

specifics, the word loses its usefulness. ... It categorizes people and fails to explore adequately the ways in which people struggle against, and resist, such depictions" (p. 148). Similar considerations have to be taken into account with many other phenomena of change in Southeast Asia.

Rural-urban dynamics, i.e. interaction, modernization and transformation processes, are focused in in the third part: Here the tremendous changes in agriculture, the rural villages, industrial performance and urban functions as well as rural-urban interactions and dependencies are questioned. While stressing: "The notion that there are distinct and separate worlds ... is shown to be deeply flawed as more and more people, and with greater frequency, cross the 'divide' between the two" (p. 153), the author gives several proofs in this chapter for the summary that "the process of 'change' – one is chary to use the terms 'modernization' or 'development' – which is not just complex in time and space, but also subject to multiple interpretations given different cultural and ideological backdrops." (p. 154).

Part four brings together the major ideas of the three previous parts, while looking more closely to the winners and losers in the "landscape of modernization and impoverishment" (p. 279) in Southeast Asia.

Apart from valuable "unfashionable" perceptions and remarks – which set the unique concept – the book offers a highly readable mixture of facts, background information, statements and conclusions, enriched by a plethora of useful material (maps, diagrams, tables and inset boxes) and well-chosen references.

Frauke Kraas

MAHA SILA VIRAVONG, *Prinz Phetsarat – ein Leben für Laos. "Eine Biographie von Chao Maha Uparat Phetsarat" und "Die Geschichte des 12. Oktober 1945"*. Übersetzt aus dem Laotischen und herausgegeben von Volker Grabowsky. (Periplus-Texte 4). Münster: Lit Verlag, 2003. xxi, 179 pages, illustrations, € 20.90. ISBN 3-8258-6492-8

Prince Phetsarat (1893–1959) was one of the great historical personalities of the 20th century in Southeast Asia. As vice-king of Luang Prabang he was paramount in the struggle for independence of his motherland Laos. Therefore, Prince Phetsarat – also known as the "Iron Prince" – is admired in the whole of Laos as the father of the Laotian nation. To date, half a century after his death, Laotians wear amulets with his portrait. This tradition is comparable to the Thai custom of wearing amulets with King Chulalongkorn's portrait. For the Lao, Prince Phetsarat has a historical significance similar to that of King Chulalongkorn, the builder of modern Thailand, for the Thai.

Though historians do not question Prince Phetsarat's role in the Lao struggle for independence and his importance as the "father of Lao nationalism", little is known about the person and life of Prince Phetsarat. The only biography

in a Western language, entitled "Iron man of Laos: Prince Phetsarat Ratana-vongsa" was published in 1978 under the pseudonym "3349". It is supposed that parts of this biography, which was originally composed in the Thai language, were written by Prince Phetsarat himself.

Another biography was written in the late 1950s by Maha Sila Viravong, the then leading historian and still most important Laotian historian and philologist, who was Prince Phetsarat's private secretary for many years. This biography is a key to the understanding of this complex personality, who was active not only in the fields of politics and administration, but also of religion and traditional royal culture. The biography describes events in Prince Phetsarat's life, as well as his personal character and work, vividly and in detail. It begins with a discussion of the prince's royal lineage, and his traditional as well as French education. His personal courageousness is described in several events like hunting and fighting against wild animals, for which his people greatly admired him. This part reflects an important aspect of traditional royal culture, which is only too often neglected in historiography. Another section gives details about Prince Phetsarat as a political leader and historical personality. His role in administration and politics, and the national struggle for independence in particular, are described, as well as his attitude to religion (Buddhism) and national culture.

Furthermore, the historical events during World War II, the occupation of Indochina by the Japanese, the declaration of the independence of Laos in 1945, and the subsequent reinstatement of French power in the country which led to Prince Phetsarat's escape to Thailand, are explained in detail. Emphasis is also given to Prince Phetsarat's work there as head of the Lao Itsala ("Free Laos")-movement, a sister organisation of the Seri Thai ("Free Thailand")-movement in Thailand. In 1957 the prince returned to his motherland without having realized his dream of an independent Laos.

The biography includes some original documents like the notes of talks between Prince Phetsarat, the people's delegates and the government on July 16, 1956; the declaration No. 7; the declaration of Prince Phetsarat; and the declaration between the governmental delegates of the Kingdom of Laos and the delegates of the Pathet Lao.

The second part of the book is the story of "The 12th October 1945", the day of the declaration of Laos' independence. Prince Phetsarat played not only a central role in the struggle for independence of the Laotian nation, but also in its proclamation on 12th October 1945 by the Prince himself. This work of Maha Sila Viravong was not published until August 1975, though it is indeed an important complement to the biography of Prince Phetsarat.

Although Prince Phetsarat is seen as an outstanding historical personality among the Lao, the government and the party still hesitate to accept him as a "national hero". Presently, monuments in honour of great historical personalities of the Laotian nation are being erected throughout the country. Besides the former leading cadre of the party, Kaysone Phomvihane, only three historical

personalities have so far been honoured with such a monument: King Setthathirat (1548–1573), King Surinyavongsa (1633–1690), and King Chao Anou (1804–1828), the first two symbolizing the glory of Laos, and the last named the struggle of the Lao people against Siamese hegemony.

The translator and editor of the book, Volker Grabowsky, is Professor of Southeast Asian history at the University of Münster. He has worked as senior lecturer for Lao language and literature at the National University of Laos. His recent research focuses on the history of the Tai peoples in Southeast Asia and southern China.

The translation of both works of Viravong provides us with an important source which, hopefully, will enhance the further study of the recent history of Laos. Besides this, Grabowsky's introduction to the book is a valuable contribution to a better understanding of the biography of Prince Phetsarat and the story of the declaration of independence in the context not only of Laotian history, but of Southeast Asian history as well. A large appendix of personal and place names, given both in Laotian and Latin script, as well as a bibliography, index, maps and historical photographs round off the book.

Jana Rändchen

KEES VAN DIJK, *A Country in Despair. Indonesia between 1997 and 2000*. (Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, 186). Leiden: KITLV Press, 2001. 396 pages, € 31.80, ISBN 90-6718-160-9 (pb)

As the fourth most populous country in the world Indonesia is one of the potential heavyweights in international relations, especially because it is also the country with the largest Muslim population. It is this international context that makes the *reformasi* era, i.e. the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule since the step-down of President Suharto in 1998, an important topic not only for the country and its immediate neighbours. In this era, many fundamental decisions were made in a great number of fields, such as politics, economics, religious affairs, and culture at large, that will be of lasting influence. This is why it is foreseeable that the *reformasi* period will be seen in the future as one of the classic points of reference for Indonesian area studies as well as for a number of other disciplines.

Kees van Dijk's book has all the prerequisites for becoming one of the standard works of this period for a variety of these approaches. The reason is simple: Since the book follows a descriptive approach, it is similar to a chronicle or a diary covering this turbulent period week by week. Based on extensive research of Indonesian-language material, especially from the print and internet media, the book provides the reader with a detailed summary of what happened when, who did what, and who said what to whom. Excellent indexes and other