

and it is clearly surpassed by the more subtle analysis found in Martin Stuart-Fox's *The Lao Kingdom of Lan Xang: Rise and Decline* (Bangkok 1998). Apparently, the book under review is intended as the first of two where the other will be dealing with Laos in the 1945-1975 period. Due to the authors' presence in Laos during that period, it can only be hoped that it will be more interesting reading than this one.

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Josiane Cauquelin, Paul Lim and Birgit Mayer-Köning (eds), *Asian Values: Encounter with Diversity*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1998. xix, 207 pp. ISBN 0-7007-1096-5.

This edited volume is the result of a study undertaken by the European Institute for Asian Studies commissioned for the Venice Forum on Culture, Values and Technology, an event that led up to the first Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) in 1996. Its main purpose has been to facilitate an understanding and appreciation, especially among Westerners, of developments in Asia so that relations between Europe and Asia may be handled more sensitively and the two regions drawn more closely together in a 'deeper, more constructive and more beneficial relationship' (p. ix). This has centred, specifically, on an understanding of Asian values; their roots in ancient cultures and traditions; their transformation by modern developments such as market forces, consumer culture and Westernization; and their overall consistency. This volume also attempts to suggest fruitful directions for further studies of Asian values.

The book's subtitle, *Encounter with Diversity*, aptly characterizes not only the heterogeneous region that has come to be called Asia, but also the multiple ways in which Asian values have come to be understood and the variety of approaches that have been adopted in attempting an understanding of them. The book's editors and contributors comprise a credible mix of Asian and European academics, and a few have worked in

countries across the divide. However, the absence of contributors from academics in Singapore and Malaysia, where some of the most vocal pronouncements in Asian values have lately originated, is curious in the light of a work that appears to attempt a wide-ranging and representative spectrum of efforts to understand Asian values.

As a whole, the approach is multidisciplinary – there are country studies, historical accounts, socio-political analyses, culture studies, accounts of the major religions largely through analysis of scripture and historical developments, and business studies. This makes the book quite suitable for introducing undergraduates to the many possible approaches in the human and social sciences. It is particularly useful as a basic overview of the essential attitudinal orientations, beliefs and practices of major 'Eastern' civilizations and religions. At the very least, it is a thoroughly interesting read.

However, such a broad scope for a book of this length, and the largely encyclopaedic and compartmentalized attempts of each chapter to explain Asian values, leave the book without a central thesis. Little attempt is made to establish useful connections among different authors, their approaches and research areas. An eclectic menu is presented to the reader who is left quite on his own and without any suggestions as to how one might put together a meal. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it does complicate efforts to come to grips with the slippery notion of Asian values which, after all, have been specified in the book's title as the central analytical category. It is therefore unfortunate that the structure and contents of the book spiral outwards from this category without really coming back to it. In this regard, the final chapter that discusses the role of Jesuits in pre-colonial India, China and Japan seems oddly placed, except for a weak suggestion that the more balanced pre-colonial relationship between Europe and Asia could serve as a model for future relations. The reader, seeking an understanding of Asian values specifically, might come away from the book with a general feel for 'Asian Studies' but not much more insight into Asian values themselves.

The large portion of the book devoted to discussions of Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, Hinduism and, in more fragmented ways, Christianity in Asia, suggests that Asian values are largely anchored in religion. Yet, Pertierra argues quite correctly that '[w]hile religion continues to play a significant role in contemporary Asia, it is a mistake to assume that its primary texts are the major influence in everyday life in the region' (p. 118). Although Asian values are discussed in the contexts of modernity, capitalism, consumerism, the nation-state and political-ideological concerns, the important dynamics of internal multi-ethnicity in Asian nation-states are inadequately treated. Attempts to shape a national ideology, such as Indonesia's *Pancasila*, Malaysia's *Rukunegara*, and Singapore's *Shared Values*, though surely pertinent, are not discussed. 'Phenomenological' and ethnographical approaches are also neglected, as are potentially useful commentaries on published national polls and surveys, as well as interviews with those in a position to shape Asian values. After all, these Asian values are surely not simply a function of the past but also conscious expressions of collective interpretations of the past and of collective aspirations for the future. A discussion of the possible impact on Asian values of regional institutions (such as ASEAN) and their partnership with 'Western' institutions (e.g. ASEAN Regional Forum, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) is also pertinent but absent.

On the whole, the book maintains a controlled, very readable style with helpful translations of key concepts. While its target audience is principally the diplomatic community, *Asian Values* is also appropriate as an undergraduate introduction to Asian Studies, and suitable for the general reader who wants to obtain a quick, wide-ranging and not overly simplistic introduction to Asian societies and their evolution.

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