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Book Reviews

Southeast Asia

Seaways and gatekeepers: Trade and state in the eastern archipelagos of Southeast Asia, c.1600–c.1906

By HEATHER SUTHERLAND

Singapore: NUS Press, 2021. Pp. xv + 537. Maps, Images, Bibliography, Index.

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Heather Sutherland's *Seaways and Gatekeepers* is an excellent new inquiry into the hitherto hidden histories of the eastern archipelagos of Southeast Asia. With this book, Sutherland, a retired professor at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam who has published extensively on the history of Java and Eastern Indonesia, compiles two decades of research into the maritime trading zones of eastern archipelagic Southeast Asia, stretching from the southern Philippines and Sulu in the north to southern Borneo and Bali in the south, to the Moluccas and New Guinea in the east. It offers a re-evaluation and deeper understanding of centuries of commercial and political interaction along the important seaways linking the trans-oceanic trading systems from the South Chinese Sea to the Indian Ocean, through the harbours, bays, rivers and beaches of this region.

Central to this interaction, Sutherland argues, were the 'gatekeeping' societies of these islands—most notably the seafaring sultanates of the southern Philippines, the riverine polities of east Borneo, the powerful spice-trading sultanates of Ternate and Tidore as well as Makassar, and Bali's Indian-influenced realms. These societies are drawn into the limelight and demonstrated to have been not peripheral and isolated but interconnected and at least as pivotal in tying the Asian trans-oceanic trading system as the Chinese, Arab, Gujarati and European sailors who had begun dominating the region. The latter groups siphoned off profits by controlling the corridors and intersections where people moved in and out of the trading system (p. 441). Often having been portrayed as living 'stateless' lives, as 'people without history' (p. 22), and as subjected to external forces of indigenous, commercial and colonial power and subjugation, Sutherland demonstrates how the people of eastern archipelagic Southeast Asia, producing what were once some of the world's most valuable commodities, in fact actively participated in resilient trading networks which brought cultural, socioeconomic and political exchange and interaction. Commerce along these seaways, Sutherland argues, may serve as an alternative to the narrative framework of formal state formation to explain different forms of social integration and political cooperation and interconnection.

The book has a clear structure, and is supplemented by a useful 'digital appendix' with more maps, images and resources on a dedicated website (<https://epress.nus.edu.sg/seaways/>). The chapters are divided in two parts, 'Foundations' and 'Glimpsed Histories'. The first part provides an outline of the sociopolitical impacts of aspects such as geography and climate on the region. The second part of each chapter,

based on summaries of existing scholarship and European and Indonesian sources, chronologically delves into the formation of the Southeast Asian trading system between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries, and the related socioeconomic histories of the different islands discussed. These chapters are full of impeccably presented historical evidence and detailed knowledge of these islands, though some readers may find the level of detail a bit overwhelming.

Sutherland displays an encyclopaedic knowledge of her subject and an exceptional command over her sources, but the many micro-histories of various villages, bays, rivers and islands, some of which are not mentioned in the otherwise useful index (for example, in chapter 1: Adi island, p. 60, Wokam, p. 61, Tiworo, p. 64) as well as the elaborate, in-depth descriptions and analyses of various societies, do not always contribute to the book's momentum and argument. Many of the later empirical chapters therefore come across as rather descriptive, which occasionally conflicts with the wider theoretical ambitions on the dynamics of political-economic interaction and state building Sutherland sets out in the Introduction, citing the work of Karl Polanyi, Douglas North and Michel Foucault. In the chapters of Part Two (5–10), use of this analytical scope remains rather implicit, and the book's theoretical ambitions disappear into the background. This absence of further theoretical actualisation may be explained; Sutherland sees this book as merely a new beginning in generating more complete understandings of the region. She is careful and treads lightly to avoid making overstatements and generalisations, and calls on others to follow in her footsteps to write more detailed local histories (p. 448).

We should certainly hope that many historians will take up this challenge, or that Sutherland's 'forthcoming monograph on the history of Makassar' (p. xiv) will provide for a similarly rich and innovative study. This book sets the bar very high. It is a milestone contribution to the historiography of Southeast Asia that transforms the way we understand the islands of eastern archipelagic Southeast Asia and draws them into their rightful place in global history, where they belong.

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Cambodia

Disturbed forests, fragmented memories: Jarai and other lives in the Cambodian highlands

By JONATHAN PADWE

Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020. Pp 280. Maps, Plates.

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Disturbed Forests, Fragmented Memories is a beautifully written and insightful ethnography that draws on Jonathan Padwe's long-term work in the Jarai village of Tang Kadon, in Cambodia's Ratanakiri province. Padwe became fluent in the Jarai language and was adopted into their community, enabling him to deeply explore villagers' perspectives on how their culture was entangled with the landscape, and their