

gripping narrative that blends historical facts and discourses with embedded analysis, the author brilliantly captures the essence of power in contemporary China that lies in networks and discourses. Broadly, Xi has attempted to weave Chinese history of the Maoist and post-Maoist periods into a seamless web, with an idealistic faith in the teleology of history and in achievable perfect outcomes. Having said that, the author points out that the contingency that comes along with networked power dynamics makes Xi vulnerable. In a thought-provoking volume, the author succeeds in making a dent in the insularity that surrounds Chinese political culture.

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**Damien Kingsbury**, *Politics in Contemporary Southeast Asia: Authority, Democracy and Political Change*. New York: Routledge, 2017. 197 pp. ISBN 978-1-138-88944-6.

The region known as Southeast Asia is a unique combination of countries whose values, economies, political systems, ethnicities and languages agglutinate common points and huge distinctions. In addition to the peculiarities of the countries that make up the region, its neighbourhood makes our understanding more difficult and yet more necessary. To the west the region is bounded by India, while to the north is China. The states that make up Southeast Asia are Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam on the mainland and Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, the Philippines and Timor-Leste in the maritime area.

These countries share a European colonial heritage. This legacy has caused distortions in the constitution of the union between the countries. The region's borders are more strongly influenced by this colonial history and by geographical distribution of territory than by individual countries' identities and by their ethnicity. According Kingsbury, in the introduction of his book, this situation creates a considerable ambiguity.

Damien Kingsbury emphasizes that the region of Southeast Asia was peopled by waves of migrations. Ethnic groups from the southern region of China, together with Sino-Tibetan and Austro-Asiatic groups, and migratory movements between the islands, gave rise to a region with strong ethnic and linguistic differences. These differences were neither

observed nor respected in the colonial period, and even less when the process of independence was occurring. At the same time, Kingsbury says that despite the strong cultural and linguistic differences, there are also a considerable number of common characteristics among the countries in the region. The first of these is related to agriculture as the main economic and social activity. Another relevant feature is the political structure of these countries, which is a legacy of the colonial period. As these particularities have been neglected in the independence process, Kingsbury believes that the countries of the region have adopted with no criticism the Westphalian State model, particularly around notions of fixed borders.

Another essential characteristic of the construction of this region is the centralized political system. According to the author, these countries have developed a hierarchical political system, based on what he calls 'patron-client relations'. This type of relationship is quite common in the region's countries, and is more than a political, social and economic system. At one level, it tends to construct a mutually supportive and reciprocal set of relations, which helps to bond together particular societies or social orders. But in the modern economy, the patron-client relationship lends itself to corruption, particularly in political office where traditionally there was little or no distinction between power and reward.

The main purpose of this book is to analyse the extent and type of regional governments in Southeast Asian countries, as well as the challenges to their representativeness and accountability. Looking at each government case by case, degrees of good governance and transparency are identified, and the role of elites and militaries in shaping or determining political outcomes is explored. It is worth noting that Kingsbury indicates he will consider the political processes in each country, but because the chapters deal with each case individually, the sociocultural context is also provided for the reader. Kingsbury also examines the key events that have taken place and in time will cause significant changes to the region, as well as worldwide. These events are the end of the Cold War, the recent rise of globalization, the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 and American policy (and that of their allies) in the so-called War on Terror.

There are good reasons for choosing these events and relating them to Southeast Asia. In the case of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the communist regimes, and the victory of democratic capitalism, led to a reduction in international support for govern-

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ments in Southeast Asia. It seems that democracy, as conceived and formulated by the core of 'victorious nations' after the Cold War, may not have become universal. It appears that in the countries of Southeast Asia centralization remained stronger, with power remaining in the hands of the elite or military governments.

When it comes to globalization, the establishment of a global space, interdependent and financially integrated, has affected countries in this region. They have experienced a jump in economic growth and have consequently become promising spaces of exploitation; this means they are also spaces in which there has been a high rate of speculation. Among the various consequences of this was the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997. This destabilized some of the stronger economies in the region, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. However, it is also important to consider the effect of the War on Terror. This deals with an international security issue, notably terrorism related to religious matters. For several countries in the region, which share the same religion but are not directly involved with the terrorists, the security issue ends up influencing decisions about politics, economics and cultural issues.

It is worth noting that Kingsbury provides an excellent historical review that allows us to understand the current state of politics in Southeast Asian countries. The colonial history and the history of these countries after the Second World War can be characterized as challenging independence. Besides, for many countries (Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, East Timor-Leste, Indonesia and the Philippines) the forces that have dominated political processes since independence are mostly military.

The presence of the military in politics is a factor in Kingsbury's analysis. Despite the attempt of some countries to emulate democratic models, what existed in the region were authoritarian governments, monarchies and communist governments. This, according to Kingsbury, has affected the emergence and maturation of institutions and the adoption of more transparent models of governance. What may be observed because of these centralized structures is a process of regime change that is crucial to the countries' development. By regime change, Kingsbury refers to change not only in the form of government but also in the political structure of the state. However, the author warns that 'regime change usually follows a period of rising political tension' and consequently may lead to 'political violence, in particular between groups representing the status quo and aspirants for change' (p. 21).

This set of characteristics means the region has a complex set of challenges when it comes to understanding its evolution as well and evaluating the relations that exist between these countries, as well as with their neighbourhood and the rest of the world. Kingsbury's great contribution is dealing with each of the countries in the region chapter by chapter, but also providing an opening chapter that presents the reader with the theoretical key to allow understanding of the political structure in the countries of Southeast Asia. As a researcher of the region, I see this to be a valuable contribution. The high level of detail, the set of data provided and the current literature used are all highlights of this book.

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**Tasneem Khalil**, *Jallad: Death Squads and State Terror in South Asia*. London: Pluto Press, 2016. ix + 166 pp. ISBN: 978-0-7453-3570-4.

This book is a historiographical account of state repression, genocides and 'death squads' in five South Asian 'deep states', namely Bangladesh (Chapter 2), India (Chapter 3), Nepal (Chapter 4), Pakistan (Chapter 5) and Sri Lanka (Chapter 6). The other chapters deal with state terror in post-colonial South Asia (Chapter 7), specialists of violence (Chapter 8) and the international regime of state terror (Chapter 9). The author, Tasneem Khalil, is a young political activist, journalist and self-proclaimed 'prisoner of conscience' who engages with state-sponsored terror in South Asia. His personal saga of abduction and torture by the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence or the Rapid Action Battalion of Bangladesh forms the content of Chapter 10.

The term *Jallad* is of Urdu origin and is used as a metaphor for those who actively engage in state-sponsored post-colonial governmentality attained through gross human rights violations which include torture, extra judicial executions, massacres, rape and enforced disappearances. It is illustrative of the black laws injected by the state into the body politic which is the first pillar of the system of state terror in post-colonial South Asia (p. 101). *Jallad* is a hagiography of statecraft and deals with