

Book Reviews

Florentino Rodao, *Españoles en Siam, 1540-1939: una aportación al estudio de la presencia hispana en Asia Oriental*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1997, xix + 206 pp.

Reviewed by *William Gervase Clarence-Smith*

Whereas the study of Spain's role in South East Asia has all too often been confined to the Philippines and the Moluccas, this book provides a welcome excursion onto the mainland. Siam is the guiding thread of Rodao's work, but the text often strays further, to encompass other parts of the mainland, as well as the activities of the Portuguese. There is also a fair amount of general context, which is provided for a Spanish public with little or no background in Asian history. A revised *tesis de licenciatura*, the book is based entirely on Spanish archives and published materials in European languages, albeit with considerable sensitivity to recent developments in the historiography of Thailand and South East Asia in general.

Spanish intrusion into mainland South East Asia built up rapidly after the union of the crowns of Spain and Portugal in 1580, despite an agreement that neither nation would trespass on the sphere of influence of the other. Portuguese weakness in the mission field drew in Spanish regular orders, while Portuguese New Christians took over much of the trade of the Spanish empire. The flashpoint in relations with South East Asians was Cambodia, where, from the 1580s, Spanish adventurers sought to exploit internal political divisions to conquer the country, with covert support from some officials in the Philippines. These Spanish desperadoes sometimes seemed to be close to success, but their schemes were soon scuppered by the expansion of Siam. This story has been told before, but Rodao adds interesting side-lights on the tensions between Manila, Mexico, and Madrid, and on divisions between Spanish officials in the Philippines. While some dreamed of heroic conquests and conversions to match those in the Americas, others opted for a quiet life and peaceful trade.

Spanish dreams were quickly snuffed out, as other Europeans entered South East Asia from 1600. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the Dutch had effectively boxed in the Spaniards in the Philippines in both naval and economic terms, while France was taking over from Portugal as the leader in Catholic mission activity. The long period of Spanish withdrawal is covered at some length by Rodao, albeit with interesting details on the more persistent Portuguese presence in Siam. Commercial liberalization in the Philippines after the shock of the British occupation of Manila in 1762–64 led to few changes. China and India offered far more interesting trade goods than Siam to Spanish merchants in Manila and to the Real Compañía de Filipinas, Spain's version of an East India Company from 1785.

Madrid's isolationism increased after the loss of the mainland American colonies in the 1820s. Spain was one of the last European countries to take advantage of the precedent set by the Bowring Treaty of 1855, not signing a commercial treaty with Siam until 1870, despite the proximity of the Philippines. King Chulalongkorn's private visit to Madrid in 1897 provides Rodao with a crop of amusing newspaper articles, but Spain generally paid more attention to China and Vietnam. This was partly because of Catholic missions in those two countries, and partly because they were seen as labour reservoirs for Cuban sugar planters, as the African slave trade was progressively restricted. The loss of both Cuba and the Philippines in 1898 led to an almost complete withdrawal from Asia, although the missionary presence remained as one last tenuous connection.

In view of Rodao's repeated criticisms of the paucity and poor quality of Spanish diplomatic sources for the study of Siam, more emphasis on Catholic missions and a greater use of mission sources would have been welcome. After 1920, Spaniards gradually became the dominant nationality in the Gabrielist order in Siam, previously dominated by French fathers. Although they made very few converts, Rodao notes that they educated many prominent members of the Thai élite. As the only significant group of Spanish residents in Siam, with a fine command of the Thai language and having spent decades in the country, the Gabrielist fathers might have provided insights into Thai life of greater interest than the disparate comments of officials, who made only rare visits until Spain appointed its first resident diplomat in 1949. Rodao's few archival references to the Gabrielists all come from the files of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the reader is left wondering whether a good doctoral thesis could not be written from the Gabrielists' own

archive. In any event, this pioneering and courageous book stands as a reminder of the resources for the study of South East Asia's past that lie hidden away in Western archives and libraries that scholars rarely visit.

Paul H. Kratoska, *The Japanese occupation of Malaya, 1941–1945: a social and economic history*. London: C. Hurst & Co., 1998, xxi + 404 pp.

Reviewed by *Simon C. Smith*

Paul Kratoska's *The Japanese occupation of Malaya* seeks to throw light on this fascinating, yet relatively unexplored, episode in twentieth-century Malaysian history. Reacting against the widely held view that the occupation was a major watershed, Kratoska suggests that the significance of these years is 'often assumed rather than demonstrated' (p. 1). Indeed, throughout the book he sets out to dispel a number of misconceptions about the occupation.

In the administrative sphere, Kratoska demonstrates that continuity, rather than change, was the dominant theme. In his annual report for 1942, the first full year of the occupation, the chairman of the Klang Sanitary Board observed: 'With a few exceptions, where departure from the old method of procedure has been found to be necessary, the general system of administration is practically the same as before' (p. 59). Although the Japanese introduced some innovations, especially by allowing Malays to become district officers, posts which had formerly been the preserve of the British, 'many elements of the pre-war administration survived the occupation nearly unchanged' (p. 59). There were sound reasons for this. Lacking local knowledge and impeded by language barriers, Japanese officials 'depended heavily on the Asian staff of the pre-war administration, and on existing administrative practices to carry out their duties' (p. 67). As the tide of war began to turn against Japan, expediency militated against any attempt fundamentally to reshape Malaya's administration. As Kratoska notes: 'By 1944 the Japanese were more concerned with holding on to what they had than with shaping a new social or economic order' (p. 91). Moreover, in using ethnically based organizations to handle certain