

Surveying Southeast Asia with the Newest Edition of *Southeast Asia in the New International Era* by Robert Dayley

Southeast Asia in the New International Era *Seventh Edition*

By ROBERT DAYLEY

BOULDER: WESTVIEW PRESS, 2016

356 PAGES, ISBN: 978-0813350110, PAPERBACK

By Margaret B. Bodemer



Southeast Asia can seem overwhelming to integrate into a course, given its eleven countries and considerable cultural diversity.¹ Robert Dayley's *Southeast Asia in the New International Era* steps in to save the day. Organized into thirteen chapters, the book provides a thorough overview and introduction to the political developments of each of the eleven countries. The introductory chapter provides a historical survey and a discussion of cultural features of the region, and the concluding chapter draws everything together by giving a useful overview of ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which is the most

important regional organization in Southeast Asia. The remaining chapters focus on each particular country, and each is broken into sections: Institutions and Social Groups, State-Society Relations and Democracy, Economy and Development, Foreign Relations, and a Conclusion. This organizational strategy facilitates comparisons across chapters. Each chapter has endnotes

with sources that are cited, which are useful for further study. The chapters are concise, and the average length of each is twenty-five pages. The book as a whole is highly readable, informative, and suitable for scholars looking to refresh, as well as those new to the study of Southeast Asia.

Dayley, a professor of International Political Economy and Asian Studies at the College of Idaho, has been the primary author of this book since 2011, and this is its seventh edition, having been established by renowned political scientist of Southeast Asia Clark Neher. Dayley's research focuses on Southeast Asian comparative political economy and agrarian change in Thailand; this expertise shows in the especially insightful chapter on Thailand. Key themes in the book are the development of political systems and whether democracy can exist in the region (although at times one wonders if an overzealous interest in democracy obscures the unique sociopolitical formations particular to Southeast Asia). The book highlights many of the contemporary issues for the region, including the conflicts over the South China Sea concerning the Spratly and Paracel islands. This particular issue has gained more attention in the United States in the past few months, with the new Donald Trump administration and questions of American military involvement in that area. Dayley gives some historical context to these and other issues, although this is primarily a book about political development and political economy.

Today's students may be more familiar with Southeast Asia as a land of glittering beaches, palm trees, and exotic cuisine, rather than as a site of Cold War conflicts. Dayley's highly accessible *Southeast Asia in the New International Era* would be useful in an undergraduate survey course on Asian studies, Asian politics, comparative politics, or international studies. It could also serve as a text or a reference for AP World History courses. In AP World History courses, Dayley's book would be most useful in the "Industrialization and Global Integration" (ca.1750 to 1900) and "Acceleration of Global Change and Realignments" (ca.1900 to present) themes, and the "State Building, Expansion, and Conflict," and "Creation, Expansion, and

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Interaction of Economic Systems” thematic learning objectives.²

Southeast Asia in the New International Era could be used alongside other sources to provide a stimulating inquiry into Southeast Asia. Examples of additional sources include George Dutton’s edited volume *Voices of Southeast Asia: Essential Readings from Antiquity to the Present* (M. E. Sharpe, 2014), which provides translations of inscriptions, historical texts, short stories, and poetry with works from the ninth century to 2002. This text is a useful way to provide more depth into the culture, politics, and history of Southeast Asia. For instructors wanting more focus on a particular issue, novels such as Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American* (Heinemann, 1955) provide a way to go into even more depth, in this case American Cold War-inspired actions in the region in the lead-up to the Việt Nam War. There are also two films that have been made from *The Quiet American*, one in 1958 and the other in 2002, both of which offer the opportunity to further discuss issues raised around colonialism and independence.

For further information on Southeast Asia’s historical development, one can reference one of the many historical surveys on Southeast Asia. Among these, M. C. Ricklefs et al.’s *A New History of Southeast Asia* (Palgrave, 2010) and Mary Heidhues’s *Southeast Asia: A Concise History* (Thames & Hudson, 2000) are particularly useful. Where Ricklefs et al. provides a history of political and social systems, going back to earliest recorded history, Heidhues provides a thematic overview of social and cultural history. Both texts are concise and readable as well.

Lastly, memoirs (autobiographies) can be useful in teaching Southeast Asia and could be used in conjunction with Dayley’s text to deepen students’ engagement with the region. Memoirs give students a chance to step into someone else’s shoes and imagine a different perspective. For a region as diverse as Southeast Asia, memoirs also help in understanding the multiple perspectives and viewpoints within the region. There are many memoirs written by Southeast Asians either in English or in translation, but what follows are some that have been most successful with students in my undergraduate classes. San San Tin’s *No Time for Dreams: Living in Burma under Military Rule* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009) traces the decline of freedoms after the 1988 uprisings that coincide with Aung San Suu Kyi’s return to Burma and subsequent participation in the political movement. The author, a journalist, grapples with state censorship of the media, including the paper she writes for, as she witnesses a different reality than what she is forced to write about. A memoir that elaborates on cultural and racial history is Marguerite Schenkhuizen’s *Memoirs of an Indo Woman*, which narrates the biracial Dutch-Indonesian community that is disrupted by the Japanese invasion during World War II. Le Ly Hayslip’s *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* (Doubleday, 2002) is a harrowing and extremely effective memoir of a peasant girl caught between the Americans and the Vietnamese sides in the Việt Nam War. Another memoir that illustrates the peasant experience is Nieves Villamin’s *Bittermelons and Mimosas: A Philippine Memoir* (Inkwater, 2011), which illustrates the hardships faced in the postwar Philippines on the fringes of the Huk Rebellion. Of the many excellent memoirs about the Cambodian genocide, Chanrithy Him’s *When Broken Glass Floats: Growing Up under the Khmer Rouge*

(W. W. Norton, 2001) contains her story of the cruelties and horrors her family suffered, but also their resilience and survival.

There are even some great graphic novel memoirs related to Southeast Asia—although these are both related to the Việt Nam War. First up is Marcelino Truong’s *Such a Lovely Little War: Saigon 1961–1963* (Arsenal, 2016, with a forthcoming sequel), which gives a child’s perspective on the early years of the war from the son of a Vietnamese diplomat and a French mother. Lastly, G. B. Tran’s *Vietnamica: A Family’s Journey* (Villard, 2011) illustrates three generations navigating French colonialism, war with America, and resettlement in America. These days, one does not need to know a Southeast Asian language to be able to teach well about this area, in part thanks to texts like *Southeast Asia in the New International Era*. ■

NOTES

1. These countries are typically classified geographically: the peninsular or “mainland” countries of Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Việt Nam, and the insular or “island” countries of Indonesia, East Timor, Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines.
2. See the “AP World History: Course and Exam Description” from the College Board website at <http://tinyurl.com/qa7phry>.


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