

based on social structures well adapted to local environmental conditions. In her theoretical background she refers to the cultural ecology approach developed by D.A. Posey and M. Münzel in the mid 1980s. It requires a wide range of methodologies from various scientific disciplines and a profound knowledge of the cultural background of the ethnic group concerned. The author has succeeded in mastering the first prerequisite and, as for the second, she has brought the knowledge gathered by her in previous field research in other regions of Nepal.

The study avoids romanticising the living conditions of the local Tharu community, but elaborates on the development potential the population can activate by relying on their age-old and partly still self-sustaining way of living. One of the most severe conflicts the Tharus are confronted with are the restrictions imposed on them by the national park regime of the Royal Chitawan National Park. Müller-Böker's analysis of a contradictory development points to general problems in development planning. It is the dilemma of conserving the biosphere without paying adequate attention to the sociosphere. Social development on the basis of indigenous resource use strategies has not yet been able to be harmonised with nature conservation objectives. To enable integrated planning, and this strongly underlines the importance of Müller-Böker's studies, an ethnoecological approach could prove to be the most appropriate. Apart from this general value the lasting merit of this study is the collection of many valuable details in the field of ethnobotany and indigenous knowledge of soil, forest, and traditional strategies to cope with natural calamities. Last not least, it is a laudable undertaking to have had this work translated into English, so as to attract the attention of the English-speaking world, and not just that of the region concerned, to this important topic.

Klaus Seeland

KWOK KIAN-WOON et al. (eds.), *'WeAsians' Between Past and Future*. Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society and National Archives of Singapore, 2000. 301 pages. ISBN 981-04-2824-3

The search for identity has gripped Asian intellectuals for some time. Politicians picked up the theme by stimulating a discourse on 'Asian values' in the 1980s that was eagerly commented upon by European and American scholars as well. This volume is an interesting addition to this debate in that it presents a number of fresh self-critical insights. The contributions, papers as well as comments, to a Millennium Regional Conference sponsored by the Japan Foundation, are published in their draft form. This is an advantage as the freshness of the vivid discussions is preserved. The volume should therefore be judged as a primary source for those interested in the Asian values debate rather than as a scholarly publication.

The opening address by Tommy Koh, Law professor, long-serving Singapore ambassador to the UN and chairman of the Asia-Europe Foundation, is a gem of a brief, six-page history of Asia, which should be required reading for any undergraduate embarking on the study of this region. According to Professor Koh, the terms "Asians" and "Asia" are not meaningless, but it is difficult to define "the glue that holds Asians together". Could it be the vision of future prosperity? His dream for the future of Southeast and East Asia is, indeed, truly Singaporean: He wants the

area to develop into a "world-class economy" with a "cultural renaissance" and "its own authentic models of democracy". Inspired by the example of Western Europe, he is confident that East Asia will be "a region of peace, harmony and prosperity".

The keynote address by Dipesh Chakrabaty, a professor at the University of Chicago, specialising in post-colonial history, does not opt for a clear definition of what "WeAsians" means either. He hints at the sameness that lurks behind the differences without actually defining what this sameness might entail. Caroline Hau, a professor at Kyoto University, points to the centrality of Asia in world history. Asia has long been regarded as "a disembodied fantasy of post-Enlightenment Europe ... an empty signifier ... a vanishing object" (p. 79). It is not enough to discuss "WeAsians" in terms of identity and values, but to fill the empty signifier in real terms, by say deconstructing Chineseness in terms of modernity, upper-class lifestyles and transnational entrepreneurship. Her arguments are sophisticated and interesting, but the question how Chineseness can be transformed into Asianness remains unanswered.

Chua Beng Huat, Professor of Sociology at the National University of Singapore, contributes one of the most interesting papers. He points out that since the integration of Asia "into the global logic of capitalism", Asians have never been without reservation towards capitalism and "its Western cultural forms" (p. 140). Hence the title of his paper "Living with Capitalism in Asia, Uncomfortably". The Asian values discourse of the 1980s was as much an attempt to de-link capitalist development from its Western cultural moorings as a cover-up of cronyism and corruption. Chua Beng Huat leads the debate in a new direction by asking whether there could emerge "a communitarian basis for capitalism in Asia" as a counterpoint to excessive individualism (p. 148). Communitarianism should, however, not be interpreted as essentially Japanese or Singaporean, but as a useful ideology to contain certain excesses of market individualism. Chua appears to argue that the Asian cultural resonance to communitarianism paves the way to the management practices of Asian states and economies.

There are a multitude of other arguments brought forward by the authors and commentators. Needless to say, no common definition of "WeAsians" emerges. The floor is still open for discussion.

*Hans-Dieter Evers*

HANS-DIETER EVERS, RÜDIGER KORFF, *Southeast Asian Urbanism. The Meaning and Power of Social Space*. Münster, Hamburg: LIT-Verlag, 2000. 268 pages, DM 49,80. ISBN 3-8258-4021-2

*Southeast Asian Urbanism* is based on the findings of over two decades of field research on cities and towns in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore. The goal of the book was to analyse the connections between micro and macro processes, between grassroots interactions and urban structures, between social theory and empirical data – Evers and Korff, two German sociologists well familiar with Southeast Asian development in the last decades have succeeded in providing a vivid picture of the great variety of urban forms, the social creativity in the slums of Bangkok, Manila or Jakarta, and the variety of cultural