

maintain. In turn, colonialism had a deep impact upon these forest dwellers, forcing them into the global economic system. Two particularly interesting case studies show how on the one hand the Soras of Orissa were drawn into a vicious circle of indebtedness and defraud, while on the other hand the Orang Asli in Malaya harboured resistance to the government even after the Malay states had gained independence.

The book shows many interesting facets of the relationship between man and – mostly – forest in colonial South Asia, but it is obvious that it cannot represent “The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia”, as the subtitle boldly states. Further research will have to fill the gaps that exist not only concerning Southeast Asia, but also the relationship between man and water or the exploitation of mineral resources, to give but a few examples. On the whole, the papers collected in this book give a fairly comprehensive picture of current research on various periods, areas, subjects, and modes of perception of man and his environment in South and Southeast Asia. In this respect the book is an important landmark in the field of interdisciplinary environmental research.

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AMITAV ACHARYA, ANANDA RAJAH (eds.), *Reconceptualizing Southeast Asia. Special Focus in: Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, Singapore, 27,1,1999

This volume draws together some of the papers presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Seminar on Southeast Asian Development in Pekanbaru, June 1997. As the editors point out in their introductory essay the concept of Southeast Asia as a region needs to be reconsidered in the light of the current economic crisis and the resurgence of an ASEAN identity. The earlier positivist approaches that described Southeast Asia in terms of “Unity in Diversity” by essentializing more or less arbitrary cultural traits are, according to the authors, mistaken. “The notion of Southeast Asia as a cultural or geographic entity is manifestly overstated. What is less contestable is that the notion of Southeast Asia has a far greater plausibility as an imagined construct.” This theme is further elaborated on in Ananda Rajah’s article “Southeast Asia: Comparatist Errors and the Construction of a Region” and by Amitav Acharya in “Imagined Proximities: The Making and Unmaking of Southeast Asia as a Region”. Another equally interesting approach is provided by Anthony Reid who argues that the lack of centrality in Southeast Asia has led to “a saucer model of Southeast Asian identity”. This idea is further elaborated in a paper by Steven Douglas on “‘Centrality’ and ‘Balance’ in Southeast Asia: Official Ideologies and Regional Crisis” and Michael Vatikiotis, “ASEAN 10: The Political and Cultural Dimensions of Southeast Asian Unity”.

As the field of Southeast Asian studies is still dominated by empirical studies on individual communities, villages, towns or nation states it is refreshing to read the papers in this volume that take on the region as a whole. An earlier debate started by Heine-Geldern, Coedes and others is now continued in this very useful and stimulating study.

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