

### Book Reviews

Public interest in Southeast Asia comes and goes. More students in the West need to appreciate the significance of the region, and not be distracted by the high-profile progress of China and India. *Southeast Asian Development* is pitched at undergraduates in universities. It will be adopted in university courses if it connects with the pedagogical needs of teachers and undergraduates. But are textbooks the best way of introducing Southeast Asia to tertiary students? Can they provide the textual anchor for an introductory course? In some countries, and in some fields, textbooks are mandatory. But there are many sources of information and interpretation of a sprawling and a dynamic region such as Southeast Asia with which books have to compete.

Gen Y, progeny of the digital age, and those who teach them, might have expected the book to provide more connections to the diverse set of reliable electronic resources that would flesh out their understanding of Southeast Asia: radio, television and newspapers, the cinema, and the web that provides access to all four. There are relatively few websites listed. Students use search engines to find sources on everything, but they need a better interface between texts and the credible but fluid sources on the web.

Using the format of the Routledge series, the book is clearly written and logically structured. Chapters are broken up with boxed inserts, some written by others, some the author's précis of the published literature. These add specific information on case studies, and additional texture. Maps and black and white photographs provide visual reference points. Each chapter ends with a dot-point summary of the contents, discussion questions, further reading, and a few useful websites. It is a concise, sweeping introduction, with a development studies orientation overlapping with Asian studies. It will provide students with a sound introduction to Southeast Asia, and is good enough to attract them to explore further.

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DEAN FORBES

**SOUTHEAST ASIA IN POLITICAL SCIENCE: Theory, Region, and Qualitative Analysis.** Edited by Erik Martinez Kuhonta, Dan Slater, Tuong Vu. California: Stanford University Press, 2008. xviii, 455 pp. (Tables.) US\$29.95, paper. ISBN 978-0-8047-6152-9.

The comparative study of politics continues to experience fierce disciplinary battles over methods. At stake for many is the future of what comparative politics should become: a field of large datasets and global theories; or of context-sensitive field and archival research, using substantive knowledge to develop concepts and theories. That this dichotomy is a false one has not made the debates surrounding it any less inflammatory.

*Southeast Asia in Political Science* is a welcome contribution to this discussion, and should become required reading for all graduate students interested

in the politics of the region. Kuhonta, Slater and Vu ("KSV") have brought together an impressive group of scholars who have all written engaging essays. As the subtitle suggests, the authors are concerned with the contributions that regional specialists using qualitative methods have made to theories of comparative politics. As such, the bulk of the book deals with substantive topics in comparative politics. Chapters 1 (by KSV) and 13 (by Donald Emmerson), by contrast, are about theory and method in political science and their relationship to Southeast Asian studies. Rather than treat each chapter individually, I consider here themes common across them.

KSV propose two goals for their volume. The first is to *catalogue* the political science research done by Southeast Asianists using qualitative methods. The second is to *generalize* about the contributions that these scholars have made to broader theoretical debates. KSV have succeeded brilliantly in accomplishing their first goal. The substantive chapters are all sharp and well-written, each weaving together sprawling literatures on many countries with the major theoretical debates in comparative politics.

I am less convinced that the volume accomplishes KSV's second, more ambitious, goal. The chapters offer a few examples of how Southeast Asianists have made other comparativists take notice of their contributions, but I am more struck by how seldom this has happened. I am unsure if this is a failure of Southeast Asianists or of other comparativists. Nevertheless, chapters by Abrami and Doner on economic development, Hicken on political parties, and Slater on regime types are particularly good at showing how Southeast Asianists can make bold contributions that have shaped (and will shape) comparative politics research.

KSV are weakest on interpretivism, which they portray as being in some degree of opposition to positivism. This conflates two understandings of positivism: the logico-deductive positivism of rational choice theory, and positivism as an ontological position on knowledge. The former understanding is completely, not partially, *incompatible* with interpretivism, for it assumes the things (preferences, identities, etc.) that interpretivists seek to uncover. But the latter understanding is completely *compatible* with positivism. Interpretivists—as KSV characterize them—share the ontological assumptions of econometricians about the possibilities of knowledge. Facts exist, and can be known. There is a purely anti-positivist kind of interpretivism, drawn from critical studies; where facts do not exist independently of the intersubjective beliefs of observers, but this does not appear in this volume.

Discussions of small-*n* research and "causal process observations" are also shaky (although no shakier than other work on this topic). Causal-process observations do not solve degrees-of-freedom problems by "increasing the *n*," they do so by recasting the research as a different kind of enterprise. The inferences that can be made given the data are different. Moreover, Bayesians have proposed that the number of causal process observations is

less important than the weight given each conditional on prior subjective beliefs.

These are minor concerns. A larger concern is the overlap between qualitative methods and regional knowledge that the volume's tone suggests. All chapters raise a critical point, which is that one cannot hope to learn about the world while excluding a part of it from careful analysis. They also demonstrate the value of qualitative research for tackling big, important questions. But there is a tendency to elide area studies with qualitative methods, as if context-sensitive knowledge were incompatible with quantitative hypothesis testing. Hicken's chapter is an exception, but a lonely one.

*Southeast Asia in Political Science* therefore misses an opportunity to emphasize a broader point for Southeast Asianists, which is that methods must always serve questions, not the other way around. This is wholly consistent with their defense of qualitative analysis, but captures other contributions that Southeast Asianists can make to comparative politics. For some questions that Southeast Asianists may ask about public opinion, voting, or political economy, quantitative methods are invaluable. And by not recognizing when quantitative methods are useful, the volume also misses an opportunity to be critical of the situations when they are clearly not. This is when researchers follow the "wannabe economists" model of comparative politics, parachuting into a country, ignorant of its history and language, curious about neither, but equipped with the technical skills to produce statistical results devoid of context, which is to say, findings without meaning. This is where Emmerson's rejection of area experts playing junior partners to quantitative and formal scholars is most relevant.

This does not detract from what KSV have accomplished. Each chapter taught me something about Southeast Asia and excited me about theoretical debates in comparative politics. This is no small feat, and it makes this volume very appealing.

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**EARLY SOUTHEAST ASIA: Selected Essays.** By O.W. Wolters, edited by Craig J. Reynolds. Ithaca (NY): Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2008. xii, 236 pp. (Figures, photos.) US\$23.95, paper. ISBN 978-0-87727-743-9.

This is an important book, especially in the sense of understanding the early history of Southeast Asia. It is a collection of essays by the late, well-known historian of Southeast Asia, O.W. Wolters. The consideration behind this volume, as indicated by the editor, "is to introduce the work of O.W. Wolters