

dissonant in a chapter that spends many pages justifying the name Up-country (Malaiyaka) Tamils, while problematizing the alternatives: Indian Tamils, Plantation Tamils, Estate Tamils or Coolies.

All in all, Bass' solid ethnography will be of interest to scholars of (South Asian) diaspora, as well as to Sri Lanka specialists who wish to strengthen their knowledge on this under-represented community. Readers desiring a surprising or conceptually stimulating argument, are less likely to find "Everyday Ethnicity in Sri Lanka" a must-read.

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HARD INTERESTS, SOFT ILLUSIONS: Southeast Asia and American Power. By *Natasha Hamilton-Hart*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012. x, 243 pp. (Tables.) US\$39.95, cloth. ISBN 978-0-8014-5054-9.

In this important and well-written study of Southeast Asian attitudes to American power since the end of World War II, Natasha Hamilton-Hart examines "foreign policy beliefs" in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam. She bases her study on interviews with foreign policy experts and diplomats as well as a wide-ranging survey of scholarship on the cultures, politics and histories of the region. Although she writes in part for a specialist audience of foreign policy and political science scholars, for whom abstract formulations like "unmotivated" cognitive processing" (31) and "biased scanning" (35) will be meaningful, the book will be of general interest to historians of Southeast Asia and useful in teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Two aspects of Hamilton-Hart's approach stand out and will offer excellent topics for classroom debate: she is critical, but does not engage in a "blame game" about the negative effects of American foreign policy in Southeast Asia; and she bases her analysis on universal cognitive categories rather than culturally specific ones.

Behind what Lord Palmerston called "permanent interests" that explain the choices nations make in their relations with one another lie biases, attitudes and "beliefs" that are held by the people who actually formulate and carry out foreign policy. How these beliefs are formed is what interests Hamilton-Hart. Why do the majority of the diplomats she interviewed support "American primacy" in the region? After setting out the plan of the book in chapter 1, Hamilton-Hart explains her theoretical framework in chapter 2. Her main point here is that, except for Vietnam, Southeast Asian elites in the countries of her study have been pro-American because American policies have helped them hold onto power, and their success in doing so has allowed them to conflate their own interests with those of the nation-states they serve. In chapter 3, Hamilton-Hart traces, country by country, the historical creation of the nexus of personal interests and the belief that what

is good for pro-American Southeast Asian elites is best for the region. In the case of the Philippines, the US continued to back the same oligarchy during the Cold War that it nurtured before World War II. In Thailand, military leaders secured American support against political rivals, and American aid assisted the rise of a Thai middle class. The brutal suppression of the Left, not only in Thailand, but also in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, also provided a rationale for believing that American support was essential for maintaining the “non-communist” status quo. America was also synonymous with capitalist growth that disproportionately favoured elites in control of states, who maintained their power by denying it to the rural and urban poor.

Those same elites also inscribed their dominance and reliance on American wealth and power on historical accounts of the past, as Hamilton-Hart argues in chapter 4. The official histories of Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia all demonize leftist politics during the Cold War as a “communist threat” that had to be destroyed at all costs. This conclusion, Hamilton-Hart shows, was reached without the slightest appeal to hard evidence and in clear recognition of the fact that it served the interests of those in power. Similar “establishment narratives” are found in Thailand and the Philippines, but here anti-establishment, revisionist historians have challenged them repeatedly. In keeping with the mythology of a communist threat, histories written in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have also portrayed China as a greater threat to the region than the United States, a view that Hamilton-Hart also heard voiced in Vietnam, where an ancient antipathy to its northern neighbour outweighs its experience during the American War. Filipino and Thai historians, however, have given China a more positive assessment, in keeping with their more critical view of the US. In general, the national histories studied by Hamilton-Hart present a “sanitized” version of the American presence in Southeast Asia, one that ignores counterfactual possibilities, such as: “Would Singapore be a worse place to live had Lee Kuan Yew not wrested power from the left wing of his own party in the early 1960s?” (135). Histories that assert a communist threat to the region also take no account of the price paid in lives and destruction for the “security” provided by Americans and their Southeast Asian allies. Histories from the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand, by contrast, do present a picture of the United States as a “destructive power” rather than a “benign hegemon” (142).

Sanitized histories of the American presence in Southeast Asia have contributed to a general lack of critical thinking and professional expertise among foreign policy professionals in the region, as Hamilton-Hart shows in chapter 5. Even for the years 2002–8, when there was widespread condemnation of US foreign policy, criticism by Hamilton-Hart’s respondents was limited, their overriding conviction being that “American power is fundamentally benign and that an American presence in the region is necessary for stability and prosperity” (146). Other factors affecting conformity to this view are: diplomatic routines and adherence to official

policies; the mentoring of junior staff by senior diplomats; and the opinion-shaping effect of the largely pro-American TV and print media in the region. The fact that many Southeast Asian diplomats have personal ties to Americans and have studied in the US is also significant. In her final chapter, Hamilton-Hart concludes that “beliefs” in the diplomatic communities of Southeast Asia have been largely shaped by vested material and political interests that are reliant upon a strong American presence in the region. She demonstrates that it would be wrong, however, to see these interests as being synonymous with those of national communities as a whole or to imagine that capitalist development entails a convergence of values. As she notes, “...the roots of alignment with the United States have more to do with authoritarianism than any convergence of liberal values” (199). In only one country, Indonesia, does Hamilton-Hart think that “fundamental foreign policy beliefs” are likely to change in the foreseeable future, due to the growing influence of Islam.

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TONY DAY

THE SPIRIT OF THINGS: Materiality and Religious Diversity in Southeast Asia. *Studies on Southeast Asia*, 58. Editor, Julius Bautista. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2012. x, 220 pp. (Figures.) US\$31.95, paper. ISBN 978-0-87727-758-3.

Claimed to be made of solid wood (even its joints), the only parts of the body that will be seen by the viewer on an ordinary day are the head and the blackened feet. The image owns as many as forty sets of clothes in all imaginable shades, as well as bedclothes given to it by various patrons, most of whom are well-off and, significantly, residing and working in other countries. Stories abound of people who donated clothes to the icon because they feel compelled to do so; in some cases, the Senyor appears in people's dreams (189).

This passage from Cecilia De La Paz's chapter, “The Potency of Poon,” describes the image of the Dead Christ called *Mahal na Senyor* in Lucban, Quezon (Philippines). This one passage in Julius Bautista's excellent edited collection, *The Spirit of Things*, sums up many of the themes Bautista was trying to emphasize. In his introduction to the volume and to different degrees in each of the twelve chapters there are details about the actual material realities of objects used in ritual and worship in Southeast Asia; stories regarding the ways in which that material is visible and invisible to the participants in various religious rites; analyses of the role of money and class in the making and employing of these objects; and efforts to highlight the agency of the objects themselves to act on living communities and even in individuals' dreams. The images are never seen as static objects of worship, but dynamic players effecting highly mobile and diverse sets of practitioners.

Bautista started choosing contributors and developing ideas for this