

References

- Bernad, Miguel. 2004. *The great island: Studies in the exploration and evangelization of Mindanao*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Jonsson, Hjorleifur. 2011. States lie, and stories are tools: Following up on Zomia. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 167(1): 92–94.

GEORGE E. DUTTON (ed.). *Voices of Southeast Asia: Essential Readings from Antiquity to the Present*. Armonk, New York; London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 2014. 235 pp.

The litmus test for determining the cogency of any anthology lies in its range. Is the collection sufficiently representative, or does it suffer from a substantial lack thereof? Through this lens can be gleaned both the efficacies and failings of this particular collection of literary writings from Southeast Asia.

Put together by the eminent Vietnamese scholar George E. Dutton, the collection purports to provide “a sampler... of the vast Southeast Asian literary traditions” (p. xii). This is an important qualifier that frees the book from allegations of canonisation. Dutton is not claiming to showcase the best works, but those that appear to him to make the most sense as introductory writings for the region.

Still, considering that Dutton’s most recent compendium *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition* (2012), which he compiled alongside political scientist Jayne Werner and historian John Whitmore, was critically praised for its scope, there is much to be excited about in *Voices of Southeast Asia*.

With regards to structure, at least, *Voices* does not disappoint. As with the preceding *Sources*, each chapter comes with a short introduction that situates these selected literary writings in their wider historical and textual contexts. Within these introductions can be found a wealth of information that concretises Dutton’s alluring treatise – the postulation that Southeast Asia is a region that absorbed the great Sinic, Indic, and Islamic cultures, eventually making these its own through a process of indigenisation.

For instance, Dutton gestures to the intertextual links between the seminal 15th-century text *Sejarah Melayu* and the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. If this link can be articulated more extensively, it has the potential of challenging the forceful postulation by the Malaysian philosopher Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamisation of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago* (1969) that a culture of intellectualism only came to flourish in the Malay-Indonesian world with the advent of Islam. For al-Attas, the Malays had only superficially taken to Hindu-Buddhist beliefs as a means through which the monarchs related to their subjects.

Dutton’s observation of the region as a cosmopolitan space through which cultures were processed and transformed coincides with Ronit Ricci’s interpretation in her book *Islam Translated* (2011). In this book, Ricci traces the evolution

of a tenth century Arabic text *The Book of One Thousand Questions*, a fictional narrative of poetic significance detailing a meeting between the Prophet and a Jewish leader. As this text was translated into Javanese and Malay between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, its linguistic features assumed Malay intonations, and its content was changed to suit local needs. In terms of Southeast Asian textual history, Dutton is thus in line with contemporary scholarship.

It is clear that this compendium is designed to make Southeast Asia palatable for those unfamiliar with the region. Introductory chapters are a big help here, but so too is a set of accompanying questions for the readings. A more seasoned observer of the region, however, might question some of Dutton's assumptions. As he thematises his collection, Dutton explains that these texts were partly chosen to outline the way power operated in ancient Southeast Asian societies. While this is not inaccurate, such an observation is simply treated as empirical data, glossing over the gravity of oppression that existed in a feudal society.

The downplaying of tyrannical structures in the book is a noticeable misstep given that much of modern and contemporary Southeast Asian literary work is built on the idea of breaking the shackles of subjugation – be it from European colonisers, or from native neo-colonisers. In this sense, Dutton's intention of using his selected works as a means of channelling the 'voices' of the common folk needs revisiting. Were there voices that have been unwittingly silenced?

It is also worth considering that little is said about the intricacies of translation, other than acknowledging the names of translators. The cultural turn in translation studies theorised by the likes of scholars like Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere in the late twentieth century means that any study of texts needs to explore translation more seriously. Such was Ricci's strategy in penning *Islam Translated*, a project that garnered ground breaking insights through a study of translation alone. One wonders how some exploration of translation strategies might have enriched our understanding of the selected literary works in *Voices*.

Finally, it is apt to reconsider the question of scope. This book is an ambitious attempt at mapping the textual landscape of an unwieldy, disparate region. While Dutton's thematisation and chapter introductions are helpful in leading readers to deliberate upon the region's commonalities, it is also the case that Dutton's expertise in Vietnam and the greater Indochina region could have influenced his choices of texts. While Dutton qualifies in his introduction that the book is not meant to represent all Southeast Asian nations, a quick glance at his collection reveals a discrepancy. Although all five nations of Indochina are represented, not all countries of maritime Southeast Asia have had their works included. Conspicuously, there are no writings from Brunei and Timor-Leste, the region's two oft-ignored nations.

Yet this is not so much a critique of Dutton's choices as it is of the discipline of area studies, wherein the need to map the world in terms of nation-states means that there is always a case to be made for exclusion and insufficient

representation. Perhaps it is time for anthologies to gravitate along themes and ideas instead.

NAZRY BAHRAWI

Singapore University of Technology and Design
nazry_bahrawi@sutd.edu.sg

References

- Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib. 1969. *Preliminary statement on a general theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Bassnett, Susan and André Lefevere. 1998. *Constructing cultures: Essays on literary translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Dutton, George E., Jayne S. Werner and John K. Whitmore (eds.). 2012. *Sources of Vietnamese tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ricci, Ronit. 2011. *Islam translated: Literature, conversion, and the Arabic cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

PARK SEUNG WOO and VICTOR T. KING (eds.). *The Historical Construction of Southeast Asian Studies: Korea and Beyond*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2013. 468 pp.

If the debate on area studies in general and Southeast Asian Studies in particular has produced a new stream of publications during the last two decades (Rafael 1994, Bowen 2004, Goh 2011), it has rarely taken up the challenge that editors Park Seung Woo and Victor T. King set for this collection of essays. Whilst the large majority of existing works has examined “the history, current state, and the future of the study of Southeast Asia in the United States and other Western countries” (p. 6), the achievement of this edited volume is in providing a platform for scholars from East Asia; in refocusing our attention to the establishment of Southeast Asian Studies in predominantly Asian contexts; and in making relevant material written in Asian vernacular languages accessible to a larger international readership. The volume itself, having grown out of a long-term research project at the Institute for East Asian Studies at Sogang University (SIEAS) in the Republic of Korea, hence constitutes written proof of the impressive vitality of Southeast Asian Studies in that country in particular, amid observations of a persistent ‘crisis’ of area studies in Western academic contexts.

The introduction by Victor King and Park Seung Woo refers to important publications in the conversation on Southeast Asian Studies, but also clearly states that the volume is “not so much concerned with engaging in the central debates, theories and methodologies in Southeast Asian Studies or in addressing