

REVIEWS

Australia's Asian Policies: The History of a Debate, 1839-1972

by *A.W. Stargardt*

*The Institute of Asian Affairs, Hamburg, Federal Republic of Germany
Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1977; 404 pp.*

This book is only to a limited extent a study of Australia's Asian policies. Rather it is, as the subtitle perhaps suggests, a study of Australian debate about Australia's Asian policies, indeed about Australia's foreign policy itself, its emergence and development. It includes much more on the domestic context of those policies than on the Asian countries with which Australia had to deal, references to which are somewhat brief and insufficiently novel in insight and content.

This is not to say that the work as a whole is not worth reading: far from it. It has the advantages and disadvantages of a book with a strongly interpretative line. The suggestion is that there are two major approaches to foreign policy. One, following a phrase of Menzies, the author describes as the conservative approach: rely on a major power. "Conservative ideas in this debate appear more uniform because of their wonderful simplicity: remain close to the great protecting power, please its government, and **beyond this**, do as little as possible" (p. 9). Then there are "radicals", whose views are more diverse. They include "mainly pacifist internationalist streams", but "the mainstream of Australian radicalism has long favoured a national defence effort, under Australian direction and control" (p.11).

Though Professor Stargardt has a tendency to digress, for example into a discussion of Bismarck's colonial policy, the advantage of pursuing an interpretation of this kind is that it gives the book a unity: it is easier for the author to organize his material, easier for the reader to follow him. But it has its disadvantages. Is the material forced into this interpretation? It seems to be going too far to trace the "conservative" view back to Governor Gipps's decision to ask Sir Gordon Bremer to take his ships to China to assist Charles Elliot in dealing with Commissioner Lin at Canton in 1839. On the other hand, the "radical" viewpoint seems too diverse to survive even the author's compendious definition. Above all, his not unanticipated but very proper admiration of Curtin tends to obscure the fact that his policy, though by no means involving doing "as little as possible", did above all represent the shifting of reliance on one (no longer) great power to another (really) great power.

The interpretation the book advances is thought-provoking. In the end, however, the historian rebels, and wonders whether it would not be better to approach the development of

Australia's foreign policy from a less structured point of view. There are a range of possibilities open to such a country for preserving its security and advancing its legitimate interests, the object of a foreign policy. As time passed, and it developed as a nation, Australians turned these to account, under the varying impact of domestic and international events. To present the story in this way might have been especially appropriate as offering possibilities of comparison with the emerging policies of other emerging nations, in Asia itself, for example.

Professor Stargardt quotes on page 251 a careful analysis of Australia's position, made by Garfield Barwick in 1964.

Australia is a middle power in more senses than one. It is clearly one in the general sense in which the expression is used. But also it has common interests with both the advanced and underdeveloped countries; it stands in point of realized wealth between the haves and the have-nots. It is at the one time a granary and a highly industrialized country. It has a European background and is set in intimate geographical propinquity to Asia.

This ambivalence brings some strength and offers promise of a future of which Australia can be confident, a future of increasing influence. But it poses continuing problems in identifying peculiarly Australian objectives and in finding balance in the policies designed to attain them...

It is within the ambit of rational assessments of this nature, that Australia's foreign (and Asian) policies should be considered. An ideological approach—attached, perhaps, to domestic politics—may unduly interfere with such consideration. Professor Stargardt's book tends to support such an approach and perhaps undermine his contribution to a search for rational Australian foreign policies.

The references to Siam/Thailand are few in number. But readers of this journal should be reminded that a "radical" approach by no means implied a "soft line" towards Thailand at the end of the Second World War. The Australian government, as my own research has shown, contemplated "a period akin to tutelage" for Thailand. Like New Zealand's, its policy was "rather stiffer" than that of the British.

The book, though published in Germany, was printed in Great Britain. As is common nowadays, it contains a considerable number of typographical errors, some of which are serious. Menzies did not resign in August 1940 (p. 167). Sir Roger Makins has been deprived of his 's' (p. 237).

Some interesting documents complete the book.

Nicholas Tarling

University of Auckland

Mysticism and Everyday Life in Contemporary Java

by Niels Mulder

Singapore, Singapore University Press, 1978; xix + 150 pp.

This volume, published under the auspices of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, has been in distillation from 1969 to 1977 and is a fascinating attempt to pinpoint "the pervading and intriguing quality of Javanese-ness" and what the author calls the dynamics of the Javanese social process.

No one who has lived in Java can fail to have been struck by the impenetrable nature of Javanese society and thought. Niels Mulder rightly chose Yogyakarta as his norm, or rather apex, of 'Javanese-ness', where traditional values have least changed, and the *abangan*, those conscious or unconscious practitioners of the Javanese Hindu-Buddhist-animistic heritage, are most numerous. Mulder points to the irrelevance of nominal Islam in the Central Javanese context and to the underlying unity of society in its belief in *rukun* (harmony and unity) expressed in a world of disharmony by a retreat into *kebatinan* or mystical practices.

His analysis of *kebatinan* is one of the clearest statements one could hope to find. He traces its rise and neo-official status; even in 1978 there was yet another attempt to make *kebatinan* one of the officially recognized religions, and statistical proof of *abangan* strength is to be found, if needed, in the 1955 election figures, when parties were divided on religious lines, for in the Yogya area only 24 per cent of the votes went to the Islamic party. The strength of mysticism derives partly from support by "the present government of mystically-inclined *abangan* military"; it is reinforced by the Sabdo Palon prophecy of the resurrection of Hindu-Buddhist-Javanese culture 500 years after the defeat of Majapahit by Islam around 1478; and nourished by the *wayang* mythology of the shadow play particularly the eventual ability of the Pandawa brothers to overcome the forces of disorder represented by the Kurawa.

Mulder investigates the Javanese mystical worldview and gives ample space to the practice of *kebatinan* mysticism. This takes the form of individual endeavour moving from the outside to the inside, overcoming the *lahir* or corporeal aspects of existence, and moving by means of *tapa*, asceticism, to reach *samadi*, a world of detachment and concentration in which one is open to divine guidance and the revelation of the mystery of life. One reaches this under the guidance of a *guru* who is also a *bapak* or revered leader. The similarities with contemporary Theravada Buddhist *wipassana* practices are obvious.

Mulder then moves on to discuss progressively more contentious aspects of Javanese mysticism. The *kebatinan* ethic, in its attitude to life, encourages fatalistic acceptance in the name of unity and harmony, expressed through outward forms of *budaya* (culture), hierarchy and suppression of individuality, achieved through avoidance of emotions or individual expression. When considering the social perspective of everyday life in a changing moral order,

the author moves into somewhat speculative ground with reliance on personal observation. This ranges from the mania for lottery prediction to the more startling daily facts of what appears to be dishonesty to the uninitiated Westerners but where the power structure and hierarchy is simply exercising its traditional prerogatives. Mulder is trenchant in detailing the cause and effect of the current disintegration, in the application of double standards and the exploitation of village society (p. 75):

Present-day Javanese society is frustrated, economically and psychologically insecure, and its individuals feel threatened. It is deficient in mechanisms to maintain either the equilibrium of the old values, or the values of a more modern and impersonal order. It is truly a post-traditional society where the past is invalid and a secure future is far away. People are *bingung*, coping with uncertainty and alienation from the processes of wider society. Morality has become the morality of power and hierarchy, each and every little group trying to care in the best way for its own members to the exclusion of others. Social solidarity, so high among Javanese values, is giving way to the realities of power and moral vagueness.

In dealing with the material perspective of contemporary Javanese moral order, the author is perhaps inevitably impressionistic. The pattern used to be away from material things; food, housing, furniture even for the rich were traditionally inconsequential; the senses were not cultivated, but social order was. One works to live, but strives to be *halus* (refined) and therefore not to be engaged in an onerous occupation. The modern world, with its emphasis on materialism, has disrupted this comfortable spiritual world which externalised itself in batik, kris and *wayang*. Modernization, even down to the chaotic one-way street system of Yogya, is a veneer (p. 89):

The objective was to give an image of order, rather than to achieve functional efficiency.

Modernization, applied, if the term may be used, through the non-functional and grossly overinflated bureaucracy (which, in spite of the nominal abolition of *pungli* or bribes, still offers discounts for its services and asks for presents from those seeking essential documents), is bringing about a collapse in Javanese cultural values. The lip-service paid to development, which applies new magic formulae of planning and targets irrespective of village conditions, increases the gap between the elite and the masses.

Mulder's conclusions are depressing but difficult to dispute. Development in real terms is largely meaningless in the context of Javanese village life which has always been of marginal material quality. The retreat into *kebatinan* can be seen both as a refuge from the reality of disorder and discontinuity, and an escape to the higher planes where material values are discounted, and the Javanese tendency to speculative non-empirical thinking is emphasized. More than once Mulder returns to Hildred Geertz's observations about Javanese child-raising, how the child is kept away, in his mother's *slendang*, from contact with the material world, even from crawling on the floor, and how rarely the child is presented with empirical problems. The learning process simply implies acceptance—of the family, the greater world order, or later of the words of the university professors.

There are two major factors for concern. The elite on the national level is much wider than the cosy *kraton*-centred world of the past, and is increasingly divorced from the harsh realities of *kasar* life, where one actually has to work by getting one's hands dirty, a function reserved for peasants and Chinese; because of this, Mulder sees an increasing atmosphere of

distrust and fear. This is not dissipated by the intolerance of the least expression of apparent criticism of the existing social order, as was shown in events on the campuses before the 1978 presidential elections: because this order exists, it must be accepted, the reasoning would appear to be, since to modify it would upset the *rukun*. As Mulder puts it, "the individual should be controlled, and cannot be trusted".

The second contingent factor is whether modernization, certainly in its Western-oriented conception of material progress, can be effective in traditional societies which place greater emphasis on spiritual values, and by extension whether development does not necessarily involve the destruction of the very societies in which its operation is attempted. Certainly the Javanese experience of development has not been an entirely happy one: the lot of the common people appears not to have perceptibly improved, in spite of all the Repelita plans, and far from moving to a period of stability and order one continues, to use Mulder's words, from insecurity to disruption and moral decay. Just as modernization is a decorative veneer, like unnecessarily widening streets with little traffic, so too is the imposed stability and order of the present. But, as the retreat into and growth of *kebatinan* ensures, the Javanese is not going to confront but will conform; his level of acceptance and toleration is extraordinarily high.

Some of Mulder's extrapolations may well be criticized as being beyond the context of Javanese mysticism, but his theme is precisely its relevance and context in everyday life. Many of his comments, as he says himself, relating to modernization in Javanese society could equally be made of other traditional societies confronted with modernization. Some generalizations in the picture are so sweeping as to make one wish one could establish a dialogue with the author: it may be that times are disordered, but are they not better now than before 1965? Can one really make meaningful generalizations about all southern Asian social fabrics? Perhaps statements of this kind are the stuff of social science. Mulder relies, as does anyone dealing with contemporary Java, a good deal on the work of both the Geertz. There would appear to be an error in attributing Bacht's work of 1939 as a source to an event in 1962 (p. 32). The apparently full index is not complete: Loro Kidul, Sabdo Palon, Majapahit and Magellan are mentioned in the text but are not in the index, where marriage finds a place in relation to ceremonies but circumcision, frequent in the text, does not. Some might criticize Mulder for drawing a great deal on personal experience, but given the very nature of 'Javaneness', in a society hiding behind outward forms of politeness, reducing the self and the individual to nothing for the sake of continued external harmony, it is difficult to penetrate below the surface other than by putting together apparently unconnected personal observations and experiences.

It should not be thought that the *kebatinan* cults are a passing phase. As has been seen, they draw on the whole pre-Islamic fabric of Javanese culture and have been in continuous existence. The present Indonesian elite, profoundly affected by Javanese cultural values, is permeated with mystical non-Islamic concepts; and it needs to be remembered that the Javanese form not only the largest ethnic group in Indonesia but in Southeast Asia as well.

The current mystical vogue would seem to be cyclic. As the present would appear to be one of disorder, one retreats from it into *kebatinan* practices, but among those who do this are many forming the elite who could be held to contribute to the existing state of affairs. One does not face the present with realism and no one appears to be taught to do so.

This book is a very interesting study of an elusive subject, and if some of it may be contentious, not least to those forming the current Indonesian elite, it is a serious endeavour to put a scholarly finger on the will-o'-the-wisp of 'Javaneseness'.

Michael Smithies

*Department of Language and Social Science
Papua New Guinea University of Technology*

The twofold problem of memorizing both alphabetic sequence and tone classes can be readily solved by means of the following procedure. The student should begin in the obvious way by writing out the 42 consonants one after another in alphabetic sequence. However, in doing so he should observe the following two principles.

First, the student should recognize six pairs of minimally different consecutive letters: ขข, ฉฉ, ฉฉ, บบ, ผผ, พพ.³ In each of these pairs the second member differs from the first only in possessing an extra indentation or a more elongated final vertical stroke. When writing out the alphabet, the student should write the members of each such pair close together, in effect treating the pair as specially equivalent to a single letter; for example: ... ข ฉ ขข ฉ ฉ ...

Second, rather than writing the letters in one horizontal line, the student should adopt the two-dimensional arrangement shown in figure 1.

ก	ข	ค	ฅ	ง	k	kh	kh	kh	ng
จ	ฉ	ช	ฌ	ญ	c	ch	ch, s	ch	y/n
ฎ	ฏ	ฐ	ฑ	ฒ	d, t	th	th	th	n
ด	ต	ท	ถ	น	d, t	th	th	th	n
บ	ป	ผ	ฝ	ม	b, p	ph, f	ph, f	ph	m
ย	ร	ล	ว		y	r	l	w	
ศ	ษ	ฮ	ฬ		s	s	s	h	
ฬ	อ	ฮ			l	'	h		

Figure 1. Two-dimensional pattern of Thai consonants, with phonetic values.

Written out in this way, the alphabet is much easier to memorize, thanks to certain phonetic regularities in the pattern which serve as helpful cues. The most conspicuous of these regularities are: (a) the phonetic identity of the third and fourth rows; (b) the grouping of the nasals (ng, n, m) in the righthand column; and (c) the central 3 x 5 block of aspirate consonants (those whose transcription includes a following *h*). These regularities serve to remind the student which letter comes next in the sequence, and ensure that no letter will be accidentally omitted.

Besides facilitating the learning of the alphabetic sequence, the two-dimensional alphabetic pattern yields several incidental benefits, among them an easy solution to the problem of memorizing the tone classes. As figure 2 shows, the three tone classes are distributed in the pattern in a simple and largely regular fashion.

3. Should the student choose to include ฉ and ฉ, these will pair with ข and ค respectively, and thus have no distorting effect on the resulting pattern (fig.1).

The tone rules, whether or not expressed in the form of a tone table such as that offered by Baldwin, require the student to recognize each syllable as being "live" or "dead". Here again the two-dimensional pattern simplifies the task: any syllable ending in one of the enclosed consonants of figure 3 is dead, and any syllable ending in one of the unenclosed consonants is live.

To the reader familiar with the historical development of the Thai language and script, the facts set out above will seem self-evident. However, most students learning the language lack such background knowledge; such students will find the two-dimensional alphabetic pattern a valuable mnemonic aid.

Roderick Bucknell

University of Queensland