

BERNHARD DAHM, RODERICH PTAK (eds.), *Südostasien-Handbuch. Geschichte, Gesellschaft, Politik, Wirtschaft, Kultur*. München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1999. 684 pages, DM 128,-. ISBN 3-406-45313-9

This *Handbook of Southeast Asia* constitutes a successful attempt to acquaint a broader public with the many facets of Southeast Asia. The editors (Bernhard Dahm and Roderich Ptak) have gathered together a range of articles written by well-known international experts on Southeast Asia and arranged them in a very readable form.

For any one who has ever noticed that the vegetation of Bali differs significantly from that of the neighbouring island Lombok – here comes the explanation: They belong to different tectonic plates, the Eurasian plate and the Australasian, although they are only 17 kilometres apart. Ancient hunters of Borneo never hunted and collected food only for themselves: They “produced” food for the regional and national market and traded with Dayaks, Chinese and Malays. For demographers, the Southeast Asian population growth poses a puzzle, as it was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that there was a significant increase in the population. Until then, the Southeast Asian archipelago was underdeveloped with regard to its population: a territory of 4.5 million m<sup>2</sup> was populated by only 80 million people.

Southeast Asia's integration into the world economy, its development of wide-ranging trading networks in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century is almost legendary. Here we learn that these special trading zones only existed in Aceh and Makassar, where important shipping routes converged. Other ports seem to have been much more open and have lacked characteristic network features.

These examples are not so much intended to provide a full description of an excellent book as to illustrate the density of information and the complexity of the issues discussed in this volume. The handbook is subdivided into seven parts: Part I introduces the area, people and languages of Southeast Asia and brings together four articles on geography, people and their traditional life-styles, demographic development and the languages of Southeast Asia.

Parts II and III deal with the history of Southeast Asia, albeit from different angles. While part II concentrates on historical developments from the early beginnings until the formation of modern states, part III focuses on the ten countries which constitute Southeast Asia today (Burma, Brunei, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, East Timor, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam). The country profiles as well as the articles on regional cooperation and economic development in Southeast Asia (part VII) demonstrate vividly that ancient Southeast Asian kingdoms have developed into modern states, that this process has reconfigured old patterns of gov-

ernance and trade and that most Southeast Asian nations today face many challenges: For example, despite an exceptional long-term economic growth stimulated by interventionist governments, most observers agree that Southeast Asian nations must adopt important reforms if they want to return to the long-term growth phases of the 1970s, 80s, and early 1990s. And despite the integration of Southeast Asian nations into a regional institution, ASEAN, and the success of this regional organisation in security cooperation, efforts toward economic integration have been stalled for years due to the different economic priorities.

The external relations of Southeast Asia and perceptions of Southeast Asia by other countries are described in part IV of the book. Southeast Asia's relations with India, the Near East, the role of the Chinese in this region and the European perception of Southeast Asia give a rich impression of the various influences which have shaped Southeast Asian culture. They provide an ideal link with the following part on Southeast Asian religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity and part VI, which deals with literature, art and material culture (architecture). While Southeast Asia is well known for its metal, wood and leather handicrafts, as well as its traditional wooden houses, much less is known about the conceptual dimensions of Asian villages and cities.

It is, perhaps, the greatest merit of the book to bring all these different topics together, to provide a broad overview without ever becoming superficial. The reader is not only introduced to Southeast Asian history and culture, but also learns something about the difficulties of doing research on this area and of the variety of approaches to Southeast Asia as a region. Moreover, Dahm and Ptak have to be congratulated on their excellent editing, which has made the handbook a unified whole, despite the variety of the issues discussed. This makes the Southeast Asia Handbook an enjoyable book. Moreover, it lacks the scientific language and lengthy footnotes which are so typical of German scientific studies and usually make reading rather exhausting. The handbook thus not only speaks to a scientific community, but also to a more general public interested in the history, society, politics, economy and culture of Southeast Asia.

Anja Jetschke

JOHN KLEINEN, *Facing the Future, Reviving the Past: A Study of Social Change in a Northern Vietnamese Village*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1999. 256 pages, US \$ 29.90. ISBN 981-230-039-2

John Kleinen has written an anthropological longitudinal study based on several field trips since 1988, which he himself calls a "narrative" (p. 196),