

be given more attention in the literature of human trafficking in the GMS.

Overall, *The Perfect Business* and *Transnational Crime and Human Rights* represent a breakthrough in the literature of human trafficking in the GMS. They are essential works which not only benefits specialists in the Greater Mekong Subregion, human trafficking and human rights studies, but can be very useful to future students as well.

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## *Questioning Modernity in Indonesia and Malaysia*

WENDY MEE and JOEL S. KAHN, eds.

Singapore and Kyoto: NUS Press in association with Kyoto University Press, 2012, vi+257 p.

In Asia, there is a lot of emphasis on the progress. In this light, the term “modernity” is one that is very much bantered about by national leaders and the society in general, but perhaps little understood. The book *Questioning Modernity in Indonesia and Malaysia* engages readers less in a theoretical discussion of the concept of modernity as in its application to two significant countries in the region. The contributors problematize a simplistic East versus West discussion in the study of modernity, contending that the form found in Indonesia and Malaysia “cannot be viewed as merely derivative of a European/Western modernity” (p. 1). The work of Joel S. Kahn, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at La Trobe University, which argues for what historian John S. Smail called an “autonomous” understanding of modernity in Southeast Asia, is drawn upon in the book. Kahn’s work calls for an ethnographic understanding of modernity that is rooted in cultural and

historical context, an approach that has been well-executed by the volume's contributors in their examination of modernity (p. 3).

The editors rightly include the caveat that the volume "does not pretend to be comprehensive in its thematic and geographic scope" (p. 1). Rather than aiming for even distribution of case studies for both countries, the contributors saw value in a wide-ranging distribution of themes. The thematic scope in the examination of modernity is one of the book's strong points. Issues as diverse as capitalism in the border areas and technology in Indonesia and Malaysia are raised in the book.

The first section of the book examines transnational and border-zone identities. Kahn studies manifestations of modernity in marginal communities in his chapter on Islam and capitalism. He argues that modernizing processes are able to come about irrespective of state leadership and criticizes the assumption that modernity is linked to any particular civilization (p. 38). Kenneth Young and Yekti Maunati discussed ethnic identities in Malaysia and Indonesia respectively in separate chapters. Both acknowledge that cultural identity is a construction shaped by the push and pull of historical development (pp. 60, 91). Drawing on Kahn, both highlighted the intercultural foundation of the modern societies in both countries. Young also questions the adequacy of Western social theory in explaining the "modern" concept of social imaginary in Indonesia (p. 81).

The second section discusses the topic of nation-states and citizenships. While, as argued above, a multiplicity of civilizations form the foundations of contemporary life in general, the chapters by Goh Beng Lan and Thung Ju-lan reinforce Kahn's observation of the equally modern "dark aspect" of exclusion and oppression of fringe groups. As Thung pointed out, the modern nation-state is imbued with the "power to exclude" (p. 161). Goh tries to remedy this, looking not at a "modern" universal expression of entitlement to values such as human rights, but to examples from a country's own past for a different way "towards a *détente*" (p. 128) in resolving the political impasse that resulted from the exclusion. Both acknowledge, however, that the resolution for religious and ethnic minorities in Indonesia and Malaysia will be long in coming and there are no easy answers to the problems of modernity (p. 162).

The final part of the book studies cultural and moral orientations of modernity in Malaysia. Modernity, usually seen as a linear progress towards a certain utopia, ironically fears the inability to continue towards the ideal future. For example, in the case of Malaysia, Maila Stivens observed that the state's response towards its new generation is one of "moral panic" (p. 172), fearing the subsequent generation's inability to carry the successes of the present towards the future. Oh Myung-Seok's chapter critiques Western-centric observations of modern capitalism and emphasizes the importance of local cultural frames of societal analysis in studying aspects of Southeast Asia (p. 201). Meanwhile, Wendy Mee's study aims to shed light on new inventions that represent quintessential modernity and challenge state-led narratives that usually accompany such discussions. Her work posits that it is the ordinary users of technology that sustain modern inventions.

Given the comprehensive coverage in terms of thematic approaches, the discussions could have been better extended geographically. The majority of the case studies in the volume concentrate on Malaysia. Out of the nine chapters, six chapters are dedicated to examining Malaysia and only two look at Indonesia. As the discussion on Malaysia in the volume has been rich and detailed, additional chapters covering issues of modernity in Indonesia would have made for a more balanced perspective.

Other than issues of Indonesian ethnicity and citizenship that had been addressed by Kenneth Young and Thung Ju-Lan, there is definitely a case for a wealth of possible studies on modernity in Indonesia. For instance, the last section in the volume, "Cultural and Moral Orientations," would have benefited from a comparative study of Indonesia. The anti-corruption campaign targeting high-profile officials in the recent years, for example, would have made a fascinating case study of issues pertaining to modernity. Since Indonesia's independence in 1949, the bureaucratization of its economic, political, and military practices has been ongoing. Yet, corruption meant that contemporary Indonesian state institutions, while practicing Western-style bureaucracy, also bear the hallmark of patrimonial culture: patronage (Bunte and Ufen 2009). It would be interesting to have a contributor address the question of how the Indonesian nation-state adopts and adapts to "modern" Western forms of institutions for checks-and-balances. He/she could also ponder the manner in which modern monetization of values leads to conceptions of corruption.

Since Kahn's idea of modern forms of exclusion is not merely ethnic, but also religious, Indonesia would have made an excellent illustration. A study of the subjugation of the religious minorities would confirm Kahn's argument of the "dark side" of contemporary life. For example, post-New Order decentralization, which replicated the state at a local level, has given rise to the central government's inability to protect the Yasmin Bogor Church congregation's freedom to worship. The Indonesian state faces a dilemma in the modern form of exclusion. On the one hand, outside of the six official religions, indigenous religions such as the Sunda Wiwitan are not allowed to declare their faith on their identity cards. On the other hand, while the central government professes adherence to secularist principles in governing the nation, its inability to accept secularist views among its citizens is evident in the jailing of atheist civil servant Alexander Aan for posting "God does not exist" on his Facebook account in June 2012.

There is space for comparative study of both countries in the volume as well. For one, like Malaysia, Indonesia is also seeing the entrance of Islam into both its public and political sphere (Fealy and White 2008). Muhammad Syafii Antonio and Umar Juoro have written about Islamic banking and other economic initiatives in Indonesia (*ibid.*); their insights would make for a fascinating comparison with Kahn and Oh's chapters in the book. Looking at how Indonesia and Malaysia's modernity included looking towards the Middle Eastern-derived, global form of Islam would have enriched the discussion of modernity in the volume.

Finally, given the theoretical nature of the book, it will make useful reading material for

academics who teach theoretical analysis. Students of area studies will also find this volume a good read.

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## *Freedom from the Press: Journalism and State Power in Singapore*

CHERIAN GEORGE

Singapore: NUS Press, 2012, xiii+272 p.

This multi-disciplinary study of the relationship between the Singapore government and the press comes from the author of one of the most widely cited books on Singapore politics in recent times. Cherian George's first book, *Singapore: The Air-Conditioned Nation: Essays on the Politics of Comfort and Control 1990–2000* (2000), was written for a more general audience, and tackled a range of particular ironies that come about in living in illiberal Singapore. In that earlier book, George already pointed out the fact that while "In liberal democracies, it is all about freedom of the press from the government; in Singapore, it is about the government's freedom from the press" (George 2000, 69). These initial instincts have now fully taken root and blossomed in *Freedom from the Press*, reflecting the author's move from a journalistic milieu to an academic one.

Based on extensive historical research, and balanced with insider anecdotes, *Freedom from the Press* is a nuanced, courageous, and perceptive analysis of the relationship between the Singaporean press and the government. Unlike other more quotidian critiques of the journalists, publications, and the government of the country, George provides a far more thorough critical history and theoretical basis for his observations. Crucially, he also acknowledges his own complicity in the matter, having spent most of his early career as a fairly successful journalist for *The Straits Times*—Singapore's main newspaper. This accounts for the book's greatest strength and weakness: although George is able to reveal the inner workings of the mainstream press in Singapore, he is never really able to completely step outside of the system that he is analyzing. What is apparent though is his unwavering (if somewhat old-fashioned) commitment to the primacy of the