

H. Hazel Hahn (ed.), *Cross-Cultural Exchange and the Colonial Imaginary: Global Encounters via Southeast Asia*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2019, xi + 310 pp. ISBN: 9789813250062 (paper), price: SGD 48.00 (paperback).

At a time of intensifying calls for decolonization (both inside and outside the academy), for repair, reparation, and genuine reckoning with colonial legacies, H. Hazel Hahn's edited volume *Cross-Cultural Exchange and the Colonial Imaginary: Global Encounters via Southeast Asia* attempts to eke out room for more nuanced historical views of colonial encounters as they took place on the ground. The book accomplishes this by using "cross-cultural exchange" as the framework to "illuminate the multi-linear trajectories [...] of the flow of objects, cultural practices, and cultural knowledge, through a trans-imperial framework" (p. 2). In doing so, the volume hopes to "re-assess longstanding interpretive divisions [of] metropole-periphery, colonizer-colonized, precolonial-colonial, and colonial-postcolonial" (p. 3) and to better depict how culture was "continuously evolving" (p. 4) in the colonial context.

Another implicit crucial effect of a framework that focuses on cross-cultural exchanges is to tone down the exceptional status accorded to colonization as a seemingly unprecedented event or juncture for culture clash and change. As the introduction points out, Southeast Asia had historically been long enmeshed in multiple networks of trade, conflict, and contact. Given the region's astounding cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity, dynamic interactions would have been par for the course for much of its history. Thus, the book also has a subtle emphasis on the theme of continuity. For example, it critiques the conventional periodization that divides history along precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial phases because it can "overshadow continuities" in the "patterns of flow" of "goods, people and ideas" (p. 2) through time, as well as present "an exaggerated sense" of the impact of "regime changes" as well as the "monolithic power of the state" (p. 2). Focusing on the postcolonial period, Hahn writes that "[t]he regaining of national sovereignty through independence, while marking a fundamentally new era, did not entail discontinuity in all aspects of daily life" (p. 11).

And it is indeed on daily life that most of the book focuses upon. The opening chapter by George Dutton is about the observations of Vietnamese priest Philiphê Binh about daily life in nineteenth-century Lisbon, providing us with a rare glimpse of the West through non-Western eyes. Dawn Odell's close consideration of the daily use of a wooden "Chinese" screen in Batavia shows that, if compared to the conventional uses of screens in China and notions of space in both China and the Netherlands, this purported "Chinese" screen was in fact a uniquely Batavian object that could only have been produced and used in that

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particular colonial encounter. Susie Protschky's examination of family photographs and diary entries about "transgressive dress" in late-colonial Java tells us how the use of such clothing surfaced ethnic, gender, and class tensions, and how, depending upon the circumstances, this can have either empowering or disempowering results. And in what is the most convincing case of colonial to postcolonial continuity in the book, Sarah Moser argues how the creation of, and the quality of life fostered by, the post-independence city of Putrajaya in Malaysia essentially continues British colonial values and ideologies of segregation, exoticized styles, and emphasis on elite authority.

The book is thus a successful array of fine-grained studies of "strategies of integration, adaptation, and appropriation as well as resistance" (p. 2) in colonial encounters. Note that resistance is only one of many possible responses. Though acknowledging the disempowering and violent effects of colonization (such as in Benita Stambler's chapter on the denigrating effects of colonial photography in Ceylon), these themes are not foregrounded by the book. And even in a clearly antagonistic confrontation between colonizer and colonized, how each party conducts itself may be quite unexpected. In a curious case from early twentieth century Java recounted by Arnout van der Meer, it was Dutch colonial officials who insisted on the regular use of Javanese language, etiquette, dress, and material symbols of power while administering the colony, while Indonesian nationalists readily adopted Western mores and the Dutch language as they took on more prominent roles in determining the fate of their burgeoning nation. It is these sorts of complications that the book sheds light upon in order to go beyond the "standard narrative [...] of domination and imposition of the colonizers' cultures on colonized societies and subsequent erosion of local cultures" (p. 1). Indeed, the book confirms how we cannot begin to make sense of many of the ideas, practices, and material culture Southeast Asians presently take for granted if we choose to confine ourselves within such a standard narrative (Caroline Herbelin convincingly demonstrates this in her chapter on architecture in what was formerly colonial Indochina).

This work is not one with an avowed decolonizing intent. However, in the context of Southeast Asia as a culturally diverse region with a long history of being accustomed to cultural exchanges, appropriations, and collisions, and where many countries do not fit neatly into the definition of settler-colonial states, can the book nevertheless accomplish certain de-colonizing effects? Matthew Schauer's chapter on the history of European scholarly societies in the Netherlands East Indies and British Malaya showed how Indonesia and Malaysia eventually reclaimed (p. 69) these institutions of colonial knowledge-making in the service of their new nations. And the professional Filipino jazz performers in Frederick Schenker's chapter on jazz and the Brit-

ish empire “subtly challenged imperial hierarchies [by] taking advantage of the demand for jazz” (p. 274): far from simply mimicking Western styles, they actively shaped the way audiences perceived and consumed this (at that time) most novel of music movements. These musicians, it felt to me, presaged the choice-making of current globally mobile Filipino professionals of various other occupations. Can these reclamations and “subtle challenges to imperial hierarchies” feature in how we can, if not undo, at least begin to subvert the harms of colonization in the region? By giving us, post-colonials, a closer view of the exchanges made, the transfers of things, the spaces shared, and relationships formed at this period of Southeast Asia’s history, this book provides us more material for thinking about and working on our present political imaginations.

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