

*Chinese Encounters in Southeast Asia: How People, Money, and Ideas from China Are Changing a Region*

PÁL NYÍRI and DANIELLE TAN, eds.

Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016.

Rising Chinese influences in Southeast Asia is an increasingly relevant and controversial issue in Southeast Asia. In *Chinese Encounters in Southeast Asia*, Pál Nyíri and Danielle Tan have assembled a timely and important selection of papers. Based on empirical research, these aim to address questions of China's impact in the region both in tangible terms—people, money—and the more intangible changes that come from rising Chinese ideas and perceptions in Southeast Asia.

This is a hugely ambitious volume, and one that combines case studies from across Southeast Asia. All the contributions recognize the speed and scale of China's rise and the many new ways in which China has entered the region. The volume starts with an informative foreword by Wang Gungwu, which sets up the discussion very well. Wang recognizes rightly that in 2018, notions of nations existing within clearly defined borders are increasingly problematic, a major theme of the contributions in the volume.

In their introduction, Nyíri and Tan state that they have attempted to provide a nuanced analysis of China's engagements in Southeast Asia and argue for the importance of day-to-day interactions. This sets up a framework that takes ethnography seriously. The authors are right to do this and to recognize that much of the literature on China in the developing world misses out on the ambivalent everyday interactions at local levels, and that binary distinctions—such as center–periphery and dominant–subordinate—obscure as much as they include. Similarly, they acknowledge that while China may have general policies toward the developing world, there is no one model for Chinese influences in Southeast Asia, which accounts for China being experienced differently and with varying levels of ambiguity throughout the region.

Part One of the book considers shifting identities. All three chapters in this section detail how change is not only a process of newcomers changing destination countries, but also about those countries changing in response to rising Chinese influences and the visible presence of growing numbers of Chinese. All the contributions in Part One speak to changing ideas of existing notions of what being Chinese means and its increasing conflation with being somehow attached to the territory of China. Nyíri's chapter on Chinese migration challenging the very meaning of Chinese in Cambodia and how prevailing norms are being reinterpreted in view of China's rise is particularly effective. This is also illustrated well in Yeoh and Lin's chapter, which questions the extent to which mobilities of Chinese are new and how these change the otherwise entrenched meanings including of migration itself. The section concludes with a chapter by Weng on Hui business and religious activities in Malaysia and Indonesia, and which includes some very insightful detail. However, I would have liked some further theorizing, which would have connected the ethno-

graphic detail more closely with the overriding themes of the book. This chapter also contains some very insightful details on being Chinese *and* Muslim, and how these identities combine. Weng is entirely right to insist that these are not mutually exclusive.

Part Two looks at livelihoods. Somewhat sadly, this section has only two chapters. Both are very well-written, however, and it is notable that both chapters in the livelihoods section focus on border areas. Siriphon examines *guanxi* practices in Northern Thailand: by viewing the border as a transnational space, he considers the lived experiences of social relationships and how these are changemakers from the ground up. Siriphon's conclusion that language now overshadows relationships of ethnicity is an interesting one and something that I would have liked to have seen developed further in the essay. However, his key observation about how new migrants view themselves as both Chinese citizens and persons belonging to the territory of China echoes similar arguments made in Part One. This is an important distinction in thinking about new waves of Chinese migration into Southeast Asia, and how they are different. Following this, Grillot and Zhang's chapter on ambivalent encounters on the China–Vietnam border is an outstanding essay that considers the border space as a place that embodies attraction, exoticism, and adventure. Through a focus on sex workers, they argue that Vietnam is imagined and experienced through the bodies of these women. Grillot and Zhang argue that these women represent difference and provide a forum for encounters with an exotic other. Their argument that these women represent Vietnam as an ambivalent place to their Chinese customers is a very compelling one, and again connects well with overall themes of ambiguity in encounters between China and Southeast Asia.

Part Three comprises four chapters. This section is labeled “norms,” which seems a misnomer as the book is all about changing norms. Nevertheless, the four case studies once again cover a wide geographical area. Hau looks at the relationship between Philippine politics and Chinese commercial interests. She notes there are multiple implications to this, and connects new Chinese businesses with politics at both micro and macro levels. At times, this chapter seems to lack focus. However, it makes some good arguments about the importance of establishing very specific relationships within the Philippines, and how international tensions are reproduced directly in apparently domestic politics. In the following chapter, Danielle Tan argues in her title for “An alternative account of state formation in Laos” by considering Chinese activities in the Golden Triangle. This chapter is excellently written and has a very authoritative quality. Tan's argument for aspects of state functions being outsourced to actors that the state rejects publicly as a reality in this area is well made. My only criticism of this argument is that I would have liked further consideration of local Lao voices. She states that Chinese investment and influences help to strengthen the Lao state in remote areas, yet this is not what her interlocutors appear to be saying in their statements that Lao territory is being surrendered to Chinese interests and agendas.

In the following chapter, entitled “China in Burma,” Woods presents very convincing arguments backed by strong theory and analysis. He argues strongly against the binary distinctions of

dominant–subordinate and center–periphery outlined at the start of this review, and offers an excellent illustration of just why these distinctions are problematic. Like Tan, he argues convincingly for the state becoming embodied in people and in places that the state rejects publicly. He is entirely correct and his assertions that entire questions of China in Burma are as complex as they are multi-faceted. Finally in this section, Hensengerth provides a detailed overview of water governance and hydropower projects in the Mekong Basin. He argues that the rules of engagement for how companies, governments, hydropower bodies, and NGOs engage in hydro-power are contested. This chapter is well written, and very accessible to a non-specialist. My only criticism of an otherwise useful and insightful chapter is that some of the references seem quite old. I would have liked to know if the situation has changed since some of this research took place.

The last section comprises two chapters. Herlijanto considers Indonesian responses to the rise of China. This chapter provides a fascinating overview into how perceptions of China in Indonesia have undergone radical change since the end of the Suharto regime. Herlijanto considers how the positive climate has developed and in what ways China is now seen as representing positive things in various ways. I would have liked to know whether any negative perceptions remain, or whether any new negative ideas have appeared. Finally, Lyttleton's essay, which concludes the book, is an outstanding chapter that questions notions of modernity. On initial reading, this chapter appears somewhat abstract in its consideration of how notions of desire are relevant to questions of China and a perceived relationship between China and modernity. While many of the essays in this volume look rightly at *what* is happening in the region, this chapter is unique in its more philosophical standpoint of taking the question of *why* as a starting point. Lyttleton's contribution attempts to unpick the rhetoric of what catchphrases, such as the Greater Mekong Sub Region's "community, competition and connectedness" (p.216), actually mean in lived experience. Lyttleton concludes that in a rapidly changing world, the questions of asking what the world is changing into, how and why, are more relevant than ever.

Overall, *Chinese Encounters in Southeast Asia* is an excellent book and provides vital insights into growing Chinese influences in Southeast Asia. It fulfills the promising remit outlined in the introduction and foreword. It also demonstrates clearly that China's rising profile is not experienced the same universally and shows that local agency and understandings remain important, perhaps increasingly and particularly in their demonstrations of how the rise of China is experienced ambivalently and is marked by ambiguity. For this reason, I have pluralized China's influences throughout this review. All the contributors point to this being a mass movement of ideas, people, and money from China. However, while this often has similar characteristics, it takes very different forms. This volume is a timely and important contribution to the existing body of literature, which often views China's rise in international terms that negate lived experiences. I highly recommend it as a valuable contribution in both area studies and across the social sciences.

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ANG CHENG GUAN

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*Southeast Asia's Cold War* makes a significant contribution to understanding the Cold War's long history in Southeast Asia. Its author, Ang Cheng Guan, takes on a mammoth task: writing a capacious political and diplomatic history of Southeast Asia beginning in the turbulent period after 1919 until the Cold War's conclusion in 1991. He largely accomplishes this task in a snappy 198 pages by blending recent secondary literature, memoirs, and primary sources. Spatially, the book strikes a fair balance between maritime and mainland Southeast Asia while incorporating the perspectives of China, the United States, and the Soviet Union. Ang also aptly weaves in the ascendance of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to articulate how regional leaders anticipated a new, post-Vietnam War political landscape. Cogently writing this history is no mean feat, and there is much to celebrate in this ambitious book.

The volume harkens back to an older era of scholarship in diplomatic history. Ang declares in his introduction that he is moving away from the preoccupations that dominated the literature during the cultural turn of the past few decades. By foregrounding politics and diplomacy, he sets the terms for an argument that ties decolonization and nation-building with the Cold War in order to outline the creation of Southeast Asia as a political space during much of the twentieth century. He deserves praise for his reasoned stance that the literature needs an overview that traces the region's diverse local and international diplomatic inputs while simultaneously integrating regional voices that are often neglected.

One of the book's signal contributions is the selection of an interpretive lens that contends with Southeast Asia "from within rather than without" (p. 194). This perspective is sorely missing, and Ang is to be commended for placing readers in the region and not solely in the halls of great powers. He adeptly steers away from the historical literature that privileges the experience of the United States. Readers should not expect to see the names of historians of American foreign relations who predominantly discuss the Vietnam War. The author does not cite myriad works by Marilyn Young, Fredrik Logevall, Mark Lawrence, or Mark Philip Bradley. Utilizing the vast scholarly output of American foreign relations historians would be easy, and it is doubtful that this is an accidental strategy. As a result, readers benefit from Ang's choice to employ scholarship that grapples with the region on its own terms.

How does an author craft an almost century-long diplomatic history of the region? Historians