

Mason C. Hoadley and Christer Gunnarsson, eds. *The Village Concept in the Transformation of Rural Southeast Asia: Studies from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press (Nordic Institute for Asian Studies, Studies in Asian Topics, No. 20), 1996. xviii + 229 pp.

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For decades, anthropologists and others traveled to villages in order to find and study societies or other such large entities. Villages were assumed to contain some of the elementary structures that made up societies and were chosen as objects of study because they were manageable. Also, they were supposed to afford glimpses of traditional lifeways that had elsewhere disappeared. But as historians and social scientists come up against increasing evidence of transformations of the countryside in Southeast Asia, both in recent times and previously, they grow more uncomfortable with notions of timeless traditions and enduring structures. As a result, they have started asking new questions about the shape of the countryside and its units, and this book offers a range of analyses that offer a new look at rural areas.

The first section concerns the village as a creation of the colonial state. Jan Breman argues that Javanese villages were a European creation that facilitated colonial rule. Breman's argument is aimed to challenge the assumptions of "a large number of followers of the *adat*-law school" (18) about traditional village life. He points out that the supposed village law in fact often represented the agenda of the better-off segment of a village against other locals, an agenda that was subsequently uncritically codified by these outsiders. Breman contends that local differentiation and the primacy of households over villages undermine the portrait of autonomous and harmonious villages so common among administrators and academics. The archival record suggests that the social landscape at the grassroots level was characterized on the one hand by clusters of core settlements each with a number of satellite hamlets, and on the other by clusters of four or five villages organized in mutual interest groups. Breman highlights the contrast with the colonial policy of territorial demarcation, and shows that the "ideal" of fixed residences was only attained at the end of the last century when land was no longer available for further expansion.

In a similar critique of mistaken ideas about village communities, Jeremy Kemp analyzes material on Thailand. In his words: "Perceptions of community underlie and affect not only academic analyses but also the actions and attitudes of officialdom and those experts who are involved with the administration and development of the countryside." (44) Kemp draws on the Bang Chan research of Hanks and Sharp to support his contention that autonomous, bounded village communities are actually fictions. He notes exceptions where villages took on a more corporate identity, in one case because of an ethnic minority status, and in another in a situation of "persistent instability." (55) This suggests that if most elements in a society were in equilibrium, villages would not emerge as significant.

Mason C. Hoadley's chapter on how coffee cultivation triggered a shift from control over manpower to control over territory in eighteenth century West Java suggests how the village came about as a unit of production and administration. There is no indication that the structural change in agricultural production was the result of coercion from the colonial apparatus, and Hoadley points out that a "surprising

number of [local potentates] availed themselves early on of the opportunities offered by the new economic conditions." (33) Hoadley's account of how increased coffee cultivation reshaped agricultural options in general, and how this process drew on local social relations as much as it helped reshape them, points to some of the complexities that appear if one moves beyond a two-point approach to history.

The second section deals with aspects of how the state has undermined the village, and its three chapters are all focused on Thailand. Chatthip Nartsupha's account concerns the village economy in pre-capitalist Thailand, and proposes that the village community is "one of the most ancient institutions of Thai society." (69) His argument proposes a fundamental divide between villages and the state, and contends that only with capitalism did village communities lose their structural integrity and their relative autonomy. In a related argument, Apichai Puntasen contrasts "agro-industry" and "self-reliance." The former has caused increasing landlessness and poverty, while the latter promises to improve farmers' livelihood, strengthen grassroots-level democracy, and: "Most significant, 'self-reliant' farming is consistent with the Buddhist culture of Thai society." (86) Somboon Siriprachai is concerned with issues of deforestation, which he links to demographic factors and poverty. He makes the case that historically the response to population increase and poverty has been forest encroachment rather than structural changes, and that without political effort, development will continue to contribute to growing inequalities. Meanwhile, Thai authorities and international organizations ignore the political sides of the issue and maintain that population growth is the fundamental problem.

The book's final section concerns villages as the object of government policies. Christer Gunnarsson uses the case of the rubber industry in Malaysia to field questions about adequate models for development economics, in particular regarding the role of institutions in economic development. Gunnarsson's account of the development of the rubber industry shows how the policy of both colonial and national governments has patterned an uneven distribution of the benefits of rubber production. He does not find that the framework of New Institutional Economics provide any new insights into the trajectories of the Malaysian rubber industry, but that it accommodates information on "micro level" patterns, such as the issues anthropologists address, that are "seldom . . . of interest to the economist." (139)

Shamsul A. B. discusses formal organizations in rural Malaysia through a case study that not only questions the assumed boundedness of villages but also the clear-cut division between the interests of villages and the state. Agricultural changes during the colonial period facilitated the emergence of village headmen who aligned themselves with subdistrict chiefs, and such alliances furthered the colonial cause. Such networks at intermediate levels are the site for most current development efforts, and it is common that there are ten to fifteen such organizations per village. Shamsul describes some of the intense politicking of village life, how the various organizations affect local politics, and how tensions among the better-off members of a village are played out through factionalism among national-level organizations present in the village.

Similar tensions within villages are apparent in Hans Antlöv's account of the impact of agricultural intensification programs, petty production, and off-farm labor on village affairs in West Java. Village level inequalities have increased during the

New Order, not only inequities in access to land, but also inequities that result from a reduction of wage-labor opportunities for landless people. Previously, it was common that teams of landless women went around looking for work, a search which earned them a portion of the harvest, but landowners progressively reduce their labor costs by hiring teams of young men, restricting the number of harvesters, and harvesting at times when no one is around. Similarly to the pattern evident in agriculture, petty production facilitates increasing income disparities within villages. Antlöv maintains that economic changes came about because the options and constraints of the New Order political economy were acted upon in village life by villagers whose interests were better served by national-level policies than by the conventions of village-level reciprocity.

Anna-Greta Nilsson Hoadley and Mason C. Hoadley look at the co-operative movement in Indonesia. They describe the movement's background, and how the New Order made co-operatives into vehicles for the alignment of village level structures with the interests of the central government. Co-operatives do not account for much of local production; their effectiveness is primarily in relation to government policy, and various agencies, including a Ministry of Co-operatives, have vested interests in the continuation of an organizational framework that absorbs rather than generates wealth.

The book as a whole highlights various important issues about how villages have been caught up in regional dynamics. The range of case studies and analytical approaches suggests new angles that are productive and far from exhausted. There is a curious lack of references to issues concerning peasant resistance, and, with the notable exceptions of the chapters by Shamsul and Antlöv, most of these essays portray the rurals as an inactive lot. Other research in the region has shown how villagers have manipulated ideals of village communities to press for particular rights, both in factional struggles within villages and in tensions against authorities regarding the contents of their relationships.

There are problems, too. Kemp's point that the village "as a formal territorial unit" is the creation of the modernization of the administrative system (58) dismisses as exceptions material that does not match the Central Thai or Siamese case. The insignificance of village-structures in the Central Plains is a product of a specific history (involving the Ayudhyan kingdom and its Bangkok successor which systematically undermined village organization by assigning corvee and other relations to individuals), and not a marker of a somehow neutral condition that existed before modern administrative changes imposed a village mold on a more amorphous reality.

Various pre-modern domains assigned rights and duties in terms of villages, so the issue is not whether the modern state constructed or deconstructed the village (alternatives which assign agency exclusively to "the state"), but the ways in which social formations in the countryside have taken shape in terms of how different interests (such as those of householders, villagers, regional officials, and courts) have been worked out in varied and changing conditions. The issues raised in the book should encourage further studies of how the region's countryside has been shaped and reshaped in the course of everyday politics, how particular historical moments affect

the terms of people's politics, and how even the most enduring structures are always alive not in themselves, but in the context of history.