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<Book Review>

Mohamed Effendy Bin Abdul Hamid

Ooi Keat Gin and Hoàng Anh Tuấn, eds. *Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1350–1800*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2016.

Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 7, No. 2, August 2018, pp. 264-266.

How to Cite: Effendy, Mohamed. Review of *Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1350–1800* edited by Ooi Keat Gin and Hoàng Anh Tuấn. *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, August 2018, pp. 264-266.

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subalterns speak from the heaps of colonial administrative archives is also commendable.

While an excellent monograph, *The Uprooted* leaves a few questions unanswered that future comparative studies could undertake: How was the on-the-ground experience of *métis* children in Laos and Cambodia different from that in Vietnam? How differently were public debates on sex, marriage, childcare, and social welfare configured in the distinctive Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese cultural milieus? And, lastly, how did the migratory experiences of *métis* youths and adults from colonies to the metropole inform the protection societies' policies?

Firpo's *The Uprooted* makes a critical scholarly contribution at the nexuses of race and colonial studies, French colonial history, history of family and childhood, youth studies, and Vietnamese studies. A compelling work of scholarship, it will serve as a methodological road map for subsequent studies on the topic and remain useful for a general readership with broad interest in the history of empire and colonialism.

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Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1350–1800

OUI KEAT GIN and HOÀNG ANH TUẤN, eds.

Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2016.

Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1350–1800 is an important book for any student, researcher, or educator of precolonial Southeast Asia. The contributors present the latest findings and establish new inroads into research about the region's pre-modern past. The book's agenda is stated clearly on the first page: to show "how well-developed Southeast Asia was before the onset of European involvement" and that it had a parity with "Europe in terms of socio-economic progress and attainments." The book is organized in four parts: Part 1, "Diplomatic and Inter-state Relations," reveals the complexities involved in trying to understand the development and nature of Southeast Asian state systems. Through case studies such as Ayutthaya, this section elucidates the importance of the agency and sophistication of Southeast Asian pre-modern states and political actors. This is not a new perspective, of course, but the nature of the information that attests to the reality of agency is new. This is why Bhawan Ruangsilp's analysis of the Phraklang Ministry of Ayutthaya is crucial. It shows evidence of a Southeast Asian pre-modern entity that attempted to "keep pace" with rapidly changing commercial and political environs with "bureaucratic innovations."

This part of the book would have benefited from a chapter on the newest archeological findings on the Angkor empire. This would have tied in well with Part 1's other contributors, as new evidence based on LIDAR scans has revealed a more extensive Angkor empire than previously

thought. It would have provided another perspective: that another model of progress and development adopted by pre-modern Southeast Asian kingdoms could have been simply expansion of territory and population rather than adopting bureaucratic innovations. But this model of progress is not sustainable as it leads to collapse when resources are not available to sustain it.

Part 2, “Interactions and Transactions,” offers six case studies that attest to the flourishing trade and commerce of early Southeast Asia. It begins rather fittingly with Leonard Y. Andaya’s chapter on the importance of the interconnectedness of the seas as a backdrop to understanding the rise and development of the maritime-based entities of Van Don, Batu Sawar, and Penang. More important, it provides further evidence of Southeast Asian agency in determining the success of these early port polities but only if they had unrestricted access to the sea. However, what is curious in this chapter is the omission of the role and centrality of the Orang Laut, or sea peoples. The sea is an important arena for interactions and transactions, but the intermediaries of the sea—i.e., the sea peoples—are important to the history of trade, politics, and commerce in precolonial Southeast Asia. A chapter on the Bugis traders of nineteenth-century Singapore would have been highly complementary to the rest of Part 2. It would have shown the continued dependence on regional seafaring peoples by even the British, during the rise of Singapore in the early nineteenth century—especially in providing the early port of Singapore with foodstuffs and trade items. This would have given Part 2 a more nuanced perspective on the success of maritime-based entities during this period and highlighted that success was contingent also on the support given by intermediaries of the sea such as the sea peoples and seafaring communities.

Part 3, “Kingship and State Systems,” and Part 4, “Indigenizing Christianity,” offer case studies that shed new light on the complex relationship between religion, power, and trade in pre-modern Southeast Asia. Sher Banu’s analysis of the rise of Acehnese queens offers an alternative perspective to the male-dominated historical perspective of power in Southeast Asia, “. . . an alternative model to the charismatic men of prowess model of kingship” (p. 187). The analysis illustrates the usefulness of new research on local, indigenous sources. Also demonstrative of the new perspectives that can be derived from work on difficult Southeast Asian sources is Danny Wong’s analysis of Cham-Viet relations in the late seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. Wong’s chapter shows that it is possible to have a more nuanced perspective on the highly complex nature of the Cham-Viet relationship; the Cham had a great degree of agency even when the locus of political and economic power shifted to the Vietnamese during the centuries mentioned.

In all, the book is useful in highlighting the latest research findings and directions related to pre-modern Southeast Asia. Of great importance is the reminder of the importance and usefulness of using local, indigenous sources in throwing new light on Southeast Asia’s pre-modern past. However, more could have been done to integrate archeological perspectives on pre-modern Southeast Asia. This could have complemented the various chapters on Southeast Asia’s past. A survey of John Miksic’s extensive archeological work on the region could have been included. If this had

been done, the material evidence from early modern Southeast Asia—especially on the wealth, prowess, and cultural sophistication of early modern communities and rulers—would have greatly complemented many of the contributors' assertions.

The problems involved in using local indigenous Southeast Asian sources remain under-discussed. Several contributors have demonstrated the usefulness and importance of using such sources, but these are exceptions. If this work was truly a “showcase for a passing of the baton to a younger generation of historians of Southeast Asia” (Foreword), perhaps it could have included a comprehensive concluding chapter on alerting future young researchers about the problems involved in studying precolonial Southeast Asian written sources. For example, it is difficult to read Cham manuscript sources as there are several types of highly complex writing styles. Furthermore, these sources need to be contextualized with other types of sources (Vietnamese, Malay, Chinese primary written sources) to make the Cham manuscript information comprehensible, and this requires a mastery of several languages. Many of the Cham manuscripts are in poor condition, which makes studying them even more difficult.

Perhaps the book could have included a chapter on how studies of Southeast Asia's pre-modern past have become more important in the last few years. An issue that could have been discussed is how the pre-modern past has been perceived and used when territorial issues come into play. For example, the Spratly Islands dispute among several countries in the region led to countries such as Vietnam and China looking into “historical records” in order to find evidence to justify their claims. Singapore's disputes with Johor over Pulau Batu Putih and Horsburgh Light-house could also have been discussed.

This is a useful book for understanding the history of precolonial Southeast Asia and being informed on the latest research findings. But more could be done to encourage the young generation of researchers to continue studying Southeast Asia's pre-modern past as well as making it more relevant to understanding present-day issues.

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