries in each country of Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Chapter 2 is about Malaysia, in which Teoh Cheng Hai explains the transnational and national development of the plantation industry of Malaysia. It discusses 1) the transnational phase brought about by European companies, especially the UK, in