

ANDREW SELTH. *Burma's Armed Forces: Power without Glory*. Norwalk, CT: East-Bridge, 2002. 316 pp. Bibliography, index. US\$44.95, hardcover; US\$29.95, paper.

Burma is now the only Southeast Asian country in which the military dominates the government. Andrew Selth's examination of Burma's Armed Forces shows that military rule is not likely to end soon. Since the current military regime took over in 1988, the armed forces have doubled in size, restructured their organisation and acquired new armaments. Unlike most studies of military forces in Southeast Asia that focus on their involvement in politics, this book also gives considerable attention to the military as a military. Selth discusses in detail the evolution of defence doctrine, the growing capabilities of military intelligence and, in separate chapters, the development of the army, navy and air force. He argues that in view of the poor condition of Burma's military forces in the past, Burma's strengthening of its military capabilities since 1988 does not threaten its neighbours. He confirms that Burma's military purchases have been defence-oriented and that the country "still does not possess any real power projection capability" (p. 256).

The most important motives for the expansion of the military are domestic and political. The military feels threatened by urban unrest and is obsessed by the prospect of "national disintegration." Viewing the defence of state and regime as two sides of the same coin, the military "was determined to put into place all necessary means to guarantee that [it] would remain the real arbiter of power in Burma" (p. 33). It needs to expand in order to establish "a permanent military presence in almost every part of the country" (p. 35) and thus crush all opposition. Despite common speculation about rivalries between officers, Selth believes that their common interest in preserving military domination makes a major split unlikely.

The detailed analysis of both the political and military roles of the Armed Forces makes this book a valuable contribution to understanding Burma's contemporary situation.

HAROLD CROUCH
Australian National University

ARIEL HERYANTO and SUMIT MANDAL (eds). *Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia. Comparing Indonesia and Malaysia*. London and New York: Routledge-Curzon, 2003. ix, 247 pp. Notes, appendix, glossary, references, index. £70.00, hardcover.

This empirically rich and theoretically well-informed collection of comparative essays on women, intellectuals, arts workers and industrial workers, as well as environmental and Islamic activists in Indonesia and Malaysia during the late 1990s is an interesting attempt to excavate the complex social forces that are currently forming the civil societies in the two countries. By concentrating on this societal level the book avoids getting caught up in describing the power struggles that rage within the formal political institutions and which to a great extent guide the actions of the national elites – a subject much discussed and written about. As such the book offers a new approach to dealing with societies that are undergoing more or less volatile processes of social, political and economic transformation, processes in which a previously curtailed civil society is gradually being transformed into a more active partner in national political discourses.

One of the key concepts discussed in all seven chapters is democracy, not in the form of a conceptual discourse but rather in a contextualised social political mode that allows the individual author to describe the various strands of social forces that challenge the authoritarianism that radiates from both the Indonesian and Malaysian governments during the late 1990s. This means, according to the editors, that the book does not aim to provide a critique of any specific theoretical position or construct a new one. Rather, it favours more nuanced and empirical observations that hopefully will help re-examine familiar theories in a new light. Furthermore, by using a comparative approach the book avoids becoming country-specific and thus potentially incompatible with like developments in neighbouring countries. In this sense the book becomes pertinent to most countries in the Southeast Asian region.

One aspect, however, that is conspicuously absent in all chapters except in the first one, where it receives very superficial attention, is the role of the ethnic Chinese. This is rather strange as the latter always had and still have a tremendous influence on the development of many aspects of Indonesian and Malaysian societies, especially in the economic sphere. Even in the chapters that deal with industrialising polities and state–labour relations the ethnic Chinese, conceived of as economic agents, are absent. This lack of appearance is confirmed when looking at the number of entries on ethnic Chinese in the index. They are very few indeed. The same is true of references on ethnicity and ethnic relations in general. The latter two are not even mentioned in the index even though both Indonesia and Malaysia are ethnically quite heterogeneous, which, of course, has a great impact on how various polities in the respective civil societies are designed and implemented. This said, however, the reader will, when going through the different chapters, be rewarded with a wealth of information on developments that characterise the current formation of civil societies in Indonesia and Malaysia respectively.

Finally, after having read all the chapters one is left in a state of bewilderment, as the input of data from the preceding chapters has been so massive. A solution to this problem would have been a concluding chapter in which all the various strands of development were commented upon, thus providing the reader with an overview or at least a red thread that could have guided him/her through the respective societal mazes. Such a chapter is sorely lacking. This, however, does not stop the present reviewer from recommending the book, as it offers great insights into those forces that have contributed to forming the civil societies in post-1997 Indonesia and Malaysia.

MICHAEL JACOBSEN

Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS)

MARY SOMERS HEIDHUES. *Goldiggers, Farmers and Traders in the 'Chinese Districts' of West Kalimantan, Indonesia*. Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2003. 316 pp. US\$18.00, paper.

Somers Heidhues' important book fills a gap not only in our knowledge of the ethnic Chinese in West Kalimantan, but also in our understanding of the history of this province and, particularly, of relations between its three main ethnic groups over the past two and a half centuries. The book covers three types of history: it is a history of migration to the province from the late eighteenth century until the New Order's transmigration policies; a history of social organisation with particular focus on the Chinese *kongsi*, but also on the Malay sultanates and the Dutch colonial system; and finally an economic history of this resource-rich province.