

(floor plan) aspects, a thorough profiling and comparative analyses would better illustrate the evolution of the Boholano vintage house forms and consequently, provide a more complete much better understanding and characterisation of *Casa Boholana*.

*Contestations of Memory in Southeast Asia*

Edited by Roxana Waterson and Kwok Kian-Woon

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Memory is integral in historical reconstruction. It serves not only as a source in writing accounts and narratives, but a framework itself; a structure in which realities of the past can be depicted and illustrated in a substantially truthful manner. The book *'Contestations of Memory in Southeast Asia'* tackles the complex issue of memory and memory representations and manifestations in different areas and periods in Southeast Asian history. It includes stories and struggles during the major watershed periods in the region's history - colonial, post-colonial, independence wars, Pacific War and domestic conflicts. The book is divided in 3 parts: the first lays down the theoretical framework of the book, which is, *memory as a social phenomenon and as an alternative to official and singular histories* (p. 5). A dozen of historians, anthropologists and sociologists contributed in the volume where they presented historical experiences from different Southeast Asian countries where manifestations of memory challenge the dominance of state-promoted narratives.

The first part contains the introductory chapter that discusses the role of memory as a knowledge that verifies succeeding generations' familiarity of the past. Roxana Waterson and Kwok Kian-Woon discussed the dimension/s where memories as psychological and historical domains intersect. They elaborated on the stages of the memory process: *encoding, storage, retrieval, and transmission*. With particular emphasis on the transmission - the stage by which memories become 'social' or a public domain (p. 19), the authors established the theory the articles in the book want to prove. Within this process, *'memory provides a crucial site for the exploration of the links between the individual and the social'* (p. 23). The chapter argues that memory as central in historical narratives is

fundamentally an *'unfinished business'*, therefore creates an *'unfinished past'* (p. 31). Memory is a continuous, changing, slow and cumulative component of the written past (p. 38). The second part presents several studies on memory as tool in building identities and constructing national *'destinies'*. It contains critical researches on how important events and periods in a nation's history and in what avenues and processes narratives were constructed and reconstructed. Based on the studies, this part reflects how governments create a space for its people to *'remember'* the past, though experiences are very much different from each other.

The first study is a comprehensive critic on Burmese historiography. Maitrii Aung-Thwin's paper argues memory as an *'analytical category in the assessment of culture, politics and history'* (p. 54). He discussed how the Burmese people used the glorious history of their kings in constructing contemporary discourses on identity. Two chapters discussed the social memory phenomenon in Vietnam. In her article, Vathana Pholsena transliterated *'the narratives of some people of ethnic minority that have remained concealed in the authoritative national history'* of Vietnam (p. 84), to challenge the existing political party's dominance in the writing of their national history. On the other hand, Sharon Seah Li-Lian discussed how the past is remembered in Vietnam, by looking at the way reality is produced and perceived. The authored considered memory as central on how historical narration is the *'privileged signifier of the real'* (p. 108); by analysing the meanings and depictions of history on monuments and museums.

The succeeding articles talked about the experiences of Singapore and Indonesia. In her study, Dayang Istiaisyah bte Hussin analysed how the Singapore government discursively constructed the idea of a *'nation'* by using two key events: the 1964 Racial Riots and the merger issue with the Federation of Malaya (p. 126). The author argued that history became a *'prerogative of the state'*, through the symbolic-cultural construction of a Singaporean nation (p. 125). Similar in approach, Heddy Shri Ahimsa Putra discussed how Indonesia memorialises one glorious event in their history and how it was used as a political tool to strengthen the integrity of Soeharto and his regime. The author treats the *Serangan Oemoem 1 Maret 1949* (General Attack of 1 March 1949) as a *'misremembered history'*; a momentous event that was distorted to intensify a dictator's rule, by making him the sole hero of the said battle (p. 156).

This part provides a fresh look into the multifaceted and highly-debatable discourse on nationalism, nation-building and national identity. The theoretical framework of the studies gives the readers an extensive

introduction into the particular details of the articles. Memory, given its complicated status as both source and counter-source, was used to extract other interpretations about the present historical realities, known and accepted. The studies suggest a cohesive historicity amongst the indicated social experiences of the countries studied.

The third part delves into the process of '*interpenetrations*' of individual and collective memories into how present generations see and accept the major events and periods in the past. In his article, Ricardo Jose discussed how the Pacific War is being remembered in the Philippines, more than six decades after. He described it as very '*selective*': the government focuses on annual commemorations and recognizes individuals and associations yet have '*ignored the serious issues attached with the war, such as the comfort women and forced labor*' (p. 185). He also discussed the problems being encountered with the reliability and truthfulness of war memories, which then lead to the complex dilemma of myth-making for political purposes. The author suggests that war should be viewed in full perspective; one proposition is the joint research between Philippines and Japan (p. 197).

Two chapters show the different levels historical commemoration in Singapore. Adeline Low Hwee Cheng presented her study on how different ethnic sectors in Singapore remember the historic 1964 Racial Riots. As the watershed of the nation's history, she compared the different views of Chinese, Malay and Indians on the said event, and how those memories were transmitted into the present generation (p. 203-05). On the other hand, Kwok Kian-Woon and Kelvin Chia studied the role/s of the Chinese-educated intellectuals in contemporary Singapore. They argued that education became the basis of association; wherein dimension of learning is one basis of the created identity in the '*intellectual sector*'. Thus, the idea of a monolithic Chinese community is challenged, with the separate development of the Chinese-educated and English-educated Singaporeans (p. 230-31).

Lastly, Indonesian historian Budiawan presented a historical study of the afterlives of some unknown actors of post-Soeharto Indonesia. The author studied the situation of *eks-tapol* (political prisoners) wives after the fall of Soeharto's regime. In his analysis, one dimension of memory studies was problematised – the dilemma of memories that were left unrevealed, and how this resulted to trauma amongst the people involved (p. 286). This part takes us into the convoluted landscape of memory and history in Southeast Asia. The studies reveal the different levels of generational acceptance of events and

period in history; that reception is driven by how political and social institutions construct pathways in which people remember and appreciate the importance of history. Whether through commemorations, in education or knowledge dissemination, we can conclude that it is vital to thoroughly examine and reexamine contemporary norms and how do they relate with their particular historical origin. Perhaps one recommendation on this part is to cite more studies from different areas and aspects in Southeast Asian histories to discover more commonalities. In general, the book is a rich source of new studies and perspectives on Southeast Asian history and historiography. With the variety of researches, one can see a broader and complex picture of society histories. The studies dig deeper into the understanding of modern Southeast Asia, by looking back into the alternative, yet very progressive instrument of historical research – memory.

The compilation is very informative, especially for researches pursuing Southeast Asian studies. Striking is the level of research one can observe upon reading the different case studies. The expertise of the contributors in their respective fields was clearly manifested; on how they argued and developed their theses, particularly pertaining to the dimension of the remembered and commemorated past. We can witness a dialogue of perspectives and views on how memory is problematised in different parameters. The book is a good springboard into more critical studies in history and identity. It maps out places and situations of contradiction, coercion and subjugation in history. The broad-minded approach of the book reinforces the need to question existing norms and beliefs on Southeast history. I believe, as a student of history, the book is an excellent scholarly compilation that unearths perspectives of the silent actors and marginalised sectors in historical narrative inscription.

We can observe that most of the studies are political in nature – focusing on politics and politically driven events and memories. Perhaps, other topics/aspects can also be studied using the ‘memory’ framework, such as disasters and calamities, or on individual or family histories. On the other hand, to make it more comprehensive, the book might as well include studies from/about Cambodia, Laos, and East Timor. I think these countries will give us new stories and knowledge on memory studies and how the past is being perceived in their respective local and national histories.



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