



WESTERN BOOKS ON ASIA: SOUTHEAST ASIA

from the John M. Echols Collection at Cornell University

Scholars of Western views of Southeast Asia before and in the early part of the 20th century have long recognized the difficulty of researching this topic because of the unavailability of many key texts from most libraries. Indeed only a few libraries in the world contain

collections that hold many such titles. The largest of these is without doubt the Southeast Asia collection at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, begun in the 1950s by Cornell professor of history John M. Echols and added to thereafter by a small group of loyal students and alumni.

The full scope of the Echols Collection is well known to scholars in the United States and abroad, comprising as it does several hundred thousand individual items from the earliest periods in printing throughout Southeast Asia up until the modern day. While the vast majority of the titles comprise publications from Southeast Asia in the vernaculars of the region, the portion of the collection devoted specifically to pre-1930 Western-language publications is reckoned the largest in the world.

Western Books on Asia: Southeast Asia mines the many treasures of this part of the collection, with particular attention to the broadest needs of scholars and students studying Western views of Southeast Asia. Published in several parts divided by period, *Western Books on Asia: Southeast Asia* includes materials that appeared in Dutch, English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Russian. For publications that appear in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, titles are arranged chronologically by year of publication and then by author.

By the 19th century, the amount of published material on this important region had grown exponentially, requiring the division of monographs by the regional subjects of Burma, Indochina (with further subdivision, where appropriate, into Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam), Philippines, Siam and “various regions” where more than one is addressed. Finally, in order to ensure the value of this remarkable collection, every single title has been researched on OCLC in order to establish its rarity, regardless of its particular edition or format.

A remarkable journey through four centuries of Asian history

Our journey starts in the 16th century, where researchers will discover such unique titles as the anonymously pub-

lished “History of Trauayle in the West and East Indies, and other countreys lying eyther way towards the fruitfull and ryche Moluccaes” (1577) and Richard Hakluyt’s “Principal navigations, voyages, traffiques and discoveries of the English nation: made by sea or ouerland, to the remote and farthest distant quarters of the earth, at any time within the compasse of these 1600 yeres” (1599). For the 17th century, researchers encounter some of the earliest major accounts of European travels to Southeast Asia as well as titles on numerous other topics related to the region. These include works by Michel Baudier, Jacques de Bourges, Michel Boym, Alexandre Chaumont, Philipp Cléuver, Pedro Cubero Sebastian, Nicolas Gervaise, Hendrik Hamel, Sir Thomas Herbert, Johann Christian Hoffmann, Simon de La Loubáere, Michel Le Tellier, Gio Filippo de Marini, Adam Olearius, Pedro Ordoñez de Ceballos, Pierre Joseph d’Orleans, Alexandre de Rhodes, Jacob Jansz de Roy, Francisco de São de Meneses, Nicolas Sanson, Guy Tachard, Jean Baptiste Tavernier and Bernhardus Varenius. Among these titles one can find beautiful early woodcut engravings as well as fascinating firsthand and secondhand accounts on the “wonders” of Southeast Asia, albeit from a distinctly Western perspective.

The 18th-century titles constitute an even larger and more diverse group of publications that call into question clichéd notions of the eclipse of European interest in Southeast Asia from the 1680s until the 1820s. Researchers should especially benefit from the many accounts of European travelers who seem to have gone just about everywhere in the region. These travel accounts center on a wide range of subjects, including trade in many different objects, as well as religious evangelization, wide-eyed tourism and imperial expansion. Here one finds commentaries on trade and commerce affecting the region by Simon Tyssot de Patot, Carl Peter Thunberg, Johan Splinter Stavorinus, Jacques Savary des Brûlons, Saunier de Beaumont, Alexis Rochon, René Augustin Constantin de Renneville., Abbé Raynal [Guillaume-Thomas-François], Patrice Mac Neny, Richard Hayes, William Guthrie, Nikolaas de Graaf and Sir Josiah Child. The work of early geographers appears in works authored by Richard Brookes, John Malham, John Barrow, Thomas Salmon, Frederic Watson, William Guthrie, Patrick Gordon, Charles Theodore Middleton, George Henry Millar and Philippe Clüver. For looks at the customs and manners of peoples in the region, one may fruitfully turn to the works of W. H. Dilworth, William Dampier, Jonathan Carver, Jacques Savary des Brûlons, John Hamilton Moore, Thomas Salmon, Lewes Roberts, Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola and Daniel Beekman.



For the 1800s, *Western Books on Asia: Southeast Asia* divides titles into two major halves: those in English and those in other major European languages. These are then arranged geographically, even though Primary Source Microfilm recognizes the historically biased (and sometimes inconsistent) character of these divisions (such as references to titles about “Siam” rather than modern-day Thailand or the grouping of titles under the rubric of “Indonesia,” which officially existed only since 1948; or Malaysia, which gained its independence in 1963). Rules of thumb were inevitable for creating such a complex collection, and Primary Source Microfilm recognized from the outset the challenges posed by the heterogeneous character of the collection and the unusual ways in which the West conceptualized Southeast Asia.

And yet this collection consistently surprises researchers with its inclusiveness. It includes books so rare that they are not even included in the standard bibliographies. Unusually scarce 19th century English titles count among them, for example, early missionary accounts on Burma by Willis Webb, Alonzo King and John Saillie. Titles on Siam include the wonderfully informative account of the trial of Phra Yot, who defended Siam against an invading French army in 1893 and was put on trial for killing a French military officer while defending his country.

So great had the number of titles on this area of the world grown that researchers surveying this period will find a variety of titles organized by region. For Burma, Grattan Geary’s “Burma: after the conquest: viewed in its political, social, and commercial aspects, from Mandalay” (1886) or Thomas Campbell Robertson’s “Political incidents of the First Burmese War” (1853) underscore the politics of this British colony. Indochina is heavily covered by such French-language works as Francois-Jules Harmand’s “Indo-Chine française; politique et administration” (1887), Louis Henrique-Duluc’s “Colonies françaises; notices illustrées, pub. par ordre du sous-secrétaire d’état des colonies” (1889) and Albert Septans’ “Commencements de l’Indo-Chine française d’après les archives du Ministère de la marine et des colonies, les mémoires ou relations du temps” (1887). On Indonesia, although a Dutch colony, one discovers French views, such as W.L. de Petit’s “Conquête de la Vallée d’Atchin par les hollandaise” (1891) or Just-Jean-Etienne Roy’s “Quinze ans de séjour à Java et dans les principales îles de l’archipel de la Sonde et des possessions néerlandaises des Indes Orientales” (1863). The English also had much to say, particularly through its many “select committee” reports on the East India Company, while German authors like Otto Mohnike, Auguste Lahure and W.F.A. Zimmerman aired their views on the Dutch Indies.

Malaysia — the Malay Archipelago as it was commonly called — was an object of fascination for several authors who wrote multiple titles on this region of Southeast Asia. These include Edouard Dulaurier’s letters, memoirs and diplomatic writings; Sir William Edward Maxwell’s records of Malayan myths and Harriette Bunyon McDougall’s accounts of Sarawak. And for the Philippines, one stumbles across any number of important and interesting works, such as Emilio Aguinaldo’s 1899 “Reseña verídica de la revolución filipina/por Emilio Aguinaldo y Famy” or the 1890 edition of Gaspar de San Agustín’s “Conquistas de las islas Filipinas: la temporal, por las armas del señor don Phelipe Segundo el Prudente.”

A full and unexpectedly rich representation of Southeast Asia

Western Books on Asia: Southeast Asia provides scholars rare, hard-to-find titles. Distributing such rarities allows researchers relatively easy access to an expanded range of historical materials against which to measure contemporary historical understanding of Southeast Asia. After all, while many titles may well support current historical analyses, no historian can afford to ignore those works that promote a revised understanding or new branches of analysis. It is not uncommon in rare book collections to discover works that represent “minority” views and have thus become rare as a consequence.

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