

SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

<http://englishkyoto-seas.org/>

<Book Review>

Yu Xiao

Catherine Allerton. *Potent Landscapes: Place and Mobility in Eastern Indonesia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013, xi+221p.

Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 5, No. 2, August 2016, pp. 353-356.

How to Cite: Yu Xiao. Review of *Potent Landscapes: Place and Mobility in Eastern Indonesia* by Catherine Allerton. *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, August 2016, pp. 353-356.

View the table of contents for this issue:

<http://englishkyoto-seas.org/2016/08/vol-5-no-2-of-southeast-asian-studies/>

Subscriptions: <http://englishkyoto-seas.org/mailling-list/>

For permissions, please send an e-mail to: english-editorial@cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp



Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University

wealthy Thai oligarchs, a semi-independent mobilization of political conscious participants has emerged. They, too, have a voice—one that does not always align with an oligarch like Thaksin. Some solutions to the challenge of inequality and oligarchy are proffered in the final chapter by Pan Ananapibut. This last chapter is much valued, because it allows some space for thinking through some of the options the citizens of Thailand do have, at least in terms of tax policy, for combating the economic side of inequality. Proposals are made in terms of inequality in both income and wealth.

Overall, this is an engaging and well-crafted volume that delivers much-needed new empirical research on the challenges of inequality and oligarchy in Thailand. This book represents some of the best minds from Thailand on the state of country's current political economy. This volume will be of interest to scholars and students of Southeast Asian political economy as well as researchers into how inequality and oligarchy can vary across the globe.

T. F. Rhoden

Department of Political Science, Northern Illinois University

References

- Ford, Michele; and Pepinsky, Thomas, eds. 2013. Beyond Oligarchy? Critical Exchanges on Political Power and Material Inequality in Indonesia. *Indonesia, Special Issue: Wealth, Power, and Contemporary Indonesian Politics* 96(October): 1–9.
- Pasuk Phongpaichit ผาสุก พงษ์ไพจิตร. 2014. *Su sangkom Thai samoe na* ผู้สังคมไทยเสมอหน้า [Toward a more equitable Thailand]. Bangkok: Matichon.
- Piketty, Thomas. 2014. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rhoden, T. F. 2015. Oligarchy in Thailand? *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 34(1): 3–25.
- Robison, Richard; and Hadiz, Vedi R. 2004. *Reorganising Power in Indonesia: The Politics of Oligarchy in an Age of Markets*. London: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Winters, Jeffrey. 2011. *Oligarchy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Potent Landscapes: Place and Mobility in Eastern Indonesia

CATHERINE ALLERTON

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013, xi+221p.

Potent Landscapes, by Catherine Allerton, is an engagingly written anthropological study of place and culture in Southeast Asia. Its ethnographic focus is a two-placed, partly resettled village (p. 5) in the Manggarai region of eastern Indonesia, with ancestral settlement Wae-Rebo in the highlands, and its lowland offshoot Kombo developed in the 1960s as part of a wider governmental resettle-

ment drive. To differentiate itself from the structuralist Leiden School that identifies eastern Indonesia as a field of study and pursues a cosmological coherence within the field, this book takes a “phenomenological” (p. 4) approach that puts bodily experience at the center of analysis, including those messy and contradictory aspects of people’s life. Allerton presents a “multisensory” (p. 15) picture of how landscapes gain potency through place- and path-making out of the entanglement between people and place. Meanwhile, by examining the influence of Catholic conversion, state development, resettlement, and migration on this eastern Indonesian village, Allerton also ties the work to contemporary issues.

Three recurring themes are key to master the core of the book. First, equal prominence is given both to the taken-for-granted, often unspoken aspects of everyday life and “the extraordinary, the ritual or the ancestral” (p. 9) aspects of life. Allerton argues that place- and path-making happens both through the explicit creation of presence in ritual performances and through everyday practices that do not consciously aim to create values. Readers can easily see the close entwinement of mundane and ritual life is repeatedly brought out throughout the chapters.

Second, landscapes, a rather encompassing concept in the book, include not only mountains or fields, but also—rooms, houses, and paths—and combine both material and immaterial aspects. Human activities take place in the concrete materiality of landscapes whose characteristics also shape people’s social life. Beyond this, Allerton places more emphases on the immateriality of landscapes, which refers that landscapes have agency, evoke human memories and emotions, and have their own concerns and desires.

Last but not least, the Manggarai landscape is defined by mobility along several dimensions. As the chapters expand outwards in ever-widening “concentric circles” (p. 15), different kinds of places, from the smallest and most intimate household rooms to larger scales of landscapes, are connected through daily movements between houses, to fields, up and down mountains, and the more poignant journeys along marriage paths or to outside realms. Closely related to Allerton’s strategy of personifying landscapes, is her attempt to illustrate the temporal dimension of mobile landscapes. Rooms, houses, and villages have their own course of social lives and need to undergo rites of passage as humans do so through the life cycle to realize identity transformation and reproduction.

The main contents of the book are organized in six chapters. Chapter one examines household rooms, which have not featured prominently in many writings on Southeast Asian houses. Allerton asserts rooms can be agents to connect with ancestors, gather up souls, and transmit mysterious blood spirits. By showing the entanglement of rooms with their occupants’ bodies and souls during key phrases in the human life cycle, Allerton argues that rooms emerge as different kinds of entities in the context of different practices and how particular rituals create the presence of the room as agents. In this way, the important social relationship among Manggarai people can be learnt from the narrative of the social life of a Manggarai room. However, when doing so, Allerton

emphasizes that we should not objectify rooms but understand it as “an ongoing dynamics in a room-household’s developmental cycle” (p. 41).

Chapter two looks at houses. Instead of seeing houses as an architectural or symbolic object, Allerton treats houses as a particular kind of place characterized by permeability and liveliness, which helps establish the significance of Manggarai houses in both daily and ritual practices. On one hand, an ordinary house is a place for numerous lively events, partly relying on its permeability to “sounds, smells, livestock, and the movements of the personnel” (p. 15). On the other hand, ritual liveliness ensures that a house is permeable to the right kinds of souls and spirits. In the meantime, distinct from the practices of fixing or fetishizing houses in the literature on house-based societies, Allerton suggests that easy and frequent movements of people among dwellings make houses alive and able to connect to broader landscapes of pathways and fields.

Chapter three attempts to challenge the hegemony of the Leiden-derived traditions of analysis. This tradition sees eastern Indonesian marriage alliances as constituted only by rules and classifications and argues that traveling paths are produced by kinship and marriage. Drawing on women’s experiences and memories of their marriage paths, Allerton argues that marriage, “as a sequence of place-based, practical actions” (p. 74), connects and transforms both people and places. On one hand, traveling along physical trails through the landscape reinforces and renews the historical connections between families. On the other hand, people enact kinship in this form of travel, especially women who grow from an outsider bride to a mother central to the figuration of alliance groups.

Chapter four shifts attention to “what the land wants” (p. 15). While believing that an animate landscape is a concrete form of particular agricultural animism, rituals are, according to Allerton, ways that Manggarai people communicate with “the environment as an animate realm of multiple agents” (p. 122). The strong presence of agricultural animism and the desirability of offering sacrifice explains villagers’ reassertion of ritual procedures in the face of Catholic syncretic attempts and state-sponsored resettlement when church and state simply view rituals “as a matter of traditional culture” (p. 125). Another aspect that Allerton stresses of agricultural animism is Manggarai engagements with ancestral spirits, in which the idea of “ancestors of the land” (p. 100) is quite pertinent to the problem of the drum house in the next chapter.

Chapter five illustrates the ways which place is made by examining the relationship between resettlement and drum houses. Villagers view drum houses as “most closely associated with ancestors” (p. 131) and thus still take Kombo without such ancestral links as “a monkey-hut” (p. 128). However, state-sponsored rebuilding projects highlight the authenticity of highlands in cultural terms and instead honor the isolation of Wae-Rebo in this sense. Both notions have sustained the division of the two places. However, Allerton also argues that the difference between Wae Rebo and Kombo, despite the ritual inequality, has been normalized by incorporating travels between two sites and movements of goods and personnel into daily life. Moreover, the inhabitants

of this two-placed village indeed benefit greatly from diversified economic opportunities due to partial resettlement.

Chapter six details everyday, extraordinary, and mythical movements within the landscape and describes “the moments of stillness” (p. 152) or “apparently stable places” (p. 176) that constitute what Allerton calls “rooting.” She asserts that the notion of rooting does not contrast with the core idea of the book “mobility.” Instead, mobility relies on a form of rooting. Only by rooting one’s travel in a place of origin through ritual events, can one possibly travel safely. In this context, Allerton provides us with a different lens to look at migrants’ travel to towns or faraway cities and children undertaking many journeys to attend schools. The expanding mobility of people has led to neither the loss of roots nor the erosion of culture. On the contrary, travel and movement are essential in the making of place and culture in this remote Indonesian village.

In conclusion, the rich ethnographic description along with great clarity in theoretical discussion makes the book a pleasure to read. However, I find some of the author’s claims on methodological innovation a little strained. Either emphasis on taken-for-granted everyday life or critique of the structuralist Leiden scholarship is not novel in anthropological works on eastern Indonesia. In addition, the cultural and social uniqueness of Manggarai people does not quite stand out of the writing. Readers may find a lot of similarities with village life in other regions of Indonesia. But it may also suggest a possibility for other comparative studies. The book offers a wealth of ideas and is a toolkit for comparison. Scholars who are working on place and culture of landscapes in other parts of Southeast Asian may find it especially useful. Aside from these minor weaknesses, it is an important contribution to the conceptualization of landscapes and would be interest to scholars and students of Indonesian studies, Southeast Asian studies, and Anthropology in general.

Yu Xiao 于霄

Department of Sociology, Kyoto University

Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Practices: Explorations through Java

ALBERTUS BAGUS LAKSANA

Farnham: Ashgate, 2014, xiii + 252p.

Albertus Bagus Laksana’s *Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Practices: Explorations through Java* is a rich, intricately textured comparative ethnography of Muslim and Catholic pilgrimage traditions in south central Java. The empirical data—derived from participant observation, direct-interview, discourse analysis, and archival research—is organized into two balanced sections, while a concluding analysis discusses the culturally-specific aspects that condition religious pluralism in Java. What is most interesting is that Laksana confronts the reality of this pluralism through a methodology