

the conditions of modernity, particularly with relationship to modern art. He has written about and organised exhibitions that deal with contemporary issues relevant not only to Singapore, but identify the cultural psyche of Southeast Asia as a region. “The Assumption of Love; Friendship and the Search for Discursive Density” is clearly one of the most interesting chapters of the book.

Flaudette May V. Datuin looks at the art of Thai artist Phaptawan Suwannakudt and of Filipina artists Rowena Seloterio and (California-based) Gina Osterloh. She examines through her essay “Uncommon Sense: ‘Empty the Visual from Eyes of Flesh’” their feminist art practices with a similar sensitivity that defines their art. Further, she seeks to define their art under conditions of modernity, particularly in relationship to emotions that often impact artistic practice.

Ashley Thompson, on the other hand deals with the situation of emotions in a totally different vein. “Mnemotechnical Politics: Rithy Panh’s Cinematic Archive and the Return of Cambodia’s Past” is at once an academic and poignant documentation of Cambodia’s recent political history.

The final chapter in the book is a transcript of an interview by Grant Kester of Jay Koh and Chu Yuan, who have initiated and developed a series of art and cultural initiatives in Myanmar and other locales. While this narrative differs greatly from the other chapters in the book, it does address the conditions within which professionals contend, in this instance Myanmar.

The book clearly straddles a variety of artistic experiences that have emerged in Southeast Asia’s contemporary and modern art history as it engages in dialogue that stresses the region’s artistic wealth and ambitions that cut a broad swath through the region. Borders can never be fully crossed; but understood and studied together, this anthology depicts Southeast Asia as socially and politically charged fields of artistic action, and illustrates how the reality of place and its cultural associations take on deeper meanings.

Shireen Naziree

*Creolization and Diaspora in the Portuguese Indies: The Social World of Ayutthaya, 1640-1720* by Stefan Halikowski Smith (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011). Hardbound: ISBN 978 90 04 19048 1

Compared to the other Europeans at Ayutthaya, the Portuguese are relatively understudied, especially in English-language works, and especially beyond their early presence in the 16th century. The Campos article on “Early Portuguese Accounts of Thailand” in the *JSS* seventy years ago is the only broad survey in English and limited to the 16th century. Pinto is the only travel memoir available in English translation. Suthachai Yimprasert, possibly the only Thai scholar who has learnt to read Old Portuguese, failed to concentrate his doctoral research on Siam or

publish his thesis before shifting his interests elsewhere.

This fat book by Stefan Halikowski Smith is thus a major event. The bibliography contains around six hundred entries, around half of which are old memoirs and travel accounts, many by Portuguese authors totally unknown to most scholars. Smith concentrates on the 17th century, and especially on Ayutthaya, though within the context of the Portuguese diaspora from Goa to Macao.

Smith situates his study within the debates over the role of Portuguese *mestiço* or creole communities in various parts of the world in this era. He adopts Leonard Andaya's idea of a "Portuguese tribe" to emphasize the informal and largely non-institutionalized nature of these communities, and notes that the story of this community has "very little to do with empire".

Portuguese were present in Ayutthaya from the early 16th century when they had roles as mercenaries and arms suppliers. By the end of that century, however, they had dwindled in number to a handful, lost their niche as military experts, and were spurned by other Europeans as "the worst and most lewd livers in Siam" (p. 73). After the Dutch expelled the Portuguese from Malacca in 1641 and from Makassar in the 1660s, the "Portuguese tribe" in Ayutthaya swelled to five or six thousand. Among these, there were only eight or nine true Portuguese families. Others were creoles along with Indians, Japanese, Africans, and Makassarese.

Most seem to have been poor. Only two Portuguese are visible as entrepreneurs in ocean-going trade, and a few others as sea captains. Smith surmises that most others were engaged in petty local trading. Their status seems to have been similar to the Japanese, another community which lost status once its martial expertise declined in value. The Portuguese "camp" to the south of Ayutthaya island was something of a "ghetto", where people were confined during political crises. Whereas the heads of the Dutch, French and other communities were adopted into the Siamese nobility with official titles, the head of the Portuguese was dubbed only *Capitão-Mór* and rarely invited to court. The incumbent at the time of the Siqueira mission in 1684 was 70 years old and in "severe poverty".

In what way were the members of this tribe "Portuguese"? On the basis of studies from other regions, Smith assumes that they spoke a creole language of Portuguese with additions from other languages, but he regrets that he has found no evidence to reconstruct this tongue. By surveying temple murals in Siam and Pagan, he examines how the Portuguese looked to others. They seem to have worn cotton pants, a neckerchief, no shoes and a black hat. This rig clearly differentiated them from the British and French, who clung to something more originally European, but also set them apart from the Siamese.

Smith contrasts the poor situation and status of the Portuguese in Ayutthaya with their counterparts in Cambodia and Burma, and wonders why there was such a difference. He argues that the Siamese court kept a close control on trade and only the Dutch (and later the French) had the diplomatic weight to gain access. He might

also have added that the Portuguese, because they had few infusions from Europe, had little expertise in the way of the new technologies that intrigued the Siamese court. The single exception seems to have been the Jesuit Tommaso Valguarnera, who had engineering skills to strengthen the city walls and build a fountain. But this scarcely compared to the architects, engineers, marine experts, and astronomers supplied by other European nations.

The Dominicans were probably the first churchmen to arrive, possibly building in 1555 the church which has recently been excavated. They were followed by the Jesuits, who built a church and college, and later by Augustinians and Franciscans. Their efforts at conversion bore very little fruit. They were most successful with orphans or abandoned children of peripheral communities, and converted almost no Siamese. Perhaps because of this disappointment, they bickered vituperously. The Dominicans sneered at the Jesuits for eliding the story of Jesus Christ from their teachings because they felt it was not appealing to their audience. Particularly once the French missionaries arrived, the various sects seem to have put most of their efforts into slandering their opponents as lazy and sinful, calling on their overlords to intervene, appealing to King Narai for help, and occasionally resorting to murder.

The Portuguese community survived the ructions of 1688 rather well because they had no association with Phaulkon. With the removal of the British and French, some Portuguese fared rather better in the early 18th century, though most of the new opportunities were captured by the Chinese and the Dutch. The reputation of the Portuguese improved very little. In 1718, Alexander Hamilton called them “the most dissolute, lazy, thievish rascals that were to be found in the country” (p. 175).

The subtitle of the book, *The Social World of Ayutthaya*, is a little misleading. The focus is very much on the Portuguese who were a very small part of the society of Ayutthaya. Smith offers a nice sketch of the other foreign communities in the 1660s, but has virtually nothing on the Siamese.

Smith has read very widely (the books in the bibliography are in at least eight languages) and has deftly reconstructed his picture of the Portuguese in Ayutthaya from rather fragmentary references. But much is missing from the picture and probably will be for ever. On many issues, such as the design of the various churches and colleges built by the Portuguese in Ayutthaya, Smith draws our attention to examples elsewhere in the Portuguese diaspora because there is no trace of the Ayutthaya buildings in the sources. He seems to have found no Portuguese-language account of the Ayutthaya Portuguese community, nor any Portuguese-language description of Ayutthaya to set beside those of Van Vliet, La Loubère, Mohammed Ibrahim, and others. It is not difficult to guess why. These authors were either writing for the benefit of their official superiors, or writing for a public audience after their return to Europe. But the Ayutthaya Portuguese were an informal community without any institutional superstructure, and they were permanently settled in the east. Their visiting missions came from Goa and Macao rather than Lisbon, and

seem to have taken little interest in matters beyond their religious duties. The Jesuit Valguarnera compiled the first dictionary of Siamese in the mid 17th century, but no copy has survived. Any hope that our knowledge of 17th-century Ayutthaya will be expanded by a Portuguese account to put aside those of the French, Dutch, Chinese, and Persians seems to be forlorn.

Smith makes a couple of rather bizarre errors, such as displacing Prince Prisdang's mission by two centuries, but otherwise this is a very thorough work of research and a fascinating analysis which will undoubtedly stand the test of time.

Chris Baker

*30 Heritage Buildings of Yangon: Inside the City that Captured Time* by Sarah Rooney (Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2012). ISBN 978-1932476620 (hard)

Few visitors to Myanmar are not struck by the wealth of surviving colonial architecture in Yangon, preserved, for better or worse, by the country's long isolation and stunted economic growth since Independence. Indeed, Yangon, formerly Rangoon, is likely the choicest spot in all of Asia to appreciate an urban colonial setting which has virtually vanished everywhere else. The very character of once regal cities, from Colombo to Saigon to Hong Kong, has been irrevocably fractured by thoughtless and unbridled urban development. Only has old Yangon been spared such a sorry fate, but the city's future now hangs in the balance by the rapid economic changes anticipated in Myanmar.

Sweeping new political progress and the concomitant relaxation of international sanctions have indeed triggered a race by rapacious foreign and Myanmarese investors keen to erect shopping malls and business parks in the wake of the wrecking ball. The prognosis for Yangon is not a happy one, since commercial pressures too often trump the goals of preservation, as history amply demonstrates in Asia and throughout the world. The single overarching thrust of this compelling book is the need to respect, protect and nurture Yangon's rich architectural heritage in light of these new threats. Like endangered species, these heritage buildings can never be replaced.

The book opens with a tribute to old Yangon by U Thaw Kaung, a well-known savant who for decades served as the Chief Librarian at the Universities Central Library. His first-hand experiences, such as shopping at the now-closed Rowe & Company department store opposite the City Hall, provide poignant reminders that the city's boarded up landmarks were once centers of urban life.

The Association of Myanmar Architects selected the thirty buildings that are treated by the book's author, Sarah Rooney. The thirty are mostly public structures