

Southeast Asia: an additional bibliographical tool

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Antweiler, Christoph. 2004. *Southeast Asia: A Bibliography on Societies and Cultures*, Singapore: ISEAS, 111 pages, ISBN 9 873825 877062

In spite of the abundance of printed bibliographies and increasing reliance on internet-based tools and information, this bibliography can usefully support general and introductory reading on Southeast Asia in the social sciences.

There are plenty of bibliographies that cater for the needs of researchers on Southeast Asia. Kemp's relatively recent (1998) *Bibliographies of Southeast Asia* published by KITLV lists over 5,380

In sum, this book – or rather the accompanying CD-ROM – can be used to identify general and comparative studies on Southeast Asia. Thus, it may be useful for those who want to find material for introductory courses on Southeast Asia, and for researchers of specialized topics within the region who are trying to identify studies with a broader or more comparative view.

bibliographies; of which 433 refer to the region as a whole. The remaining close-to-5,000 entries refer to more specialized subject or geographical bibliographies. The magnificent indices of Kemp's publication greatly facilitate efforts to find specialized bibliographies on the region, or any of its parts.

Contrary to what its title seems to indicate, Antweiler's (2004) contribution, *Southeast Asia – A Bibliography on Societies and Cultures*, is not a comprehensive reference bibliography of publications treating individual societies and cultures within Southeast Asia. His aim is rather to provide an 'orientation about general books on the whole region as well as on books about

specific topics which are transnationally relevant within Southeast Asia' (Antweiler 2004:3) Perceiving the lack of short, general and interdisciplinary bibliographies featuring publications on Southeast Asia from a general (regional) or disciplinary point of view, Antweiler has collected about 900 references. These titles are presented in alphabetical order by author name, without annotations. However, deviation from the general rule of a regional focus, some works on specific topics or ethnic groups are included if they are 'of exemplary relevance' or of 'general importance for the region'. In practical terms, this refers to studies that have greatly influenced Southeast Asian research, and can now be considered classics, such as Freeman's (1980) study on *Iban Agriculture*. Evidently, there is a lot of discretion at work here regarding what one would consider a work of exemplary relevance.

Coming with no indices, this book would be difficult to use if it did not include a CD-ROM with all its contents on a word file. This allowed me to perform a number of searches on the CD-ROM to find out more about the potential uses of the bibliography. A simple full-text search on the term 'history' for example produced around 40 titles, most of which would be of genuine interest to anybody intent to read up on Southeast Asian history. As Antweiler indicates in the preface, the references selected would be to the greatest part relatively recent publications (post 1980s). The English language dominates, but some German and French publications are also included.

Looking for broad introductory material on forest issues in the region, I obtained 15 useful references from a search on 'forest', covering various disciplines, also a good start to get a first overview of the subject. A final example: a search on 'agriculture' yielded nine hits, relatively low given the long importance of the subject to Southeast Asian Studies. This indicates that the compilation is also a function of the research interests of the author, and that subjects of similar importance may have received differential treatment. In addition, search terms need to be quite generic to



Illustration by Pattanapong Varanyanon

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produce useful results. Also, a certain familiarity with research on Southeast Asia is required to assess the value of a search result as the author provides us with no further information or annotations on the entries selected.

Thus, selectivity and interdisciplinarity can be considered as the two merits of Antweiler's compilation. Drawing from a narrow sample focusing on the region as a whole, search results will tend to be small and focused. The user is spared long lists of hits that he or she would

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then have to narrow down further. The range of disciplines covered – from anthropology, political science, history, geography to economics – may provide useful leads into any of the disciplines of this vast field of study.

A shortcoming is the lack of a review section introducing the major disciplinary traditions and research areas represented in this selection which would expand on the remarks on selection criteria in the introduction.

In sum, this book – or rather the accompanying CD-ROM – can be used to identify general and comparative studies on Southeast Asia. Thus, it may be useful for those who want to find material for introductory courses on Southeast Asia, and for researchers of specialized topics within the region who are trying to identify studies with a broader or more comparative view.

Reference

- Freeman, Derek. 1980. Iban Agriculture. A Report on the Shifting Cultivation of Hill Rice by the Iban of Sarawak. New York: Ms Press.
- Kemp, Herman C. 1998. Bibliographies of Southeast Asia. Leiden: Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal, Land en Volkenkunde KITLV Press, Bibliographical Series 22.

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IIAS #44