Strange Parallels

Volume 1: Integration of the Mainland Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830

This is the first volume in an ambitious two-volume study of a thousand years of Southeast Asian political, cultural, and economic history. The study has two goals: to overcome the fragmentation of early Southeast Asian historiography and for the first time to connect Southeast Asian to world history in serious and sustained fashion. A blend of detailed archival work and secondary research, of local inquiry and large-scale theorization, Volume 1 argues that each of mainland Southeast Asia’s three great lowland corridors experienced a pattern of accelerating integration punctuated by recurrent collapse. These trajectories were broadly synchronized not only between corridors, but, most curiously, between the mainland and other sectors of Eurasia. This volume describes the nature of consolidation – which was simultaneously territorial, religious, and ethnic – and dissects the fluid interplay of endogenous and external pressures encouraging that trend. Volume 2 will explore parallels with Russia, France, and Japan c. 800–1830 and will explain why in yet other areas of Eurasia fragmentation, not integration, became the norm. Here is a fundamentally original analysis of both Southeast Asia and the premodern world.

Victor Lieberman is Professor of Southeast Asian History at the University of Michigan. His publications include Burmese Administrative Cycles: Anarchy and Conquest, c. 1580–1760, which won the Harry J. Benda Prize from the Association for Asian Studies, and an edited collection, Beyond Binary Histories: Re-imagining Eurasia to c. 1830. Papers in that collection originally appeared as a special edition of Modern Asian Studies devoted to an examination of Lieberman’s scholarship.
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Strange Parallels

Volume 1
Integration of the Mainland
Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830

VICTOR LIEBERMAN
University of Michigan
To Sharon, and to the memory of my mother and father
Contents

List of Figures xxi
Principal Political Eras on the Mainland xiii
Abbreviations Used in the Notes xv
Preface xix

1 Introduction: The Ends of the Earth
   Part A: Rethinking Southeast Asia
   Part B: Implications for Eurasia 6

2 One Basin, Two Poles: The Western Mainland and the Formation of Burma 85

3 A Stable, Maritime Consolidation: The Central Mainland 212

4 “The Least Coherent Territory in the World”: Vietnam and the Eastern Mainland 338
   Conclusion and Prologue 457

Index 461
## List of Figures

1.1 Territorial Consolidation in Central Mainland Southeast Asia and in the Russian Plains and Siberia  
   page 3

1.2 Territorial Consolidation in Western Mainland Southeast Asia and in France  
   4

1.3 Mainland Southeast Asia, c. 1220  
   24

1.4 Mainland Southeast Asia, c. 1340  
   26

1.5 Mainland Southeast Asia, c. 1540  
   29

1.6 Mainland Southeast Asia in 1824  
   32

1.7 Administrative Patterns on the Mainland  
   35

1.8 Some Elements in the Integration of Mainland Realms to 1830 and Their Potential Interactions  
   65

2.1 Western Mainland Southeast Asia  
   86

2.2 Religious Donations at Pagan  
   109

2.3 Composite Time Series for Recurrence of El Niño Events since 622 C.E.  
   110

2.4 Long-term Fluctuations in Vegetation and Temperature  
   111

3.1 Central Mainland Southeast Asia  
   213
### List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Distribution of Rice Husk Types by Period in Thailand and Cambodia</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Eastern Mainland Southeast Asia</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Estimated Population of Vietnam</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Principal Political Eras on the Mainland

Western Mainland

Pyu Era, c. 200–840
Pagan, c. 950–1300
Ava Period, 1365–1555
Independent Ra-manya Polity, c. 1300–1539
First Toungoo Dynasty, c. 1486–1599
Restored Toungoo Dynasty, 1597–1752
Kon-baung Dynasty, 1752–1885

Central Mainland

Funan, c. 200–600
Dvaravati Period, c. 550–900
Pre-Angkorian Cambodia, c. 600–800
Angkor, 802/889–c. 1440
Early Ayudhya Period, 1351–1569
Late Ayudhya Period, 1569–1767
Taksin, 1767–1782
Chakri Dynasty, 1782–present

Eastern Mainland

Chinese Imperial Period, 43–938
Ly Dynasty, 1009–1225
Tran Dynasty, 1225–1400
Principal Political Eras on the Mainland

Ming Occupation, 1407–1427
Le Dynasty, 1428–1788
Mac Period at Thang Long, 1527–1592
Trinh Period, 1592–1786
Southern Nguyen Period, c. 1600–1802
Tayson Era, 1771–1802
Nguyen Dynasty, 1802–1945
Abbreviations Used in the Notes

A  Original Inscriptions Collected by King Bodawpaya in Upper Burma and Now Placed Near the Patodawgyi Pagoda, Amarapura (Rangoon, 1913).


AAS  Association for Asian Studies


AHR  American Historical Review

B I, B II  Inscriptions Copied from the Stones Collected by King Bodawpaya and Placed Near the Arakan Pagoda, Mandalay, 2 vols. (Rangoon, 1897).

BEFEO  Bulletin de l’Ecole Francaise d’Extreme-Orient


BSOAS  Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

BTLV  Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde

CC  Climatic Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviations Used in the Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSSH</td>
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<td>JEH</td>
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<tr>
<td>JWH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abbreviations Used in the Notes


NL 1950, etc. National Library, Rangoon, MS 1950, etc.

PP  *Past and Present*

PPA  *Inscriptions of Pagan, Pinya and Ava* (Rangoon, 1892).

REO  *Revue de l’Extreme-Orient*


SEAR  *South East Asian Research*


ZOK  *Zam-bu-di-pa ok-hsaung kyan*, J. S. Furnivall and Pe Maung Tin, eds. (Rangoon, 1960).

To facilitate identification, the first time each nonabbreviated source appears in the notes of a new chapter, that source receives a full citation with author, title, place, and date of publication.
My strongest academic memory from graduate school – a feeling, I am certain, not unique to me – was a sense that precolonial Southeast Asian historiography was desperately chaotic and difficult to penetrate. Texts available in the 1970s and 1980s offered an endless array of names, battles, and dates with few, if any, long-term patterns discernible for individual realms, much less the region as a whole or major subregions.

I also remember thinking – a more idiosyncratic reverie, no doubt – how very curious it was that the 16th-century unification of Burma coincided with the dramatic annexations of Ivan IV in Russia, and that in both Russia and Burma these conquests yielded to periods of utter chaos at the turn of the 17th century. Preoccupied with Burmese research, I relegated such coincidences to the “useless trivia” section of my mind. But years later, when completion of some Burma projects allowed me to revisit the issue of correlations, it gradually dawned on me that far from being a 16th-century peculiarity, parallel chronologies extended throughout much of Burmese and Russian history. What is more, I began to realize, substantially similar chronologies were shared by other far-flung sectors of Eurasia with no obvious connection to either Burma or Russia.

The present two-volume study Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830 addresses these abiding, ultimately interconnected, concerns: What were the principal long-term trends in precolonial Southeast Asian political, cultural, and economic history? How did that history relate to the rest of the world? Volume One: Integration of the Mainland, focuses on sustained political and cultural integration in each of the three chief sectors of continental Southeast Asia. Of course, this is
Preface

hardly the only possible narrative – one could as easily consider trends in gender relations, literature, or Chinese trade, with rather different implications for compartmentalizing Southeast Asia – but it is a critical story that touches on diverse spheres and facilitates novel comparisons between mainland Southeast Asia and other parts of Eurasia. Volume Two: Mainland Mirrors: Russia, France, Japan, and the Islands attempts precisely such comparisons. It argues that in terms of linear-cum-cyclic trajectories, chronology, and dynamics, the mainland resembled much of Europe and Japan, but diverged significantly from South Asia and island Southeast Asia.

My own expertise in non-European primary sources is in Burmese. As soon as I decided on this comparative project, I therefore had to decide: should I attempt to write about regions outside Burma, or should I collaborate with other specialists? A concern for expertise instinctively inclined me to the latter approach, which in fact inspired an earlier collection of essays I edited, Beyond Binary Histories: Re-imagining Eurasia to c. 1830, in which nine specialists commented on the applicability to their areas, ranging from France to Java, of more general theories of Eurasian development. Yet, despite their authority and despite a preliminary effort to get each contributor to address a common set of themes, in the end these essays, I think, remained rather disparate. One simply cannot expect several scholars, with unique training and temperament, to focus on precisely the same questions, especially if those are questions of Eurasian coordination alien to traditional disciplinary concerns. If a theory of Southeast Asian, much less Eurasian, history is to have any claim to coherence or originality, it cannot be done by committee.

At the same time, any historian attempting this task must accept that her/his work is provisional, designed to stimulate new perspectives but certain to attract specialist criticism. Such a scholar also must do everything to overcome the limits of her/his background by reading widely, thinking deeply – and seeking expert advice wherever possible. Accordingly, in writing this first volume I have accumulated a large number of debts that I am eager to acknowledge.

If Chapter 2, on the western mainland, embodies the fruits of some 25 years of research in Burmese-language primary sources, even here I have benefited from the generosity of other scholars. I spent a year

interrogating 530 14th- to 16-century inscriptions with Burma’s leading historian and epigrapher, U Than Tun, whose erudition is exceeded only by his patience. On many occasions his kind wife Ma Khin Yi assisted us. Michael Aung-Thwin readily made available his recent, exciting research on the Mon kingdom of Lower Burma and answered sundry other questions. U Saw Tun helped me with Pagan cultural history, while U Toe Hla introduced me to the world of Kon-baung commercial contracts (thet-kayit) and provided three volumes of unpublished thet-kayit manuscripts. Besides drawing my attention to little-known primary sources, Michael Charney offered insights into Arakanese cultural and Burmese military history. Sun Laichen did the same with Ming-Burmese overland trade and Chinese military technology, and Wil O. Dijk provided a cornucopia of information on Burmese-Dutch economic relations in the 17th century. Jörg Schendel widened my understanding of 19th-century Kon-baung trade. Bob Hudson provided data on pre-Pagan archeology, and Patrick Franke answered questions on Kon-baung Buddhism. Several of these scholars also provided specific citations and working papers, which I gratefully acknowledge in the notes. The late H. L. Shorto furnished translations of two Mon histories of the 16th–18th centuries, the Uppanna Sudhammavati Rajarajasa-katha and the Nidana Ramadhipati-katha, while Ken Breazeale made available translations from the early 19th-century Mon annals, Phongsawadan Mon Phama. My Michigan colleague Valerie Kivelson, although an historian of Russia, offered critical readings of Chapters 1 and 2, and over the years has helped me think through a variety of problems in early modern historiography.

In Chapter 3, the sections on Angkor and Cambodia benefited from comments and/or unpublished research provided by Ashley Thompson, Charles Higham, Dan Penny, and most especially David Chandler, Roland Fletcher, and Christophe Pottier. On Thai history Yoneo Ishii, David Wyatt, Richard O’Connor, and Dhiravat na Pombejra answered specialized inquiries and in some cases supplied unpublished materials. In addition, Thongchai Winichakul, Yoneo Ishii, Dhiravat na Pombejra, David Chandler, Junko Koizumi, and Constance Wilson provided painstaking written comments on various drafts of Chapter 3, ensuring a level of expertise I would not have been able to attain on my own.

For Chapter 4, covering Vietnam and the eastern mainland, I am indebted to John Whitmore, my friend and colleague for 35 years, who has guided me in things Vietnamese and has helped shape my ideas on
Preface

Southeast Asia in general. Alexander Woodside also provided penetrating written commentary on this chapter, answered questions, and drew my attention to research in Vietnamese and Japanese that I eventually had translated. When I visited Cornell, Keith Taylor, in a display of collegiality and generosity I shall not forget, went over the penultimate draft of Chapter 4 with me page by page and line by line. Likewise, Li Tana, Nola Cooke, and Brian Zottoli supplied highly detailed written comments on this chapter and shared with me their latest scholarship. George Dutton and Charles Wheeler were no less supportive, providing copies of their dissertations and research papers.

My foray into the initially unfamiliar world of paleoclimatology depended on assistance from James C. G. Walker, Philip Meyers, Michael E. Mann, David Godley, Dan Penny, Thomas Crowley, and Pao K. Wang. Kathleen Morrison supplied material on climate and famine in medieval India, while Jack Goldstone’s unpublished papers alerted me to his new research on global economic history. I hasten to add that neither these scholars nor any of the Southeast Asian historians who aided me are responsible for shortcomings in the text.

For translations of primary and secondary sources in Japanese I am grateful to Atsuko Naono, Mariko Foulk, and Matthew Stavros. For translations of early Chinese documents I depended on Sun Laichen’s expertise. D. N. Dang-vu and John Whitmore translated Vietnamese materials. Fe Susan Go, Michigan’s Southeast Asia librarian, has been unfailingly helpful in tracking down obscure sources over the years, while the staff of the 7-FAST service at the library cheerfully supplied me with more than 1,500 special orders.

I am grateful as well for the following grants and fellowships: a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend, a Social Science Research Council/American Council of Learned Societies Research Grant, a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship for University Teachers, a NEH Summer Stipend, an Arthur H. Cole Grant-in-Aid from the Economic History Association; and from the University of Michigan, the Richard Hudson Research Professorship, a Horace H. Rackham Faculty Fellowship, plus translation, travel, and research grants from the Office of the Vice-President for Research, the Center for Japanese Studies, the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, and the History Department. In addition, the History Department and the Office of the Vice-President for Research furnished a subvention for maps and charts, which were skillfully and cheerfully executed by Asligul Göcmen.
Preface

The readers of my manuscript, Merle Ricklefs, Ian Brown, and a third anonymous referee, provided much welcome encouragement. Frank Smith, Publishing Director for Social Sciences at Cambridge University Press, agreed to convert what was originally a one-book project into two volumes. For this decision as well as for his editorial support and that of Michael Adas, I am deeply grateful.

Finally, for her intellectual comradeship, tolerance of receding deadlines, and sustained optimism, I thank Sharon, my wife and best friend.

V. L.
January 2002