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Southeast Asia's Cold War: An Interpretive History by Ang
Cheng Guan (review)

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Southeast Asia's Cold War: An Interpretive History. By Ang Cheng Guan. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018. xii+306 pp.

Ang Cheng Guan has produced an intriguing book. Full-length commentaries on Southeast Asia during the Cold War tend to be written by scholars from outside the region. For example, Americans focus on the Vietnam War and the region while British-based scholars are most often concerned with examining the end of colonialism and the way it intersected with the events of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. By highlighting the degree of agency of the regional states and the extent to which states controlled their own agenda, Ang brings a refreshingly Southeast Asian perspective to an important topic.

Ang sees three interrelated sets of political participants attempting to shape and navigate the local and overarching Cold War tensions. First, there were the communist parties that emerged in each of the ten Southeast Asian countries, some of which were clearly more successful than others. Second, there were the regional governments, which had to deal both with local communist parties and the major powers, notably the Soviet Union, China, the United States and Britain. Finally, at the international level were the major powers, which had to decide, given their other Cold War priorities, how to relate to the Southeast Asian governments, and in the case of the Soviet Union and China, the local communist parties as well.

In order to assess the interplay of the three sets of political actors during Southeast Asia's Cold War, the body of the book is divided into six chapters. The first chapter argues that it is important to fully explore the origins and early development of the region's communist parties during the 1920s and 1930s so as to trace the roots of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. The second chapter evaluates the post-1949 role of the People's Republic of China in Southeast Asia, arguing that China, rather than the Soviet Union, was the most important driver of the Cold War in the region. The third chapter looks at the policies of Southeast Asian states in response to the Geneva Conference of April 1954, the formation of the Southeast

Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) in September 1954 and the Bandung Conference held in April 1955. The fourth chapter explores the consequences of the Sino-Soviet split on the communist parties and governments of Southeast Asia and especially on the tensions within the Indo-China region. The fifth chapter sets out the policies and actions of the regional communist parties, the Southeast Asian states and the major powers during the crucial Vietnam War. The final main chapter reviews events from the end of the Vietnam War to 1990, including Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia (1978–90) and the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979, and their influence on local communist parties, regional relations among Southeast Asian states, and the relations between regional governments and the major powers, especially China.

The book's strengths lie in the author's ability to chronicle the interactions among the local communist parties, the region's governments and the major powers, especially China, the Soviet Union and the United States. Ang makes the important point that, throughout the Cold War years, the Southeast Asian governments attempted to steer a way through the many rivalries so as to maintain as much autonomy, or agency, as they could. He also describes how Hanoi's invasion of Cambodia in December 1978 drew China closer to the non-communist Southeast Asian states and their regional organization, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Moreover, the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979 and subsequent tensions undermined support for regional communist parties. However, the author could also have added that the military and economic aid that flooded into the non-communist countries because of the Vietnam War, as well as the increasing amounts of foreign direct investment in the 1970s and 1980s, produced rising levels of prosperity within non-communist Southeast Asia that also undercut the appeal of communism. There were, then, international, as well as local, reasons for the winding down of the Cold War in Southeast Asia in the late 1980s.

The Cold War in Southeast Asia involved a variety of regional actors, all of whom were affected by the actions of the major Cold War adversaries. But these groups and governments also in some ways

influenced the course and outcome of the Cold War in their region. Ang's book highlights the importance of these local participants as well as the major powers in the Cold War in Southeast Asia. By doing so it adds a good deal to our understanding of this crucial period in the region's history.

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Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects: British Malaya, 1786–1941. By Lynn Hollen Lees. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xvii+359 pp.

Originally conceived as two separate manuscripts, Lees' monograph uses Ho Engseng's earlier notion of empires as hybrid spaces as a launching point to compare rural and urban lifeworlds under colonialism. Employing British Malaya as a case study to interrogate the 'internal workings' of colonial power, the author convincingly demonstrates that relationships between rulers and the ruled were as complex as they were conflicted. Malaya's strategic location and heterogeneous population bred dissimilar modes of colonial governance over time, an argument buttressed by Lees' sensitivity to different lived experiences from below (primarily northwest Malaya's plantations and small towns). The questions she asks will interest social historians working on imperialism, urbanization, migration, labour, and commodity production: questions regarding the extent to which colonialism nurtured social mobility, cross-cultural learning, and new belongings within diasporas.

Lees pursues these enquiries over eight substantial chapters, frequently referencing developments outside Malaya for additional context. Chapters 1 and 2 chart plantation agriculture's expansion and impact across northwest Malaya during the nineteenth century (mostly