

DONNA J. AMOROSO. *Traditionalism and the Ascendancy of the Malay Ruling Class in Colonial Malaya*. SIRD & NUS Press, 2014. 276 pp.

It is unusual to find an academic monograph that the author herself was reluctant to publish. Posthumously brought out almost twenty years after the 1996 dissertation which it was based, Donna J. Amoroso's book was clearly written in a different era of Malaysian politics. The sense that Malaysians "were looking forward rather than back" (p. xxxiii) after Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed's fall from office accounted in part for Amoroso's ambivalence. Despite her misgivings and the considerable time lag, the ideas in the work remain trenchant.

Amoroso's historical analysis probes the construction of an ideological hegemony based on an invented tradition that enabled the Malayan ruling class to maintain its power during the colonial period and after the Second World War. The conscious appropriation of the past as a seemingly timeless tradition for contemporary advantage is what she terms 'traditionalism'. The argument is structured in two parts. The first four chapters cover the pre-war period, marked by a tension between preservation and progress, conflicting goals that both the Malay rulers and the British wished to achieve. Accepting monetary allowances in lieu of real power, the rulers nonetheless retained the appearance of a *kerajaan* by redefining Malay court culture. Unlike previous scholars (Roff 1967, Milner 1995) who connected the political modernisation of the Malays with the rise of print in the 20th century, Amoroso convincingly argues that "even before the British extended formal colonial rule over the Malaya states, a British discourse of good government and civilisation had become pervasive in Malay politics" (p. 63). The result was the bureaucratisation of the Malay court, an openness to foreign capital and labour, as well as the creation of territorially bounded Malay states. Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor exemplified this change. He refashioned himself as a modern leader by British standards while projecting his Malay identity. Such traditionalism enabled Malay rulers to mask change as continuity and hold on to power despite dissatisfaction among small segments of the community.

The second half of the book deals with the ways the Japanese Occupation disrupted the equilibrium, culminating in unprecedented Malay political activism against the British proposal for the Malayan Union. Disenchanted by Malay rulers' cooperation with the Japanese, the British proposed a new state that would have eroded special rights for Malays. In Amoroso's view, the rulers were unequal to the task of fighting this change, finally allowing the educated aristocracy to take the lead. This group embarked on another round of traditionalism that ultimately propelled a conservative ruling coalition fronted by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) to power that was maintained up to this day. Unlike UMNO-centred narratives, Amoroso reveals political dissension during this period, particularly between UMNO and the Malay Nationalist Party of Malaya (PKMM). Moreover, the gradual narrowing of diverse opinions at the time highlighted that UMNO's success lay in its acuity in harnessing tradition for political gain, not its nationalism. From this perspective, the book is very much a revisionist history, arguing that by conflating Malaya with Malayness, "political conservatism deflected calls for independence" (p. 220).

Amoroso's study complements Harper's magisterial *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (1999) that analysed the end of colonialism in Malaya from a British perspective. Both works emphasise the inherent messiness in this process, but Amoroso's book remains one of a very few that focuses on the role of the Malay rulers in shaping Malaysia's modern political culture. Although her sources are similar to those utilised by Harper – namely, the British colonial archives and contemporary Malay newspapers – her study's discursive analysis is a pioneering effort. She provides a new take on Malay nationalism, locating its roots further back in the past, and framing traditionalism as a consistent leitmotif in two eras that are often separated in the historiography.

Amoroso pays close attention to the significance of rituals and symbols, examples include the creation of regalia in states like Selangor, and how the Malayan national flag became “the first manifestation of the idea that UMNO was identical with the Malay nation” (p. 195). This places her work squarely within the cultural turn taken by many historians in the 1980s and 1990s, with its theoretical framework drawing heavily from Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). While effective in the first part of the book, the weaknesses of this cultural approach become apparent in the second. Crucially, her focus on traditionalism in the Malay sphere precludes a deeper examination of the impact of massive immigration during the colonial period. Unlike the scattered kingdoms of the 19th century, the colonial state no longer had an outright Malay majority by 1946. Consequently, the group that rose to power after decolonisation was not a single political party, but a multi-ethnic *alliance*, albeit one led by UMNO. The book notes that the cracks between UMNO and PKMM were part of class and ethnic fissures, but does not investigate the dialectical relationship between traditionalism and nascent multiculturalism. The fact that it provokes this question, however, indicates the significance of traditionalism as a concept.

In wider Southeast Asian historiography, there has been a turn towards regionalism and transnationalism in recent years. This work can potentially contribute to the latter since it lends itself well for further comparative study with other works about imperialism and the post-colonial state. For instance, readers could find shades of Amoroso's argument in Edwards' (2007) work on Cambodia. UMNO's ideological hegemony is far from unique in Asia where different degrees of authoritarianism predominate. Scholars interested in how and why such hegemony was established and propagated will likely find this book illuminating.

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CATHERINE ALLERTON. *Potent Landscapes: Place and Mobility in Eastern Indonesia*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013. 221pp.

This book provides new insights into the anthropological study of place. It challenges the Leiden School of thought which examined Eastern Indonesia by focusing on the cosmological order, but overlooked everyday life and mobility. The book also critically contests Levi-Strauss' concept of a house-based society. Through the cases of Wae Rebo, a highland area which recently attracted world-wide attention, and Kombo, a village comprising people from Wae Rebo, this book demonstrates that landscapes, mobility, and paths are equally important as elements for analysis and yet have often been ignored by anthropologists. As such the author has attempted to open up new areas of anthropological research by acknowledging the works of Ingold (2000), Clifford (1997), and others.

Based on two years of fieldwork and subsequent visits to the research sites, the book is well-organised and written in accessible language. Allerton leads the reader on a narrative journey through individual spaces in Wae Rebo and Kombo. She shows in detail how the residents engaged spiritually with the rooms and other parts of the house. By taking a closer look at path, landscapes, and the trajectories of migration, Allerton demystifies the common view of a house-based society, which treats the house as a single unit, by focusing on the rooms of the house.

The book engages in theory that is constructed on the basis of observation. In this regard, it serves as a good model for those who are interested in grounded theory. In each chapter, the author clearly presents and discusses her findings toward reconsidering and contesting various established disciplinary positions. Allerton suggests that it is essential for anthropologists to employ a multi-faceted approach; she also utilises the phenomenological method to analyse everyday life. In Chapter 2, she critically explains the permeability of the house through the use of the audio and olfactory senses to perceive voices and smoke. In contrast, the use of the tactile sense is not explored equally well.

Allerton usefully approaches ritual from an everyday perspective. She discusses how the memory of eating together with one's father is significant, as a married daughter can no longer eat with her father. This reveals the importance