

blages, constellations, and island clusters, I wonder how Metzger's conceptual model might relate to the "archipelagic turn", namely the engagement of the archipelago as a methodology for thinking through networked formations and clustered imaginaries. Nevertheless, these minor points do not detract from the book's undisputed value as hitherto the most comprehensive study of Chinese-inflected artistic connections across the Atlantic. Especially with regard to the emergent corpus of Chinese Caribbean scholarship, Metzger's book is unrivalled in its scope and depth of analysis and will surely become a key reference for future studies in this field.

Anne Booth: Living Standards in Southeast Asia. Changes over the Long Twentieth Century, 1900–2015, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019, 317 pp.

Rezensiert von
Vincent Houben, Berlin

This book synthesizes the huge research work done by Anne Booth, former professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies, on the development of living standards and social inequality in the world region between India and China. Trained as an economist, she develops an in-depth systematic analysis primarily based on quantitative indicators and set within a chronological order. The result is a standard work, which is compulsory

reading for anyone interested in Southeast Asian economic development as a whole and social inequality in particular.

Chapter 1 starts with setting out the composite indicators used to comparatively measure changes in living standards and the broader debate on the pros and cons of using these. For this purpose, Booth has collected country data not only on distribution of income and expenditures but also on human development indicators such as life expectancy, educational levels by region, gender, and social class. These indicators offer a much more complex picture of social inequality than is offered by GDP or HDI statistics. Her approach is part of a much larger standard of living debate between economic historians in Britain and elsewhere on the correlation between economic growth and changing living standards, the great divergence between the 'West and the rest' and the fact that growth often did not result in better living standards for large parts of the population.

Chapters 2 and 3 deal with the colonial period, which is treated in a balanced and multifaceted manner. On the one hand, colonial powers after 1900 did promote the economic development of the territories they controlled, on the other hand economic exploitation prevailed over possible social transfers to the colonized peoples. Population growth and rising agricultural output were accompanied by differences in access to land, job opportunities, and non-agricultural income. On the whole, real wage levels rose but, paradoxically, did not lead to improvement in living standards, a.o. because availability of food fell and malnutrition increased. Mortality rates on the whole declined but gaps

between urban and rural areas as well as ethnic groups remained substantial. Further variations are found with regard to levels of (il)literacy, female employment, taxation (including in the form of forced labor), and government welfare programmes. Although a GDP per capita gap between Southeast Asia and Europe remained in place, Southeast Asia as a whole did not fall behind further. Yet, under colonial rule, income inequality within the region and social stratification increased. Chapter 4 provides an overview of developments in the transitional period, between the Japanese occupation and the end of the decolonization period. Just as was the case during the Great Depression of the 1930s, during the Japanese occupation the economic situation worsened as nutritional levels dropped severely, with mortality and inflation rising. Recovery after the end of the Second World War was slow. Independence led governments to shed colonial economic structures, thwart foreign investment, and introduce economic planning but with little benefit to the citizens and even leading to negative economic growth. International economic agencies such as the ILO, World Bank, and others were given little leeway. However, until the mid-1960s, some improvement of living standards could be achieved. As is outlined in chapter 5, poverty and inequality estimates for the period until ca 1980 show a different picture, yet with major differences between individual countries. In the Philippines, GDP grew substantially but poverty and income inequality did not drop. In Malaysia, economic growth likewise occurred but rural Malays were falling behind. In the 1970s, poverty fell but inequality did not. Singapore started

off poor but thereafter GDP grew fast with the distribution of income remaining stable. Inequality in Thailand matched the pattern of Malaysia and the Philippines. In Indonesia, the proportion of the poor rose until 1967, thereafter real per capita GDP growth set in but the incomes of the poor did not change much.

Chapter 6 surveys the 1980s and 1990s, in which a part of Southeast Asia experienced substantial growth. Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia were successful in opening up their economies and reducing absolute poverty levels. Yet national statistical measurements differed, achievements in education were modest whereas poverty and unequal distribution of income were maintained. The impact of economic growth on inequality differed per region of the respective countries. Within Southeast Asia as a whole, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar lagged behind. The impact of the economic collapse in 1997–1998 was substantial and positive trends were reversed. Although levels of inequality temporarily dropped, the very rich were not affected by the crisis.

Chapter 7 and 8 deal with the economic record of the first two decades of the twenty-first century. The Southeast Asian countries recovered and resumed their growth path. The global financial crisis of 2007 did not affect the overall positive trend. The difference (in consumption expenditure per capita) between relative rich countries in the region such as Singapore, Brunei, and Malaysia and the poor ones such as Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar remained substantial. Despite growth, poverty levels did not change much even if different national poverty lines are rec-

ognized. Income inequality did, however, fall but with Indonesia as important exception. In the human development rankings, Southeast Asian countries mostly followed per capita GDP but Vietnam was, for instance, performed better. By and large, school attendance levels in Southeast Asia have risen, although access to tertiary education remains highly dependent on household income.

Chapter 8 leaves the chronological approach and enters into a theme-based discussion of how governments have intervened in order to raise living standards. National government programmes with regard to land reform, land settlement policies, public works, control of food prices, family planning, and decentralization programmes have produced mixed results with little effect on poverty alleviation. Chapter 9 summarizes the findings of this study. Living standards in Southeast Asia have risen but to different degrees in individual countries. At the same time, income and wealth inequalities as well as differences in access to health and education have proven to be enduring. In sum, economic growth by itself is not sufficient to address imbalances but more efficient policy interventions are needed.

As stated above, this is an impressive book by a leading scholar, providing the reader with a huge amount of detailed information on economic development and its effects on social inequality in Southeast Asia. It is exemplary of what economic history can offer us in terms of process description and systematic explanation. Anne Booth does not only render factual evidence but also critically engages with a huge number of expert studies, quantitative data and the instruments of measurement itself. She

offers a view across entire Southeast Asia, making many interesting comparisons within the region itself but also with the advanced economies in North Asia and elsewhere, so that both shared trends and country specifics are convincingly exposed and explained. In the text, the reader will find many useful tables, in which statistical indicators offer clear insights. Through this approach, a highly differentiated assessment of growth, living standards, and inequality emerges. It is self-evident that in the economic history approach pursued here, cultural factors of social change and subjective experiences of injustice find little place. For this there exists another literature.

Max Trecker: Red Money for the Global South. East-South Economic Relations in the Cold War, Abingdon: Routledge, 2020, 243 pp.

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Historians of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are increasingly disentangling the complex nature of global economic relations during the “bipolar” Cold War era. Among these complexities are the sometimes intricate economic ties that developed between the Soviet Union, its European socialist allies, and the Global South. Examining these historical ties is significant not only for shedding light on the ideologically-driven efforts by the So-