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# philippine studies

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## Centers, Symbols, and Hierarchies

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a major one, needs to be noted here. The book's reviewer in *America* magazine (7 September 1985) has formulated it this way:

It is the problem of Vatican-reporting, of what sometimes can and sometimes cannot be documented, that causes the principal reservations about the book. Hebblethwaite cites his sources in a parenthesis following a particular discussion, but at times incidents and remarks are given without any source. One of the cited sources of the hard-to-verify Vatican words and deeds is of questionable reliability. The impression of an opposition between Pope and Curia as a dominating fact of the pontificate goes beyond what can be known with certainty. And in an almost relentlessly negative attitude toward Pope Pius XII, the author even tries to enlist as allies of his position two so unlikely candidates as Roncalli himself and Cardinal Augustin Bea. The extolling of Pope John XXIII has solid grounds without resorting to unfairness toward others. Also, Pope John XXIII's distinction and achievement do not need to rest on his having been prophetically all his life long what he was later to be as Pope, a theme that Hebblethwaite weaves throughout the book and that at times makes for some anachronistic thoughts and expressions.

Few books are around, in any language, which — twenty years after the end of Vatican II — can call up as effectively the experience of living through the pontificate of John XXIII, as Hebblethwaite's work. It is not *the* definitive biography, by any means. It is altogether too much H's own personal interpretation, even if it is remarkably detailed and well-researched, as well as written with a gifted journalist's enviable skills. But the 550 pages of small, tightly-packed print are well worth the time they demand. One hopes, especially for readers in this country, that a paperback edition may soon be available.

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*Loyola School of Theology*

CENTERS, SYMBOLS, AND HIERARCHIES: ESSAYS ON THE CLASSICAL STATES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA. Edited by Lorraine Gesick. New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1983. xi, 241 pages.

This collection of six essays clearly addresses itself to a much debated concept of the state in Southeast Asia. The dynamic interplay of history and tradition in a region on which colonial and neocolonial relations have been imposed has compelled scholars to reevaluate the various assumption and categories in their interpretations of what would be characteristic of Southeast Asian states.

A striking feature which the authors in this collection apparently share (however diverse their essays may seem) is an observation of religion (taken to mean a relationship with the supernatural) as dominant in the Southeast Asian politics. One's relationship with the supernatural determines his rank in a Southeast Asian social hierarchy. The closer one is to the sacred, the higher is his status and the more power he possesses: the more merits, *borami*, *sakti*, or white blood. Also linked to this belief is a conviction regarding high status; powerful people as more effective (compared to those of lower stature) in influencing the will and gaining the friendship and favors of the supersocial—gods, spirits, ancestors. Hence, it is usually an expectation of sharing his "spiritual charisma," his fortune in life, his better afterlife, that essentially faces an effective leader.

It is inevitable therefore that a study of the Southeast Asian states would imply a discarding of the tight hypothetical compartments that most researches on Southeast Asia have been known for. What is purely economic, political, or religious, for instance, may demand a framework which shows no sharp lines between the categories mentioned.

The noted dominance of religion in Southeast Asia may have led the authors in this compilation to posit the belief that from changes in religion one can abstract insights into the dynamics of social leadership—a point not directly expressed in the discussions but apparently implied in the conclusions.

The opening essay is Jane W. Christie's study of Java at the turn of the first millenium A.D. Christie's examination of various epigraphical and archaeological data clearly provides information about the early Javanese landscape, village, the *kraton* and *watek*—evidences from which can be inferred the early processes of Southeast Asian state formation.

Michael Aung-Thwin's essay on kingship in Burma provides a wealth of research material, as he investigates a wide range of data, which includes religious and legal texts, folk tales, chronicles, and inscriptions. Aung-Thwin cites a rich tradition of concepts on which a Burmese perception regarding the meaning of political power and political leadership is couched.

Particular variations in Southeast Asian kingship shaped by various circumstances such as institutional crises are likewise portrayed through particular case studies: Lorraine Gesick discusses Thai kingship in 1767 (i.e. after the Burmese destruction of Ayudha), and notes the relationship between autonomous, indigenous historiography and a traditional ideology. David Chandler studies Cambodia's history in a study of King Duang's reign in 1850, i.e. when the Cambodian kingship was restored under Thai hegemony and sponsorship, after a period of kinglessness under direct Vietnamese rule. Anthony Day, in his study of a Javanese poem, reads through the *Serat Bangum Tapa* and discusses how its imagery evokes and reinvigorates the Javanese "kingship" experience.

Anthropologist Shelley Errington concludes the volume with a study of the royal regalia of Luwu, a former kingdom in southern Sulawesi. She explains how Luwu people perceive a hierarchy as a ranking of "places" instead of persons. She then proceeds to hypothesize that the regalia, the repository of power, would serve as the perfect tool for a leader who would surpass any mortal.

This gathering of essays shows different methods used, and various approaches taken, but does not present definite parameters that would define a Southeast Asian state. Clearly, however, these endeavors reveal that various approaches and interests must indeed be encouraged so that further insights may increase our understanding of the formation of the state in Southeast Asia.

*Jaime B. Polo*

MORAL ORDER AND THE QUESTION OF CHANGE: ESSAYS ON SOUTHEAST ASIAN THOUGHT. Edited by David Wyatt and Alexander Woodside. Connecticut: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1982. v, 413 pages.

Although Karl Marx may have uncovered the linkage between the economic and noneconomic relations characterizing an historically determined social formation, he has left the concept of "superstructure" in his base-superstructure metaphor still a crucial question for current scholarship on culture and society to resolve.

Thus, Claude Levi-Strauss, for instance, while recognizing the primacy of the infrastructure in societies (although he doesn't show this systematically), seems to have foregrounded the superstructure as he aimed at uncovering the basic structure of the human mind. Although he may appear to have approached the subject more as an idealist than a materialist, he assures his readers that what he has studied (and will be studying) are simply the "shadows on the walls of the cave." Would he likewise endorse Maurice Bloch's argument that studies on society and social change emphasize mechanisms as occurring in terms the actors themselves use or totally alien to them, and so are "unable to explain how these mechanisms can be transformed into meaningful action."

The editors of this particular collection of seven essays on Southeast Asian thought seem to do so. They recognize the disadvantage of studying human thought mainly by investigating the mechanisms which the subjects under study would employ, as this brings about difficulty in understanding how these concerned subjects can find ways to work out social change and order.