Su Lin Lewis

Cities in Motion: Urban Life and Cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asia, 1920–1940.

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In *Cities in Motion*, Su Lin Lewis manages to produce a history of a dynamic time period in Southeast Asia by studying the vibrant urban sphere of multi-ethnic port-cities. Rather than focusing on the formation of nation-states or on anti-colonial movements in the region as in many traditional histories, Lewis highlights the rise of cosmopolitan civic societies through a comparative study of Rangoon, Penang, and Bangkok. Other Southeast Asian port-cities, such as Singapore or Jakarta/Batavia, are also mentioned in order to supplement and enhance her findings.

Four themes run through this work: 'global and regional connections, the city as a cosmopolitan site, the rise of a self-consciously progressive middle class, and the cultivation and prominence of youth in modern civic life' (p. 2). Lewis thus foregrounds global 'interconnectedness' within and across Asia and beyond, allowing the intertwined developments in fields such as city-planning, transportation, and technology to shine through the local differences of her chosen sites of analysis. Another keyword in Lewis's work is 'simultaneity', as expressed in the experience of and experimentation with modern, cosmopolitan forms by multi-ethnic participants in civic societies in Southeast Asia's port-cities.

The first chapter, 'Maritime Commerce, Old Rivalries, and the Birth of Three Cities', examines the rise of the Southeast Asian port-city through readings of pre-colonial literature. It thus 'situates Southeast Asian cosmopolitanism within a much older geographic unit than the modern nation-state' (p. 23). By focusing on the interconnectedness of Southeast Asian port-cities and their intertwined origins, Lewis sets out to establish a new point of departure for studying 'modern Asian cities and their inhabitants outside a national framework' (p. 23). The chapter concludes with a short overview of new connections formed in the early twentieth century thanks to improved transportation networks, such as faster steamship and rail links, as well as new modes of communication and travel, including regional radio and air travel, that 'accelerated traffic of people, goods, and ideas' (p. 46).

The second chapter, 'Asian Port-Cities in a Turbulent Age', moves towards examining the developments of Southeast Asian port-cities in the colonial era. Refreshingly, Lewis suggests that we rethink urban planning schemes in this period via the term 'simultaneity' (p. 49). Rather than seeing the disciplining of the urban public space as a purely colonial endeavor, '[m]unicipal admin-

istration, transport systems, suburbs, and urban parks' are viewed as part of global efforts shared by expanding cities all over the world, allowing for integration and adaptation to local settings (p. 49). Lewis also highlights some of the locations in port-cities, such as markets, shopping areas, street food stalls, and public fairs, where supposedly fixed class distinctions and racial segregation could be blurred by allowing interactions between individuals to occur across such categories.

In the third chapter, 'Cosmopolitan Publics in Divided Societies', Lewis turns our attention to the 'multiple and overlapping publics' and types of cosmopolitan connections that arose in these port-cities: from religious institutions, through clubs and societies, to professional associations (p. 96). These affiliations were simultaneously local and global, creating connections that at times eroded colonial or ethnic distinctions in these cities, and at other times enhanced them. Outwardly-looking Asian middle classes embraced new ideas they were exposed to in the context of the cosmopolitan city to revitalize their multi-ethnic communities. Lewis convincingly argues that the 'desire for self-determination emerged within the context of growing internationalism', providing 'a tenuous counterweight' to rising ethnic nationalism (p. 127).

The fourth chapter, 'Newsprint, Wires, and the Reading Public', focuses on the much explored topic of the rising reading public and local print cultures beginning in the late nineteenth century, yet Lewis offers a fresh look at these developments by pointing out that the multitude of newspapers in different languages in port-cities 'testified to a plurality of communities *within* cities and across oceans' (p. 140, italics in original). She shows how port-cities were a hub of intersecting 'print-worlds', linking growing reading publics 'not only to the affairs of a particular linguistic community, but to the politics and culture of multiple and varied communities: to cities, towns, and rural areas, to diasporic homelands, and to the wider world' (p. 140). The scope of international coverage and the speed at which information was delivered, thanks to new communication wires, provided new perspectives and opportunities to literate Asian readers. Much like the cultures of association discussed in her third chapter, the local press enabled for 'individual and collective identities to be articulated within a shared public space, and provided a venue for modern ideas of citizenship, society, and individualism to be discussed' (p. 180).

The fifth chapter, 'Playgrounds, Classrooms, and Politics', once again takes up the previously studied topic of education in the colonial period, but widens the scope by focusing on the role of an older generation of Asians, educated in Asia and in the West, in 'shaping new educational initiatives' for the younger generation of Asians (p. 182). Lewis shows how private and public 'pluralist and transnational educational environments' emerged, moving us away from

the 'colonial-nationalist teleological framework' (p. 183). 'Asian students were not simply "Westernized elites" or "proto-nationalists", but emerged within a pluralist and transnational educational framework in the 1920s and 1930s' (p. 226).

In the sixth and final chapter, 'Gramophones, Cinema Halls, and Bobbed Hair', 'simultaneity' features again as a major trope, with urbanites in Asia and around the world encountering new modes of audio and visual technologies at the same time (p. 227). Despite the international, commercial, and Hollywood products that were most popular among consumers of popular entertainment, Lewis claims that the new technology also fused with local forms of performance, stories, and cultural forms. The 'modern girl'—and local responses to her—similarly emerged in cosmopolitan cities influenced by the images and attitudes she consumed in magazines and Western movies, yet undergoing local alterations and drawing on other forms of womanhood from Asia (p. 248).

This review provided an overview of some of the major themes that run through the book, but could not adequately address many of the subtleties and differences of each of the port-cities discussed by Lewis. This goes to show how effectively Lewis captures the global through focusing on the local in this readable book, which won the 2015–2016 Urban History Association Best Book Award (Non-North American). It is a highly satisfying read, producing a history that goes beyond the particulars of the port-cities that provide the materials for this book.

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