

REZENSIONEN

Khai Leong Ho (Hg.): Connecting and Distancing: Southeast Asia and China

Singapur: ISEAS, 2009. 265 S., EUR 52,99

Against the background of an ever-strong(er) China, exerting perceptible influence especially in its neighborhood, the eleven contributions in this edited volume trace the relationship between the countries of Southeast Asia and China in various fields and through many epochs. Compiled by Ho Khai Leong of Nanyang Technological University Singapore and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore, all chapters - with the exception of the introductory one - take a Southeast Asian perspective on this relationship. On an interdisciplinary scale, ranging from history, political science and sociology to economics, they aim at depicting various countries' ways of encountering China as oscillating between *connecting* and *distancing*. As explained by the editor, there is a need to reconsider these two dominant themes in the writings on Sino-Southeast Asian relations when thinking about the contemporary realities of dealing with China. For instance, while perceptions of a benevolent and peaceful China may encourage connections mainly meant to "reap the benefits from the successful economic modernization in China" (p. xi) or even motivate cooperation, the "China threat" theory rather raises concerns about sovereignty and is likely to result in playing a distanced waiting game or trying to partition as far as possible from Chinese access. However, Ho and his co-authors argue that neither the image of China nor the ways of dealing with it are static or clear-cut.

The book is divided into three main sections. In the first domain, "History and Remembrance", an account of Sino-Southeast

Asian interactions and dynamics from the tributary era to the present and a chapter on Philippine-China connections from pre-colonial times to the post-Cold War era, embrace different dimensions of this relationship, including political, economic and societal ones. The third chapter is a more specialized examination of World War II commemoration in Singapore in the immediate post-War years of 1946/47, focused on Chinese-language newspapers. It is followed by a study on the different aspects of the "revolutionary" and "patriotic" donation campaign to China in Penang between 1911 and 1913, taking into account that Chinese in Penang did not unanimously support the revolutionary cause. The next chapter deals with how "China" came to be perceived in the eyes of Overseas Chinese tea traders in colonial Singapore. A study on Myanmar's relations with China from the fifth century CE until the mid-eighteenth century, containing one of the very few investigations into Burmese language sources on the subject, concludes this section. The second part, "the Cultural and Chinese Identity", includes an analysis of the position of Chinese students in Singapore with a special focus on the secondary education sector, stating that they are to be considered as a particular group among the "new" Chinese migrants in the city state. Subsequently, we find a broader study on the cultural identity of Chinese in Indonesia in the Soeharto era and "watershed events in the revival of Chinese culture post-1998" (p. 153), focusing on the role of the media in identity formation and maintenance. The opening chapter of the final part of the book, "Economy, Politics and Regionalism", deals with strategic policy implementations of China's economic emergence and analyzes some of the policy responses adopted by Southeast Asian countries. After that Taiwan-China relations in East Asian

regional integration are analyzed on the basis of similarities and differences between *old* and *new regionalisms* from Taiwan's vantage point. The last chapter focuses on Vietnamese strategies in maintaining a normal diplomatic relationship with China through the concept of "language power".

Altogether, the volume presents a collection of very different disciplinary, analytical and methodological perspectives on Sino-Southeast Asian relations. On the one hand, this is the book's big accomplishment, as multi- and bilateral state-level studies are complemented by analyses of interpersonal encounters and identity building, and light is shed on the many interdependencies between these dimensions. This assortment is emblematic for the multi-faceted and complex relationship between China and the countries of Southeast Asia, which cannot just be assigned to one of the two extremes of "distancing" or "connecting". On the other hand, it is precisely this mixture which is problematic, as all chapters appear to be strung together without any coherent concept and are not even oriented at the volume's overarching interest, as stated by the title and the editor. Bearing in mind the scope and diversity of the research field, this could, nevertheless, have been avoided if at least all authors would have stuck to the task of placing their findings on the central continuum of "distancing" or "connecting" - which only two of them did -, or at the least to critically integrate these categories. Furthermore, while not all Southeast Asian states are (equally) represented, the chapter on Sino-Taiwanese integration seems even more surprising in this composition. However, these shortcomings might be due to the very nature of edited volumes and can be accepted with regard to the book's rich contents and the creditable effort of reflecting historical and cultural continuities in the current political developments in Sino-Southeast Asian relations. Not least, the recent tensions in the South China Sea are evidence of how complex this relationship still is.

To put it in a nutshell, the book is an asset for students of Chinese and Southeast Asian Studies and a good complementary source for graduate courses on Sino-Southeast Asian relations.

Anna L. Ahlers

Graham P. Chapman: The Geopolitics of South Asia. From Early Empires to the Nuclear Age

Farnham & Burlington: Ashgate, 2009 (Third Edition). 362 S., GBP 25,00

Nur neun Jahre nach der Erstausgabe und sechs Jahre nach Erscheinen der zweiten Auflage legte Graham P. Chapman 2009 bereits die dritte Fassung seines Werkes „The Geopolitics of South Asia“ vor. Der Autor reagierte hierbei nicht nur auf die Entwicklungsdynamiken Südasiens, die Aktualisierungen und Ergänzungen unumgänglich machten, sondern auch auf die anhaltend große Nachfrage. Der immense Erfolg des Buches erstaunt keineswegs: Es behandelt eine in ihrer Bedeutung wachsende Weltregion, wird in seiner Materialdichte nur von wenigen anderen Werken erreicht und ist zudem hervorragend geschrieben.

Chapmans Thema ist die Verbindung von gesellschaftlicher Entwicklung und territorialer Organisation in Südasien. Seine Rolle als externer Beobachter, der eine relativ unvoreingenommene Perspektive einnehmen kann, interpretiert er hierbei als Vorteil, was angesichts der mitunter stürmischen Diskurse in Südasien selbst wohl nicht ganz zu unrecht geschieht. Vor allem aber bringt Chapman als Geograph und Sozialwissenschaftler einen multidisziplinären Ansatz ein. Sein Ausgangspunkt ist dementsprechend auch die natürliche, physische Beschaffenheit Südasiens, welche zwar die Entwicklung einer eigenständigen geopolitischen Region vorzeichnet, aber keinen „geographischen Determinismus der Staaten-