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Kingdom of Laos [Book Review]

Item Type	popular_press;article
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Download date	2024-12-11 22:29:00
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/23253

Kingdom of Laos



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Far Eastern Survey, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Jan., 1960), 15.

Stable URL:

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the University of Malaya, as well as two essays by him, one modified from an article published in the *Malayan Economic Review* of April, 1957. His subject is the economic character and problems of the Commonwealth Territories in Southeast Asia, this region being defined properly as that portion of Asia lying east of India and south of China. His primary concern is with Malaya, Singapore, and the territories of British Borneo—Sarawak, Brunei, and North Borneo. His style, in the first three chapters particularly, is easy and informal; he notes, for example, with regard to the Iban of Borneo that "It is a matter of some interest for the traveler to find human heads hanging at one end of a longhouse and to see a number of outboard motors stored at the other" (p. 26).

Of the book's five chapters some idea of its content and objectives: "The Basic Pattern," "The Commonwealth Impact," "Assessment and Suggestions," "Malaya and the European Free Trade Area," and "The Determinants of Economic Development." The first is most informative to the general reader seeking information about the political and economic character of the British territories in Southeast Asia. The second may be of greater interest to those seeking insights into the processes, underlying assumptions, and consequences of British colonial administration. The third focusses on the implications of independence, self-government, and new Commonwealth relationships on economic development and political evolution in these multi-ethnic territories. The fourth more specifically deals with one aspect of Malaya's economic relations with western Europe. The fifth, providing a general statement concerning the nature and problems of economic growth, is in many respects the most important in the book; it appears to this reviewer to reflect the point of view one finds in the recent books by Bauer and Yamey (*The Economics of Under-Developed Countries*) and Myrdal (*Economic Theory and Underdeveloped Regions*), rather than the less compromising, more "scientific" approach of some other economists to economic growth problems.

Professor Silcock makes a number of interesting points—too many to be noted in a short review. He points to the extreme variations in kind among the class of regions commonly termed "underdeveloped" and notes the need for research in area differences as a basis for technical and other assistance. He describes the lack of complementary resources which in Southeast Asia, as in most other lesser developed areas, handicap the use of otherwise known resources. He notes the basic significances of accessibility of people to places, resources, and other people. He points to the need for developing new types of economic and social organization in newly independent or developing countries or variations on the old, and suggests as a possible model, Chinese commercial enterprise about which we know relatively little. Above all, he is concerned with the relations between economic change and political change. He argues that the shift from one form of government to another, especially from a dependent status to independence, may result in economic shifts as the roles of government and government personnel change, which in turn may mean temporary economic recession. With considerable insight, he discusses the peculiar role of the British colonial official and his tendencies to improvise for the colonial system itself, rather than for development. In discussing the need for research and education, he stresses the contrast between American and British systems of education, and though sympathetic to the British form, recognizes its limitations in the Southeast Asian environment.

The discussion of Commonwealth problems in Southeast Asia has numerous implications for the comprehension of more

universal economic development problems and the scholars' and administrators' approach to them. For this reason, it might have been preferable to shift the final, general chapter to the beginning of the volume so as to have provided a frame of reference for the reader as he moved into the analysis of Southeast Asia. This might have made for a rather tauter organization. As it stands, the book tends to be rather patchy, and redundancies occur. This is, however, a minor objection to what is a readable, thoughtful appraisal of the problems and potentials of an important set of countries in Southeast Asia. The value of the book is enhanced by a comprehensive bibliography of recent publications on the Federation of Malaya and Singapore.

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NORTON GINSBURG

KINGDOM OF LAOS. Edited by René de Berval. Saigon: France-Asie. 1959. 506 pp.

The present volume is an English translation of the earlier book, *Présence du Royaume Lao*, which was published in 1956 as a special number of the Saigon monthly journal *France-Asie*. Its appearance is timely, particularly since the book is the only general source in English on this small but strategic country.

Lacking real unity, the book is a collection of essays and articles by various Laotian government officials and French contributors, loosely organized under these basic headings: Geography, History, Arts, Ethnography, Religion, Medicine, Language and Literature, Annals of Lan Xang (the Laotian kingdom from the 9th to the 18th centuries), Folklore, Education and Economy. A useful addition to the English version is the concluding article on the international relations of Laos, by Professor Bernard B. Fall. Of indispensable aid to the researcher is an extensive bibliography at the end of the book, including French, English and the few Dutch and German sources. Many of the fifty articles are excellent. However, the wide range of authorship cannot help but give an unevenness to the volume. Historical background is well presented, offering alternative versions where dates and records conflict. In subsequent sections the reader is treated to tantalizing vignettes of Laotian everyday and ceremonial life, including such diverse subjects as crisis rites, religious festivals, details of the installation of temple drums, instruction for playing a Laotian card game, and Laotian recipes. Again, information is scattered and descriptions are frequently simply brief summations.

What has been included is all interesting and of value in itself—but one looks in vain for an integral picture of agriculture in Laos, not adequately covered in the annotated outline statement on the current Laotian economy, or for a discussion on the set-up of the Laotian government. One very important omission is the lack of a single article on any one of the several tribal peoples who together make up approximately half the population of Laos. Thus this book is exclusively about the Laotians and not about peoples of Laos. The translation from French to English is unfortunately uneven in quality. One gets the impression that *Kingdom of Laos*, from its inception as individual essays to its present form, has all along been a labor of love, its aim being to present to the world as many aspects as possible of the little-known Southeast Asian kingdom. As such, it will surely be welcomed and should not be judged simply as an academic study. Many photographs and a wealth of other illustrative material enhance the book's appeal.

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