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King, Victor T. (2008), *The Sociology of Southeast Asia. Transformation in a Developing Region*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press
ISBN 9788791114601, 352 pages

Although Southeast Asia experienced major changes during the 20th century that subsequently led to a fundamental transformation of the region's socio-economic structure, a textbook authored by a single person that focused on sociological issues and was primarily written for university use has not existed until now. Victor T. King's book *The Sociology of Southeast Asia* now attempts to fill this gap in the literature written for this purpose. The study is designed as a source and reference book for students interested in the development and history of Southeast Asian societies. Covering the period between the colonial era of the 19th century and the present day, it provides a comprehensive overview of various aspects of life in Southeast Asia as well as covering the associated social science literature. Moving from a review of the classical accounts of the region to the scientific debates conducted during the last century, the author works his way toward identifying new avenues of research. This work will therefore be indispensable for students of the region, no matter whether they are reading Sociology, Regional Studies or a subject beyond the social sciences.

King reviews the different approaches that sociologists have taken toward Southeast Asia. He mainly builds his own analytical framework on the Dutch school of historical sociology. Although working within a sociological framework, the collected insights he provides actually come from a variety of fields within the social sciences. King's main focus is the rapid change occurring in Southeast Asia throughout the 20th century. He argues that this is mainly due to the "dynamic response to the opportunities and constraints generated in their encounter with the outside world" (p. 16). Even though he takes the fact into account that much of the socio-economical change has been caused by factors originating outside the region, it is the process of regionalization and the emerging importance of regional entities like ASEAN that speak for his idea of a Southeast Asian region with a different "identity and rationale" compared to other parts of Asia (p. 18).

As already indicated, the work itself is designed as a textbook. It spans a total of eleven chapters, eight of which are devoted to different sociological subjects. The book can be read linearly from beginning to end or be used as a reference work on the various topics covered; the easily accessible language King uses makes either method possible. Although no use is made of graphs, the book is discreetly illustrated with pictures portraying everyday life, thus allowing the aspiring student a small visual insight into the subject at hand. In addition to this, two detailed indices are included that completes the volume, making it an easy-to-use reference work.

The major themes in Southeast Asian societies as King exemplifies them are class, ethnicity, patronage, gender, and urbanity on the one hand – all aspects of modernization – and underdevelopment on the other. King first focuses on general and theoretical issues such as modernization, underdevelopment, and class, and then proceeds to what he refers to as “essential issues” (p. xi), namely ethnicity and society, patronage and corruption, Asian values and social action, and transformations. In the latter, he focuses on gender roles and work and on the transformation of urban worlds. He guides the reader from more general and historical concerns to more specialized topics in which he presents the current state of the discourses conducted in this field.

The individual chapters are organized as follows: After summarizing the authoritative works on the respective topics, King presents the main arguments in the field, outlining the shortcomings and highlights of the scholarly debate in the process. He ends each chapter with a few case studies in which the main concepts are applied. These case studies provide the reader with a concise overview, but should not be mistaken for comprehensive analyses; their strength is to be seen in the practical use of the concepts explained by King based on empirical evidence provided by previous studies and analyses.

In his chapter on underdevelopment and interdependency, for instance, King works his way from Karl Marx’s 19th century notions on colonialism and his followers’ views on imperialism to Paul Baran’s foundation of the theory of underdevelopment in the post-war era along with his critics’ views of the latter. He describes the analysis of intervening foreign powers, but also the social force comprised by local entrepreneurs in between outside intervention and local power holders. The case studies are then conceptualized on the three stages King elaborates from his literature study: mercantilism, industrial capitalism, and monopoly capitalism. His study of the former Dutch East Indies proves the importance of his historical-sociological approach best when tracing the economic history and contradictions of Indonesia back to the needs imposed by the Dutch colonial regime and the structures it implemented.

By taking this approach, King also gives an account of the history of social science in itself, moving from the early anthropologists concerned with colonial administration to the post-war Western scholars focusing on the problems of modernization and their struggle with scholars in the field of critical political economics and interdependence theories. This approach will be of interest to readers well beyond the book’s professed scope. Take King’s broader division of American and European scholarship and approaches when portraying the different emerging schools, for example.

While the latter remain within the historical framework, North American schools – and thus the sociology within the entities in the USA's sphere of interest, like the Philippines – have mostly focused on modernization problems. Their research agenda is therefore not only strong with regard to the Philippines, but also to Viet Nam, Thailand, and Indonesia. Parallel to this, the development of sociology in Singapore was concerned with the key questions of statehood and nation-building from a perspective that should enable policy-relevant information to be gained and analyses to be made.

King's well-presented book is aimed at an audience of postgraduate and undergraduate students. This is reflected in the structure of the work. A minor point of criticism is that it seems King has chosen not to use any new qualitative or quantitative empirical material. Through his notion of providing insights into the various societies as well as into the academic reflection of the object of study, he successfully manages to maintain a balance between providing an introduction to the main lines of theory and to each of the societies, thereby avoiding the pitfall of merely producing a collection of individual case studies.

King admits that there are no detailed features on Viet Nam, Cambodia, the Lao PDR, or Brunei among the case studies. Nevertheless, he has obviously worked through the huge amount of material on societal change in Southeast Asia and compiled this in a structured manner well suited to undergraduate readers. It is to the author's credit that he has managed to compress the large body of works on the region concerning disciplines ranging from sociology and anthropology to political economics into a newly structured textbook. This publication is a valuable source of information for students of development and change in Southeast Asia. Recommended for anyone studying the present state of Southeast Asian societies, the book illustrates how a historical sociological approach can be utilized to explain the development and change of Southeast Asia.

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