



## **Southeast Asia's Cold War: an interpretive history**

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# 2019

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Introduction by Brad Simpson, University of Connecticut

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Recent historiography on the Cold War in Southeast Asia resists easy categorization. Though scholars continue to produce sophisticated country-focused studies, and to take advantage of recent methodological turns to explore the environment, gender, migration, development, and the circulation of goods and culture, few historians have aimed for broad synthetic accounts that center politics and interstate diplomacy, as Ang Cheng Guan does in *Southeast Asia's Cold War: An Interpretive History*. There are some good reasons to resist this temptation, including the linguistic and archival challenges of researching across wildly diverse countries and continued disagreement over basic questions of periodization, perspective, and method. When did the Cold War 'come' to Southeast Asia? How can we tell an inside-out story which acknowledges the ways in which the Cold War shaped the choices of local actors while still focusing on their agency? How do we account for those dynamics—such as the challenges of postcolonial development—which intersected with but were not wholly determined by the Cold War?

Ang Cheng Guan acknowledges these challenges, especially in the wake of the so-called cultural turn in Southeast Asian history, but insists that the method of international history, broadly construed, illuminates crucial features of the region's imbrication in the wider global conflict between the United States, the Soviet Union, and China in the twentieth century. This wide-ranging narrative begins with the post 1919 formation of local Communist parties in Southeast Asia, then examines the galvanizing impact of the Chinese revolution, before turning to the institutionalization of the Cold War through summitry and regional organizations such as SEATO and the 1955 Bandung Conference. The next several chapters focus on the Sino-Soviet split and its regional consequences, the Vietnam War, and the ambiguous 'end' of the Cold War in the decade and a half after 1975.

The reviews here mostly applaud the breadth of Ang Cheng Guan's account, which, according to Michael J. Montesano, "poses a strong and fundamental challenge to easy acceptance of 'the Cold War' as a useful framework" for apprehending the history of the region. Jürgen Haacke likewise congratulates Ang for having written "a very readable and important book," one which is "well-crafted and empirically rich" and marked by cross-regional coverage. Reviewers uniformly praise the breadth of Ang's research, which brings to bear what Mattias Fibiger describes as "a vast array of sources, including archival documents from the United Kingdom, United States, and Australia; English-language print media from Southeast Asia and the wider world; autobiographies and memoirs of key personages; and the voluminous secondary literature." They also endorse his wide-ranging geographic approach, which deftly surveys political developments across the region over the course of decades in a relatively compact narrative.

The novelty of synthetic works such as this rests on their ability to marshal familiar evidence in service of new arguments and interpretations, and on this task the reviewers are somewhat divided. They agree with Ang's decision, joining Odd Arne Westad and others, to seek the origins of the Southeast Asian Cold War in the mostly ineffective Communist Party activism in the interwar period.<sup>1</sup> Despite the limited success of these efforts, the Japanese conquest of the region beginning in 1941, the collapse of European colonial rule between 1941 and 1945, and the Chinese Revolution galvanized Communist movements throughout the region. Reviewers appreciate Ang's emphasis in telling this story on the agency of local Communist parties and movements in the 1940s, especially in the face of limited Soviet interest and Chinese weakness. After 1949,

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Odd Arne Westad. *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 19-43.

however, Ang argues that the Chinese Revolution drove regional politics, as the two superpowers, anti-Communist political elites, and local Communist parties were forced to grapple with Chairman Mao Zedong's support for revolutionary movements in the region. While some endorse Ang's analytic frame, Fibiger laments what he terms the "orthodoxy" of a focus on Communist organizing rather than the local conditions out of which it grew, resulting in "a call-and-response narrative in which Communists attempted to remake state and society and anticommunists responded."

Attempts at regional alliance building, or attempts to escape such pressures, as exemplified by the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, suggest some of the many ways that Cold War tensions inflected both the domestic politics and foreign relations of countries in the region, especially in the wake of the Sino-Soviet Split (chapters 4, 5). Reviewers largely agree with Ang's focus here on what Montesano calls the "unending need of Southeast Asian states and societies to work out their relationships with China," and the disruptive effects this had on the internal politics of Southeast Asian states, where decisions to back the United States, the USSR, or China did not always break along predictable fault lines.

The Vietnam War looms large in most histories of Southeast Asia's Cold War, and these readers are generally relieved that Ang does not read Southeast Asian politics as a mere extension of the conflict in Indochina. As he notes, by 1966 anti-Communist regimes had consolidated control of the region outside of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, in effect exiting the Cold War system, though they continued to benefit from U.S. security and credibility concerns to extract military and economic aid, even as they turned to the broader project of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) regionalism. Kenton Clymer, like the other reviewers, particularly appreciates Ang's focus on the so-called "third Indochina war," the 1978 Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and subsequent Chinese attack on Vietnam, as the catalyst for the long, slow, and rather ambiguous winding down of institutionalized Cold War conflict in the region, which thirty years after its 'end' still counts three nominally Communist states (Laos, Vietnam, and China).

Ang's focus on interstate diplomacy and politics, readers seem to agree, helps to clarify some of the key dynamics of geopolitical conflict, decolonization, and "nation-building." But Fibiger laments that "processes like state-building, economic development, ideological polarization, and social militarization—all of which depended in no small measure on the intervention of the Cold War's central protagonists—receive little attention" in Ang's narrative. And Kenton Clymer suggests that the emphasis on state and party politics drains some of the human drama from Ang's account, especially given the enormous human toll of Cold War conflict in Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and elsewhere in the region. All agree that Ang might have explored more deeply the economic dimensions of local and regional politics, especially after 1975, when arguably 'post-Cold War' regional and developmental dynamics held greater sway, but in ways that were deeply affected by the physical and political legacies of Cold War conflicts.

Ang's book adeptly surveys the complicated and intertwined dynamics of Southeast Asia's postcolonial politics over the course of a half century of the Cold War. But the readers here agree that much work remains to be done, especially at the archival level, to more fully excavate local and regional dynamics that intersected with, but were not directly the product of the Cold War.

### **Participants:**

**Ang Cheng Guan** is presently Associate Dean and Head of Graduate Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. His forthcoming book (in late-2019)

is entitled *Southeast Asia after the Cold War: Order and Regionalism*, which is the sequel to *Southeast Asia's Cold War*. He is presently working on a new book entitled *SEATO: A History*.

**Brad Simpson** (Ph.D., Northwestern) is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Connecticut. He is the author of *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and US-Indonesian Relations, 1960-1968* (Stanford, 2008). He is currently writing a global history of the idea of self-determination in international politics.

**Kenton Clymer** is Distinguished Research Professor in the History Department at Northern Illinois University. He graduated from Grinnell College, then completed his graduate work at the University of Michigan, where he was a student of Bradford Perkins. He is the author of several books relating U.S. relations with Southeast East Asia. His most recent book is *A Delicate Relationship: The United States and Burma/Myanmar since 1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015). He is currently researching the career of the “Burma Surgeon,” Gordon Stifler Seagrave.

**Mattias Fibiger** is Assistant Professor in the Business, Government, and International Economy unit at Harvard Business School. He received his Ph.D. in 2018 from the Department of History at Cornell University in 2018. His dissertation examines the international and transnational construction of authoritarian rule in Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore in the 1970s.

**Jürgen Haacke** is Associate Professor in International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). He teaches on the international politics of Southeast Asia, including the foreign and security policies of Southeast Asian countries, East Asian regionalism, and foreign policy analysis. He is the author of *ASEAN's Diplomatic and Security Culture: Origins, Development, and Prospects*. Among other topics, he has also published on Myanmar's foreign policy, the responsibility to protect, and recognition-theoretic approaches within critical theory. His current research includes a focus on the role of policy entrepreneurs in the making of U.S. Burma policy.

**Michael Montesano** coordinates the Thailand and Myanmar Studies Programmes of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, for which he has also served as managing editor of *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* since 2013. He is the co-editor of several books on Thai history and politics and on contemporary Southeast Asia more broadly, including the forthcoming *After the Coup: 22 May 2014 and the Future of Thailand* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing 2018, co-edited with Terence Chong). His current research concerns relations between Bangkok and the Thai provinces since the 1930s.

Review by Kenton Clymer, Northern Illinois University

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There are several important books about the history of Southeast Asia, beginning with D.G.E. Hall's classic work, *A History of South-East Asia*, first published in 1955.<sup>1</sup> Works that focus on the Cold War period are scarcer, and those that exist are edited works with chapters by different authors. Ang Cheng Guan mentions these in the 'acknowledgments' page of his book and comments generously on their importance. But there appear to be no single-authored works on the topic employing a regional perspective—until now. Thus *Southeast Asia's Cold War: An Interpretive History*, fills an important gap. It is similar to the very few surveys of U.S. policy toward the region as a whole, such as Robert J. McMahon's essential work, *The Limits of Empire: The United States and Southeast Asia since World War II*.<sup>2</sup>

In the introduction, the author surveys the various approaches to the discussion of international relations history, including the 'cultural turn,' the 'new imperial history,' 'subaltern studies,' and so forth. And while acknowledging the usefulness of these newer approaches, his book is an institutional and diplomatic history, an approach justified by the lack of book-length overviews of the region during the Cold War. More adventurous approaches will presumably build on this traditional account.

Ang Cheng Guan appropriately begins the book with a lengthy (arguably a bit too lengthy) account of the 'antecedents' to the Cold War that emerged in the interwar period. In this chapter he surveys the development of Communism and Communist parties in several of the Southeast Asian countries. He is particularly interested in discovering whether the Communist parties of Southeast Asia were influenced by the Soviet Union and/or the Chinese Communists or whether they emerged out of local situations that were largely uninfluenced by outside developments. Certainly there was some outside influence. Both Ho Chi Minh and Tan Malaka were Comintern representatives, for example. Yet even they were nationalists, responding to the desire for independence. Ang Cheng Guan appears, then, to take something of a nuanced view of the question. At the end of the chapter he discusses the well-known Calcutta Conference of Youth and Students of Southeast Asia Fighting for Freedom and Independence, which met in February 1948 as the Cold War was beginning. Some have argued that the conference illustrated Soviet influence on the Communist movements in Southeast Asia, something evident in four Communist insurgencies that broke out in separate countries in the region soon after the conference. Others disagree. Ang Cheng Guan generally accepts the view that the insurgencies were "largely shaped by local developments not directed by the Soviet Union" (51), though he acknowledges a possible ideological attachment to the larger Communist movement.

In any event, most of the Communist movements in the region had little success prior to World War II, in part due to serious repression by the colonial powers, and in part due to internal problems. More than anything else, it was World War II that "brought about the revival of the communist movements in Southeast Asia" (28), in part because, as followers of the "united front" approach that supported the Allies, the colonial powers often allowed them to function and even legalized them.

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<sup>1</sup> D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.; London: Macmillan, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> Robert J. McMahon, *The Limits of Empire: The United States and Southeast Asia since World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

In the second chapter Ang Cheng Guan examines the importance of the victory of the Chinese Communists in 1949. In a country by country survey, he concludes that the Chinese were much more important than the Soviet Union in fueling the Cold War in Southeast Asia. (Interestingly the Philippines showed the least Chinese influence, even on the Communist-led Hukbalahap Rebellion, which the Americans helped suppress—though the Huks' downfall, the author asserts, was due more to their own internal contradictions.) Thus the year 1949 was critical. Contributing to this was the strong American response to Chinese developments, which helped bring the Cold War to Southeast Asia. The 'fall' of China unquestionably had a traumatic effect on the United States, which had always thought of itself as a friend of China and was now being attacked by the new Chinese government as the leading oppressor and imperialist power in the world. Still, fear of Communism and Communist expansion in the region was central to American policy well before 1949.

In the following chapter, "Geneva, Manila, and Bandung," the author employs a different approach. Instead of surveying each country in turn, he focuses attention on events: the Geneva Conference of 1954, the formation the same year of the Southeast Treaty Organization (SEATO), and the Bandung Conference (1955). With respect to the Geneva Conference, among the author's more important points is partially to dispute the common assertion that the Soviet Union and China forced the Vietnamese to accept an agreement that did not reflect their position on the battlefield, which they deeply resented. This is, in fact, the Vietnamese view of what happened. The Chinese, however, have asserted that the Vietnamese had exhausted themselves in the decisive battle of Dienbienphu and were in no position to move further for the time being. They were therefore not entirely disappointed with the settlement, which appeared to give them a chance to attain their goals peacefully in the coming years. Ang Cheng Guan sees "elements of truth" (71) in both accounts, but concludes that Ho Chi Minh himself was actually more aligned with the Chinese assessment of the situation than were some of the more exuberant Vietnamese.

It is sometimes forgotten that Geneva also dealt with the situations in Laos and Cambodia. The first question with respect to these countries was whether to include representatives from the revolutionary forces active in Laos and Cambodia (the "Issaraks") at the conference, much as the Vietminh participated. In the end, they were not invited, a decision for which Ang Cheng Guan credits China. But in fact the Cambodians in particular fought mightily to exclude the Issaraks, and their tenaciousness deserves some credit. In the end, the Cambodian Issaraks received no recognition at all from the conference, whereas in Laos the revolutionary forces were recognized by being required to regroup in a particular area of the country.

The author notes that SEATO and the Bandung Conference set up diametrically opposed options for Southeast Asia. But the commitments at Bandung were largely unfulfilled, and in the following chapter Ang Cheng Guan turns his attention to the importance of the Sino-Soviet split that began about the same time. He does this by examining how Southeast Asian Communists in each of the countries responded. This posed a dilemma for many Communists, who were now getting assistance from both China and the USSR. Most had to choose, but the Vietnamese were the important exception. They managed to retain friendly relations with both the USSR and China until after the Vietnam War.

But perhaps the larger point, as Ang Cheng Guan sees it, is that Communism in insular Southeast Asia was largely defeated, very much on the defensive, or a nonentity by the mid-1960s. Indeed, with their dramatic defeat in Indonesia, they only posed a serious problem in the Indochinese countries. Overall this is a useful discussion of Soviet and Chinese connections with regional Communist organizations.

Ang Cheng Guan then devotes an entire chapter to the Vietnam War. He examines how each country responded to the war, though the chapter contains observations on other topics as well, including much on the formation of ASEAN. As for the war itself, the account is necessarily sketchy. For example, it gives little context for President Richard Nixon's decision to resume bombing Hanoi (Linebacker II) after Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and North Vietnam's lead negotiator Le Duc Tho had agreed on preliminary terms of peace; the book states only that "at the last moment, Nixon decided to launch controversial Linebacker II (Christmas bombings) to pressure Hanoi to accede to the revised peace terms and to assure South Vietnam of American support" (154).

The final chapter, "Ending the Cold War Chasm," is particularly interesting, with the main focus being the falling out of Vietnam and China, which resulted in a brief war between the two countries in 1979 when Communist China invaded Communist Vietnam in response to Vietnam's invasion of Communist Kampuchea (Cambodia). The split between China and Vietnam had important impacts on the remaining Communist parties in Southeast Asia and also influenced the responses of regional countries to the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. For example, the Thais moved closer to China because they disliked the Vietnamese being so close to their borders. With the end of the Cold War, the importance of Communism faded in Southeast Asia, with the Philippines being the only country in the region which faced a meaningful Communist insurgency.

A couple of criticisms: the book lacks a certain emotional appeal that should, I think, be a part of the story. Though Ang Cheng Guan acknowledges that as many as one million people died in the aftermath of the coup attempt in Indonesia in 1965, for example, the human tragedy is scarcely discussed. The focus is mostly on the geopolitical and diplomatic factors. Similarly, his analysis of Ne Win's leadership in Burma is astute and helpful in understanding how Ne Win maneuvered diplomatically. But there is next to nothing about him destroying democracy in the country and engaging in disastrous economic policies that drove the once prosperous country back decades and set the stage for the Revolution of 1988. And most important, the Khmer Rouge government in Cambodia is dealt with as an ordinary government, even while it was engaged in something akin to genocide against its own people. Nor are the Vietnamese credited with saving Cambodia with their invasion late in 1978, even if it was not undertaken entirely for humanitarian reasons. Even Prince Sihanouk, who had little love for any Vietnamese, applauded their action in this case.

Two other small issues. The author asserts that from the beginning the United States "had made it quite clear . . . they it had no intention of keeping the Philippines as a colony indefinitely" (20). In fact, during the Taft period (1900-1913) the Republicans hoped that eventually the Filipinos would want to remain under American rule, and so they deliberately kept the future indefinite and undefined. (On this point, see Peter W. Stanley's excellent book, *A Nation in the Making: The Philippines and the United States, 1899-1921*).<sup>3</sup> It was only with Woodrow Wilson who came to office in 1913 (the book mistakenly says "1923," 20) that the United States finally made it official U.S. policy that independence was in fact the American goal. That happened with the passage of the Jones Act in 1916.

More disturbing is that, in the context of a discussion about 'Operation Spectrum' in Singapore in 1987 in which twenty-two persons, mostly Catholics, were arrested and charged with attempting to 'overthrow the

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<sup>3</sup> Peter W. Stanley, *A Nation in the Making: The Philippines and the United States, 1899-1921* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).



government and establish a communist state' (190), the author gives some credence to a conspiracy theory that has emerged recently that 'liberation theology' was the result of a Soviet plot. The alleged conspiracy is based on an account by a KGB spy who defected. Ang Cheng Guan is agnostic about the theory's validity but does not refute it. Including this highly questionable theory was unnecessary to his larger discussion about the Singapore development, and the book would have been better if this flimsy allegation was left out of it.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these criticisms and questions, this is a very useful book, one that takes the focus off of the United States (without, however, ignoring the American impact) and attempts to show how Southeast Asians viewed developments during the Cold War. It is also a useful summary of Communist movements and parties in the Southeast Asian countries and how the governments responded to them.

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<sup>4</sup> For an informed discussion that asserts this conspiracy theory is "rubbish," see the analysis of Kerry Walters, a distinguished philosopher at Gettysburg College: <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/kerry-walters/the-truth-about-liberation-theology.html>

Review by Mattias Fibiger, Harvard Business School

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Ang Cheng Guan has produced an impressive account of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. It is so on three accounts. First, it encapsulates ten countries and seven decades within a manageable sum of pages. Second, it wields a vast array of sources, including archival documents from the United Kingdom, United States, and Australia; English-language print media from Southeast Asia and the wider world; autobiographies and memoirs of key personages; and the voluminous secondary literature. And third, it sets forth arguments that will inspire future scholarship on the region's international history.

Consider Ang's relocation of the temporal boundaries of the Cold War. Following on the work of Odd Arne Westad, who characterizes the Cold War as originating in processes that began at the turn of the twentieth century, Ang claims the Cold War in Southeast Asia emerged during the interwar period.<sup>1</sup> In these decades, he explains, the ideological and organizational repertoires of Communism first began to shape Southeast Asians' struggles for national emancipation and social revolution. Not, Ang hastens to add, because the Soviet Union launched any tightly controlled scheme to promote revolution in the region—its capacity to do so was *always* limited, given its far remove and its focus on Europe. Instead, revolutionaries like Tan Malaka in the Dutch East Indies and Ho Chi Minh in Indochina, whose proficiencies in European languages afforded them access to Marxist ideas, traversed the region and established Communist cells, often in concert with their more proximate Chinese comrades. But the indigenous Communist movements established by these peripatetic ideologues foundered in the years leading up to the Second World War. Ang shows that their defeats arose from miscalculations about the readiness of Southeast Asian societies for revolution and mismatches between ragtag revolutionary forces and relatively powerful colonial states. Only the Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia and the collapse of the institutional, economic, and ideological foundations of European colonial rule afforded Southeast Asian Communists with an opportunity to recover.

Which leads to another of Ang's most important arguments: Communist movements triumphed when they established themselves as the exemplars of anticolonial nationalism, as they did in Vietnam. Where nationalism and Communism were effectively decoupled, as in Malaya, Communist movements emerged with far less potency. Communists generally mounted the most effective resistance to the Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia during the Second World War, which afforded them a measure of nationalist legitimacy. This did not go unnoticed by European colonial powers. Most emerged from the war aware that the era of formal imperialism was at an end, and they worked to take the wind out of Communist sails by negotiating peaceful transfers of power to trusted, conservative indigenous elites. So it went in the Philippines, in Burma, in Malaya, and in Singapore. Elsewhere, in Indochina, the recalcitrant French attempted to regain their lost possessions through force of arms, fueling the expansion of Communist movements. Indonesia sat somewhere between these two trends. Though the Dutch attempted to retake the archipelago, the Americans eventually demanded sovereignty be passed to Indonesian elites who had demonstrated their anticommunist bona fides by crushing a leftist uprising at Madiun in 1948.

In the remainder of the book, the themes become more evanescent, the arguments more embedded, and the narrative more unwieldy. Ang dates the beginning of the "conventional" Cold War in Southeast Asia to October 1, 1949—the date of the formation of the People's Republic of China (67). Chinese leader Mao Zedong proved far more willing than his Soviet counterparts to export revolution to the Nanyang, and his

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<sup>1</sup> See Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A Global History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

government quickly established ties with most of the region's Communist movements. China's entry into the Korean War punctuated the emergence of this new, revisionist element in Asia's international system. The possibility of a revolutionary cascade alarmed Southeast Asia's indigenous elites and their European and American patrons. Western resources began flowing into the region, reinforcing anti-Communist regimes against leftist challenges. But Ang is careful to note that, even in an international environment structured by Cold War competition, Southeast Asian actors retained considerable agency. Indigenous elites shaped the trajectory of the Cold War at 1954-55 conferences in Geneva (where Vietnamese Communists extracted promises of Chinese aid), in Manila (where Filipino and Thai elites extracted pledges of American defense), and in Bandung (where representatives of nonaligned states including Indonesia and Burma worked to transcend the bipolarity of the Cold War).

Yet the balance of Ang's narrative makes clear that it was Geneva and Manila rather than Bandung that would define the rest of Cold War in Southeast Asia. The Sino-Soviet split made Mao and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, each of whom was fearful of ceding his claim to leadership of the international Communist movement, more responsive to appeals for aid from Southeast Asian leftists.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile anti-Communist Southeast Asian elites argued that Chinese meddling lay behind all manner of social and political upheavals, and they induced Western governments to funnel men, materiel, and money to the region to reinforce conservative regimes.<sup>3</sup> Over the following decade, a dichotomy took hold. Outside Indochina, anti-Communist regimes suppressed all meaningful threats to their authority, including Communist insurgencies and other opposition movements organized along liberal, ethnic, or religious lines. So conclusive was the Left's defeat there that one could reasonably argue that, for most of Southeast Asia, the Cold War had already reached its end by 1966. In Indochina, however, Communist movements grew only more powerful.

What happened next is a familiar story, and Ang does not dwell on it. The United States intervened in Indochina, purportedly to preserve the non-Communist orientation of South Vietnam. Vietnamese Communists, fighting what Ang regards as a "continuation of a colonial war from 1945 against the French," refused to surrender (129). The resulting conflict swallowed millions of lives and concluded with an Indochina under Communist rule. But it also overshadowed other developments, to which Ang pays greater attention. Most of the region's non-Communist governments banded together to form the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967. The ASEAN states, except the Philippines, soon embarked upon economic 'miracles,' as market economies experienced rapid, shared growth.<sup>4</sup> And as they became more prosperous and more unified, most ASEAN states normalized diplomatic relations with a derevolutionizing China.<sup>5</sup> The end of the Vietnam War also unleashed centrifugal forces within the international Communist

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<sup>2</sup> See Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Thomas Christensen, *Worse Than a Monolith: Alliance Politics and Problems of Coercive Diplomacy in Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> See Gregg Brazinsky, *Winning the Third World: Sino-American Rivalry during the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> World Bank, *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 1-26.

<sup>5</sup> Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 277.

movement—the subject of Ang’s final chapter. In it, Ang argues that the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and the Chinese invasion of Vietnam “marked the beginning of the end of the Cold War in Southeast Asia” (160).

This brief recapitulation of Ang’s narrative complete, a few methodological and historiographical issues warrant comment.

Ang’s is a decidedly orthodox account. He begins by lamenting the lack of a “standard narrative” of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, suggesting that the field’s alleged turn away from grand narratives of war and diplomacy has rendered historians akin to blind folk attempting to determine the shape of an elephant: each is able to grasp an ear, a trunk, a leg, or a tail, but none can envision the beast in its entirety (4). Whether the field has indeed abandoned the study of war and diplomacy as Ang claims need not delay us here, though the proliferation of recent studies listed in his bibliography suggests perhaps it has not.<sup>6</sup> More notable is the fact that Ang has embraced orthodoxy in another sense. His is a call-and-response narrative in which Communists attempted to remake state and society and anticommunists responded. He justifies this choice by suggesting that, because the Left ended up losing the Cold War in Southeast Asia, “their perspectives are often ignored, forgotten, or interpreted through the lens of the winners” (194). But Ang still inhabits what Anders Stephanson has called the “subject-position of an ersatz [anticommunist] policymaker.”<sup>7</sup> The book’s central preoccupation is Communist organizing. For instance, in exploring the antecedents of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, Ang focuses on Comintern activism—not the subjugation of indigenous populations by colonial powers, not the integration of indigenous economies into global markets, and not on the growing American presence in the region. The reader comes away with the mistaken impression that the Cold War is reducible to Communist efforts to remake states and societies, and not much else.

Ang’s orthodox approach also leads him to give short shrift to the domestic causes and consequences of the Cold War. To be sure, Ang gestures in his introduction toward a central insight of Westad’s field-defining *The Global Cold War*: that superpower interventions contributed to processes of polarization and militarization that left much of the Global South in a state of “semipermanent civil war.”<sup>8</sup> But this dynamic does not fully emerge in Ang’s account of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. As Stephanson continues, “to write inside the ‘security problematic’ is to exclude a priori a whole range of possibly more interesting stories.”<sup>9</sup> Processes like state-building, economic development, ideological polarization, and social militarization—all of which

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<sup>6</sup> For other recent laments of this kind see Hal Brands, “The Triumph and Tragedy of Diplomatic History,” *Texas National Security Review* 1:1 (December 2017): 132-143; Fredrik Logevall and Kenneth Osgood, “Why Did We Stop Teaching Political History?” *New York Times*, 29 August 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Anders Stephanson, “Commentary: Ideology and Neorealist Mirrors,” *Diplomatic History* 17:2 (April 1993): 285-295.

<sup>8</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 398.

<sup>9</sup> Stephanson, “Ideology and Neorealist Mirrors,” 289.

depended in no small measure on the intervention of the Cold War's central protagonists—receive little attention in Ang's book.

For instance, Ang discounts the September 1972 declaration of martial law in the Philippines, the May 1969 race riots that led to the reconfiguration of governance in Malaysia, and the murder of student protesters in Thailand in 1973 as issues that were “essentially . . . domestic,” only minimally connected to the Cold War (156-158). Ang rightly points out that Communists had little to do with the protests, riots, and uprisings that preceded these watershed events, but it does not follow that the Cold War was epiphenomenal. In each case, ruling elites felt free to suppress challenges to their authority and establish more coercive, exclusionary regimes because they could count on American support delivered in accordance with Cold War logic.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in his discussion of Indonesia in the period leading up to Major General Soeharto's military takeover and the subsequent mass killings of 1965-66, Ang emphasizes international dimensions: ties between the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI) and China, and between the Indonesian military and the United States. International connections such as these help explain why the leaders of the PKI and Indonesian military grew more willing to challenge each other as President Sukarno's health waned. But they cannot explain the depth of political polarization that contributed to the eruption of such gut-wrenching violence following the September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement.<sup>11</sup> Finally, nary a mention is made of the genocide in Cambodia, another of the bloodiest episodes of the Cold War. To these complaints Ang will likely plead lack of space, since a book of this size cannot hope to incorporate all the twists and turns that contoured individual national histories in Southeast Asia. But the book's failure to explain why and how the Cold War penetrated the region so deeply—fracturing not only societies but also communities and even families, as Heonik Kwon has shown—undermines its claim to represent an overarching synthesis.<sup>12</sup>

What emerges is a paradox. Ang is right to assert the need for a monographic overview of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. His *Interpretive History* helps meet that need, summarizing in a brisk and engaging way most of the conflicts and crises that erupted in the region during the Cold War. Yet if the book's orthodoxy is its greatest strength, it is also its greatest weakness. The book fails to reckon with the immense changes the Cold War wrought in Southeast Asia—the reconfiguration of institutions and economies, the polarization of politics and identities, and the destruction of lives and landscapes. Archival challenges continue to make excavating these stories difficult, and much exciting work remains to be done.

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<sup>10</sup> Mattias Fibiger, “The International and Transnational Construction of Authoritarian Rule in Island Southeast Asia, 1969-1977,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> See Geoffrey Robinson, *The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965-1966* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 83-117.

<sup>12</sup> Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

Perhaps surprisingly, the number of scholarly publications that offer a regionwide and systematic account of the Cold War in Southeast Asia remains more limited than one might expect. Ang Cheng Guan's latest single-authored book, which promises 'to provide an up-to-date and coherent account of the Cold War as it was played out in Southeast Asia based on forgotten and the latest research findings...' (2), is thus both an overdue and welcome effort.

Ang offers an 'interpretive history' of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. This involves him exploring the understandings of regional policy-makers as well as the interpretations of relevant key events and decisions by the growing number of scholars who have studied these. An important objective for Ang is to highlight the agency of regional governments, all the while he is also trying to put the spotlight on those who organised in the name of and fought for the political left.

Differentiating between developments linked to Cold War dynamics and those arising from "more complex local causes" (6), Ang has produced a very readable and important book that should be of interest and value not only to students of history but also appeal to those studying the contemporary international politics of Southeast Asia. Organised chronologically, the outstanding feature of the book is Ang's cross-regional coverage. This allows for broad comparisons, but the book offers readers a significant amount of useful detail as Ang weaves together his narrative.

Important basic arguments that emerge include the following: first, the Cold War in Southeast Asia began to take shape during the interwar period, as local struggles for equality and sovereignty led – inter alia- to the formation of Communist parties across the region. More generally, Ang's argument is that to understand the origins of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, due regard should be given to processes of decolonization and nation-building. Following repression by colonial governments, Southeast Asian Communist parties were 'resuscitated' during World War II, notwithstanding different experiences and developments across the region. As Ang puts it: "It would be correct to say that it was war rather than the systemic failure of colonialism that brought about the revival of the communist movements in Southeast Asia" (28). Ang argues that even though Communist parties operated under direction from Moscow from 1943-1949, the Communist-led insurgencies under way by 1948 in Burma, the Philippines, Malaya, and Indonesia are best understood in relation to their respective local context.

Second, Ang shows that once the Communists had won the Chinese civil war, it was Mao who was keen about the establishment of an Asian Communist Information Bureau, not Moscow (52-53). Indeed, the United States and China (and not the Soviet Union) would subsequently be the main Cold War antagonists in Southeast Asia. Washington placed Vietnam in "the context of a West versus East, democracy versus communism dichotomy" by the end of 1949 (56). Washington and Beijing then faced each other in the Korean War. Also, most of the local Communist parties in Southeast Asia looked towards Beijing. As Ang notes, "... every communist party in Asia had a resident representative in China..." (54).

Third, Southeast Asian countries found it difficult to stay out of the Cold War even though they may have tried. As regards the early Cold War period, Ang argues that "the significance of the 1954 Geneva Conference lies in what it reveals about the dynamics within the communist fraternity-which was ultimately national interest" (70). He demonstrates this with respect to the outcome of the conference, arguing that the Chinese were able to reach a solution to the Indochina question at the expense of the Vietnamese Communists

“because Beijing was their sole military supplier and in control of the only aid-supply route to Vietnam” (73). Ang also highlights just how controversial the formation of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was among Southeast Asian governments and how the Bandung Conference served to map out a political alternative for the region. In Ang’s words, both “SEATO and the Bandung Conference are manifestations of the contrasting and seemingly irreconcilable strategic preferences of various Southeast Asian states” (78).

Fourth, Ang also shows how by the 1960s Communist parties were weakened and effectively destroyed across much of maritime Southeast Asia, with incumbent governments positioning themselves in the Western camp. Though domestic struggles are a crucial aspect of his analysis, Ang not surprisingly also sees the United States as having exploited these struggles to bring about both outcomes. As he argues, for instance, the 1957 coup by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat “provided the opportunity for the United States to persuade the new Thai leadership to reverse Thailand’s policy towards China” (93). More controversial was the U.S. role in Indonesia in October 1965, which extended to embassy staff on their “own initiative” apparently “passing to the noncommunist side those lists with the PKI leaders names and information of senior cadre system” (122). As Ang also comments: “Although the official narrative of the Suharto regime insisted that China colluded with the PKI in the abortive coup, we in fact know very little of the Chinese and Soviet roles in the coup due to the lack of access—even to this day—to the documents on the communist side” (123). He concludes that “...the PKI, contrary to the official account, was not the mastermind of the 1965 coup...” (124).

Fifth, Southeast Asian countries seriously differed in how they approached the war in Vietnam. According to Ang, “Of all the Southeast Asian leaders, Lee Kuan Yew was by far the most vocal in his support of American involvement in Vietnam” (138), a position which he attributes to sub-regional security dynamics in Singapore’s neighbourhood. However, while remaining committed to a non-aligned and neutralist foreign policy, Ang argues that even Burma’s Ne Win did not want “the United States to lose the war although he feared that escalation might involve Burma” (131). Notably, policy responses to the winding down of the Vietnam War were broadly similar among the ASEAN countries. As Ang demonstrates, these states vowed to and did engage China against the backdrop of the Nixon Doctrine, including the two U.S.-allies, Thailand and the Philippines. Even the Sino-Vietnamese relationship temporarily improved after it had deteriorated because of “Beijing’s disapproval of the strategy adopted in the Tet Offensive and also because of its unhappiness over Hanoi’s reluctance to side with Beijing in the ongoing Sino-Soviet dispute” (153). Ang notes that upon the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement in February 1973, ASEAN original member countries not only began to re-consider their relationship with Hanoi, but upon the communist victory in Indochina also found a new gear in relation to regional cooperation.

Ang takes the beginning of the end of the Cold War in Southeast Asia to have been the “implosion within the Asian communist camp” (160). This is essentially a story of internal weakness and a lack of external support but not necessarily a complete end to armed resistance or insurgency. Ang rightly focuses on the end of the USSR’s underwriting of the Vietnamese economy, the subsequent normalization of China-Vietnam relations, and the agreement on settling the Cambodia conflict. He also notes that the “...communist parties in Southeast Asia were the biggest casualty of the Sino-Vietnamese fallout and subsequent Sino-ASEAN ‘alliance’ against the Vietnamese” (185) and -inter alia- seems to link this point to the fate of the Communist Party of Burma. What is clear though is that despite the demise of Communist parties, armed resistance continues. Commenting on the Philippines, Ang thus for instance argues that there remains a communist insurgency problem in form of the New People’s Army but “its strength and influence have waned...” (188).

It is not obvious that *Southeast Asia's Cold War* offers insights that radically depart from the understanding readers will have had before taking up this book. But that was not the intention. What Ang has instead done is to write a book that aims to offer a 'state-of-the-field account' of the Cold War in Southeast Asia and he has successfully managed to pull many threads together to produce an empirically rich cross-regional comparison. Ang's account suggests that to date there are relatively few major controversies in the literature. Where these have taken place, he highlights them (as in the case of different readings of what happened at the 1954 Geneva Conference), and lays out the opposing arguments and interpretations.

Ang draws on an array of primary sources and secondary literature and generally seems on very firm ground. Nevertheless, some aspects of his account are open to challenge. For instance, in his discussion of Burma-China relations in the 1960s and 1970s, Ang understates the level of conflict that raged in Burma between the government forces and the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and the account is too brief to allow us to appreciate the scale of human losses suffered on both sides. According to Bertil Lintner, "The Chinese poured more aid into the CPB effort than any other Communist movement outside Indochina".<sup>1</sup> Ang also argues that "Sino-Burmese acrimony was 'relatively short-lived' and the relationship gradually re-normalized from 1968" (132). This seems a rather controversial reading. It misses at this juncture the point that at least from 1968 to 1973, Chinese 'volunteers' formed the bulk of the CPB's fighting forces (Ang mentions them in a later chapter). Maung Aung Myoe also dates the withdrawal of Chinese advisers to late 1978.<sup>2</sup> Ang himself notes that even by 1980, the issue of Chinese support for the CPB continued to impact bilateral relations, leaving Ne Win "disappointed and angry" (163). In line with the effort to trace the fate of communist movements, Ang might also have focused on the successful efforts that the military undertook to prevent a link-up between old CPB areas in Pegu Yoma and Irrawaddy Delta and the base areas on the border with China.

Ang also touches on the 'economic dimension' of the Cold War in Southeast Asia (191-193). However, after justifying why it "would be remiss not to address ... the economic development of the Southeast Asian countries during the Cold War years" (191), the discussion seems fairly cursory. One reason for this, Ang appears to suggest, is that "one cannot deny the fault of communism as a flawed economic ideology where the state controlled everything..." (192). Nonetheless, a clearer link to seemingly relevant insights concerning the economic interests and policy beliefs of political elites (for example, Natasha Hamilton-Hart's *Hard Interests, Soft Illusions*) would possibly have been appropriate to demonstrate and explain just how comfortable some Southeast Asian elites were with Washington as a 'fundamentally benign great power' during the Cold War years.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, it is important to note that in so far as Ang has examined how past Chinese initiatives and U.S. policy shifts impacted on Southeast Asian countries, the arguments and the empirical detail Ang puts forward are

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<sup>1</sup> Bertil Lintner, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB)* (Ithaca: SEAP, Cornell University, 1990), 26.

<sup>2</sup> Maung Aung Myoe, *In the Name of Pauk-Phaw: Myanmar's China Policy Since 1948* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2011), 132.

<sup>3</sup> Natasha Hamilton-Hart, *Hard Interests, Soft Illusions: Southeast Asia and American Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 13.



also bound to be of interest to those scholars who are working on triangular ‘hedging’ by ASEAN states, involving relations with both the U.S. and China. As Ang argues, “Soon after Johnson’s announcement [not to run in the 1968 election], Thanat Khoman said that Thailand should not be blamed if it were to seek an accommodation with Beijing” (143). And as Ang makes clear, “Despite Johnson’s [security] assurances [vis-à-vis Thailand], by the end of 1968 Bangkok was reevaluating its relations with Washington and Beijing” (143). As regards Manila, Ang states clearly that “[a] week after Johnson’s 31 March 1968 announcement, Marcos said that if the Americans pulled out of Asia, Manila might have to reach an accommodation with Beijing” (145-146). Given developments in more recent years, these kinds of points make for interesting historical parallels that analysts should probably bear in mind.

It is unlikely that *Southeast Asia’s Cold War* is going to be the last word on the topic. But it offers a well-crafted and empirically rich account that deserves to be widely read.

A mong historians of modern Southeast Asia, ‘the Cold War’ is in the air. A fortnight before composing this review, I showed a copy of *Southeast Asia’s Cold War* to a group of Thai doctoral students from Tokyo’s Waseda University as we chatted over coffee near their campus. One of the students rushed to take a picture of the book’s elegantly designed cover with his smartphone. When I asked why, he replied with unconcealed sarcasm that he must absolutely bring the book’s publication to the attention of all of his peers back home who were working so avidly on the *songkhram yen*.<sup>1</sup> Ang Cheng Guan is aware of the fashion for which this student expressed disdain.<sup>2</sup> While refraining from even the suggestion of sarcasm, and displaying characteristic balance and moderation, Ang explicitly pitches his new book as a corrective to much of the work in which the fashion has resulted. The book may amount, however, to far more than a modest corrective. Rather, it poses a strong and fundamental challenge to easy acceptance of ‘the Cold War’ as a useful framework in the study of the history of the Southeast Asian region.

*Southeast Asia’s Cold War* draws on a staggering program of reading to meet two needs. The first is for a synthetic account—in a single volume, by a single author—of the course of the Cold War in the region from, as it were, ‘start to finish.’ The second need grows out of the influence of “the so-called cultural turn” embraced by historians of Southeast Asia under the apparent influence of scholarship on Europe in the “New Cold War History” (3). Ang points out that that latter scholarship complements extant, well developed scholarship on the politics and foreign relations of the Cold War in Europe. One cannot, however, say the same thing for Southeast Asia, in the relative absence of work on the politics and international relations of the era of the Cold War there. As if reversing the historiographic sequence, then, he seeks to lay out an account of the politics and international relations of the era to complement recent work on the region that has been marked by the cultural turn.

Rigor in meeting these two needs, or achieving these two objectives, demands clear-headedness about three matters. They are the historian’s working definition of ‘the Cold War,’ her or his dating of its origins and conclusion, and the approach and the perspective that she or he adopts. As to the first matter, Ang defines the Cold War concisely, as “the international contest between the United States on the one side and the Soviet Union and China on the other” (9). On first reading this is perfectly reasonable. But the formulation is nevertheless telling; Ang refers to the “United States” and the “Soviet Union” rather than to America and Russia, but to “China” rather than to the People’s Republic of China.<sup>3</sup> Regarding the second matter, time frame, Ang is precise at the front end but, equally tellingly, not at the back end. That is, he dates the origins of the Cold War in Southeast Asia to 1919 in order to include the interwar-era activities of the Comintern—

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<sup>1</sup> Literally, ‘cold war’ and, in this instance, ‘the Cold War.’

<sup>2</sup> Not only does his book make this awareness clear, but he and I have also discussed that fashion over a series of long lunches in recent years.

<sup>3</sup> Note the contrast with the title of the classic ‘revisionist’ work by Fred Harvey Harrington’s and William Appleman Williams’s student Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1966* (New York: Wiley, 1967). This book has appeared in ten editions, of which the most recent is *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2006* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008).

founded in that year—and of the region’s Communist parties in his account. In contrast, and with reference to the fall of the Berlin Wall, he writes,

There is, however, not a moment, event, or image of equal significance that would mark an end to the Cold War in Southeast Asia. Yet without so much as a whimper, the Cold War did come to a denouement in Southeast Asia . . . [T]he “wall” that divided the communists and the anticommunists in Southeast Asia had already been breaking down piece by piece, albeit at different paces in each country, for almost a decade before 9 November 1989. (193)

On the third matter, Ang commits himself in the volume to an approach grounded in “international history” and to a perspective “from within [the region] rather than without,” one that “puts the Southeast Asian actors to the forefront of the events” (5, 194, 2).

Ang’s choices in confronting these matters have consequences. The following three sections of this review consider the consequence of each of these matters in turn. Those consequences both illustrate what makes *Southeast Asia’s Cold War* a book of significance and point directly to the message that younger aspiring scholars of ‘the Cold War’ in the region may want to take away from the work of this senior scholar: please reconsider your plans.

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Defining ‘the Cold War’ with explicit reference to the role of the Soviet Union serves, on the one hand, to establish a connection between the conflict as it may have unfolded in Southeast Asia and as it did unfold in Europe, and perhaps in other parts of the world. On the other hand, it calls attention to the specifics of Soviet interest and involvement in the region. Ang Cheng Guan is scrupulous and informative in his treatment of that interest and that involvement.

The story of the Comintern’s establishment of a Far Eastern Bureau in Shanghai in 1926 and of its use of the storied Indonesian and Vietnamese nationalist figures Tan Melaka and Hồ Chí Minh as its agents after 1930 is a familiar one. Ang adds valuable context in noting the attention that Communist parties in Southeast Asia paid to the organization’s changing policy line, not least with the approach of the Pacific War and the need to confront Japanese fascism. At the same time, he also notes the crucial ties of the Malayan Communist Party to the Chinese Communist Party rather than to the Comintern and discusses Hồ Chí Minh’s early links to both the French Communist Party and to ‘united front’ politics in southern China. He explains the reality that prewar communism in Siam was basically the province of Chinese and Vietnamese resident in the country but with close ties to China and Vietnam, rather than of Siamese themselves. And he makes clear the Comintern’s lack of interest in Burma. Taken together, these factors serve to put Moscow’s limited reach and relevance into perspective. In fact, as Ang suggests, fear of the Soviet Union and of its determination to export revolution, doubtless rooted in European realities, fueled the imperialist powers’ concern with the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia more than did actual Soviet or Soviet-backed activity there. This concern led those powers to crush most of the Communist parties in the region by the mid-1930s. Only the circumstances of war and the need to resist Japanese occupiers led to the subsequent recoveries of these parties, though Ang notes the role of the Comintern in the resuscitation of the Indochinese Communist Party even before 1941.

After the end of the Pacific War, Soviet involvement and interest in Southeast Asia proved hardly less tenuous than before the conflict. Ang notes Moscow's lack of attention to the region in the immediate postwar period, its willingness to cede the "leading role in Asia" to Beijing until the time of the Sino-Soviet split at the end of the 1950s (106), and the intensification of ties between Hanoi and Moscow in the years following the fall of Saigon in 1975. That intensification came in the context of mounting tensions between Hanoi and Beijing. But it did not signal a broad pattern of increased Soviet involvement in the region, and the initiation of reformist policies under Communist Party of the Soviet Union General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev before long made the Hanoi's dependence on Moscow a liability for Vietnam.

The picture that emerges from Ang's narrative is therefore one of a Soviet Union only marginally relevant—with the partial exception of Vietnam, a case to which I return below—to Southeast Asia during the era of the Cold War. This picture justifies his affirmation of the continuing validity of Akira Iriye's observation of more than four decades ago, concerning the "difficulty [of] fitting the Asian picture [of the Cold War] into an overall framework" (11).<sup>4</sup> That difficulty results above all from the imperative to assign to the Soviet Union relevance to the Cold War in, in this case, Southeast Asia—an imperative whose origins lie in studies of the phenomenon focused on Europe.

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Ang Cheng Guan's decision to begin his account in 1919 and his incorporation of the interwar activities of the Comintern into that account serve as the basis for an arresting and stimulating argument. In contrasting the latter organization's "anti-imperialist and anticolonial agenda" with the lack of support in American policy for Southeast Asians' "aspiration for equality and sovereignty," he explicitly links what he terms interwar "antecedents" of the Cold War in Southeast Asia to the contest between the Soviet Union and the United States in the region after 1945 (16). While he hastens to add that that contest was not only one between two states, but also one between "two different ideologies, social and economic systems," his choice of moment of origins nevertheless brings a series of wrinkles (16). One, treated above, relates to the discontinuity in, and the marginal importance of, the Soviet Union's involvement in Southeast Asia, resulting from the lack of interest in the region that more often than not obtained in Moscow. A second wrinkle resulting from Ang's decision to place the origins of Southeast Asia's Cold War in the interwar period relates, in contrast, to the continuities in that contest that both this decision and his hesitation to assign a specific moment to the end of Southeast Asia's putative Cold War suggest.

His attention to interwar developments notwithstanding, Ang argues without qualification

that it was Communist China more than the Soviet Union that fuelled the Cold War in Southeast Asia, and thus if one has to identify a point crucial to the development of the Cold War in post-World War Two Southeast Asia, it would be 1949, specifically 1 October which marked the inauguration of the People's Republic of China (PRC). (52)

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<sup>4</sup> Ang is here quoting Akira Iriye, *The Cold War in Asia: A Historical Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 6. Iriye seems to have made this observation with specific reference to the origins of the Cold War. I apply it more broadly.

Terming the PRC, even from its earliest years, “a new subsidiary communist hub in East and Southeast Asia,” Ang details the network of extensive ties between the Chinese Communist Party and each of the parties in that latter region that quickly developed after 1949 (54). Even before the Sino-Soviet split, the PRC functioned in relation to Southeast Asia as a subsidiary that enjoyed great apparent latitude from its notional headquarters in the distant and relatively inattentive Soviet Union. The ties established after 1949 “affected the domestic politics of the various Southeast Asian states,” and their significance highlights postwar continuity with the interwar importance of a not-yet-the-PRC China as a point of contact for the Communist parties of the region (67). This continuity stands in contrast to the discontinuity of the Soviet Union’s role in Ang’s narrative.

As that narrative unfolds, the continuity of Southeast Asian actors’ attention to the question of how to position their states, societies, and parties in relation to now-the-PRC China emerges as one of its central themes. Space allows reference to just a few examples. But prominent among them are the encounters of Indonesia’s, Thailand’s, and the Philippines’ representatives with PRC Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai at the time of the Bandung Conference of April 1955 and the keenness in the capitals of non-Communist Southeast Asian to forge relations with Beijing as, in the 1970s, American failure in Indochina loomed and then arrived. Even Vietnam’s striking, albeit abortive, effort to reach out to members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the period after the fall of Saigon and the unification of the country reflected above all the Hanoi leadership’s concern over the state of its relations with its giant neighbor to the north.

The prominence of the negotiation of a relationship with China in Ang’s account may explain his reluctance to assign a firm date to serve as paired book-end to 1919 or 1949 in marking the conclusion of Southeast Asia’s Cold War.<sup>5</sup> For the region’s work to negotiate that relationship is ongoing; neither 1975, 1978, 1991, nor any later date brought it to an end. Geography, demography, and economics make it as constant a feature of the region’s past and present as its seas, straits, deltas, plains and mountain ranges. Like those geographic features, too, the Sino-Southeast Asian relationship preceded Western colonialism in the region. According to one perspective, in fact, the era of Western imperialism in Southeast Asia represented little so much as a re-ordering of that relationship, one destined to give way to successive later re-orderings.<sup>6</sup>

One of those subsequent re-orderings in Sino-Southeast Asian relations, Ang’s book suggests, followed in the wake of October 1949. To the degree that the United States and to a lesser degree the Soviet Union, along with anti-Communism often rooted in domestic Southeast Asian realities rather than in international relations, seemed for a time to define that re-ordering, we may view the period in question as that of ‘the Cold War.’ But in choosing to do so, we must also take cognizance of the risk of introducing a distraction into the study of the recent history of the region.

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<sup>5</sup> Ang has in fact completed a substantial follow-up study on Southeast Asia after the Cold War whose publication readers of *Southeast Asia’s Cold War* will eagerly await.

<sup>6</sup> For a both trenchant and typically elegant, and also perhaps exaggerated and even innocent, statement of this view as it relates to ‘post-Cold War’ relations between Thailand and China, see Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, “Thailand Is Not Lost,” *New York Review of Books*, 24 May 2018, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2018/05/24/thailand-is-not-lost/>, downloaded 18 October 2018.

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The adoption in *Southeast Asia's Cold War* of a “from within” perspective defines the book (194). The Southeast Asianist may, as she or he reads through the volume, find that perspective so comfortable, familiar, and even reassuring as to take it for granted. In part, this apparent familiarity is due to the often astonishing range of scholarship on Southeast Asia on which Ang Cheng Guan draws. These same materials enable him to tell a story unfamiliar to the diplomatic historian, to offer a work of international history in which policy debates and decision-making in extra-regional capitals never become the focus of attention.

One highlight of Ang’s “from within” approach comes in the book’s masterful sixth chapter, “Ending the Cold War Chasm,” which treats Vietnam’s complicated relations with the PRC after 1975, its invasion of Cambodia to oust the Khmer Rouge regime in late 1978, and its brief border war with the PRC early the following year. In judging that latter “Chinese exercise of influence in invading Vietnam . . . certainly a success,” at least in long-term perspective, Ang reaches a conclusion that will challenge some readers to rethink their views (181). Even more provocative, however, is the counterfactual exercise that leads him to ask, in the book’s concluding chapter,

what if the Vietnamese had not invaded Kampuchea? The fact that Hanoi did invade in December 1978 marked the fracturing and rearrangement of the Cold War order in Southeast Asia and with hindsight the beginning of the end of the Cold War in the region. (197)

In describing that rearrangement, Ang notes the development of relations between the PRC and non-Communist Southeast Asian governments that followed Hanoi’s capture of Phnom Penh. Those relations saw ASEAN work with the PRC and the United States toward the 1991 resolution of the sustained crisis in which that capture resulted. From the same Southeast Asian perspective, however, one might equally well pose a series of questions very different from Ang’s counterfactual. Why did ASEAN governments react to Vietnam’s termination of the Khmer Rouge’s genocidal rule as they did? What motivated their alarm over Vietnam’s occupation of Cambodia and their willingness to work, in varying degrees, with China to bring that occupation to an end? And what, in long-term perspective, ought we to learn from these reactions? Again, answers to these questions, as to Ang’s own, must center on continuities in Southeast Asian polities’ negotiation of their relationships with China. They must also take into account the fact, noted above, that the origins of the rapprochement on the part of those polities and the PRC that defined the 1980s pre-dated December 1978.

The book’s sixth chapter also includes a short, smart discussion of “the economic dimension of the Cold War in Southeast Asia,” which complements the rest of the book admirably, its brevity notwithstanding (191). Ang points out there the pattern of rapid economic growth that marked most of ASEAN as the era of the Cold War ended and the relevance of that development to any understanding of the place of that era in Southeast Asia’s recent history. This observation is consequential. The rapid growth of economies in the region in the period preceding the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 had a lasting impact on the region’s conception of its own identity. In that regard, it epitomizes a number of phenomena to which Ang’s Southeast-Asia-centric perspective leads him to draw attention.

One of these phenomena was “the common and mutual distrust between the Southeast Asian incumbent governments and those on the left side of the ideological divide” that prevailed at the time of the Bandung Conference, as well as beforehand and afterwards (87). Others included a phenomenon so broad as the

stirrings during the era of the Cold War of communalism as a source of domestic tensions across Southeast Asia that would in time supplant Communism, and of one so narrow as the dismay of “progressive Singapore architects” at the polarization in which official anti-Communism resulted during that era (197). Taken together, such phenomena underline the fact that, as well as negotiating a position in relation to China, the era saw Southeast Asian states and societies grappling with the need to negotiate their own identities.

Bandung offers a further case in point. In calling attention to the participation in the gathering there of such major Southeast Asian intellectual—oh, yes, and also diplomatic—figures as Philippine Ambassador to the United States Carlos P. Romulo and Thai Foreign Minister Wan Waithayakon, Ang reminds us of the range of concerns that such men brought with them to the capital of West Java.<sup>7</sup> Discussions held there between various Southeast Asian participants and Zhou Enlai and concerning the Overseas Chinese populations of the states in the region and their citizenship status related to more than those states’ negotiation of their relationship to the PRC. Those discussions cut to the core of postcolonial national-identity formation. We are clearly in the realm of something less tractable than a ‘global’ or even merely regional contest between two ideologies.

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The preceding sections of this review argue that, with exemplary balance, Ang Cheng Guan succeeds in *Southeast Asia’s Cold War* in situating the region’s experience of the era of the Cold War on two planes. One of these planes is the history of the unending need of Southeast Asian states and societies to work out their relationships with China. The other is that of the particularly intense need during the decades after 1945 for those same states and societies to forge new identities, and to structure new or to fortify old political and social orders.

General Romulo and Prince Wan were not alone in operating on both these planes, as Mitchell Tan’s path-breaking work on Sang Phatthanothai—the journalist and labor union leader who figured prominently in Bangkok’s contacts with Beijing in the period after the Bandung Conference—makes clear.<sup>8</sup> Like those of the two more famous figures, Sang’s activities illustrated the intersection of the two planes on which Ang situates Southeast Asia’s experience of the decades that his book treats. And, like General Romulo’s own activities during the same period, they brought Sang into direct contact with the wider world in which, above all in

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<sup>7</sup> For an important recent assessment of General Romulo’s significance, see Lisandro E. Claudio, *Liberalism and the Postcolony: Thinking the State in the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Philippines* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), 81-110. This dazzling and moving book underlines the disadvantages of adopting a ‘Cold War’ perspective on recent Philippine and Southeast Asian history on which the present review harps. The discussion of Prince Wan in Tomas Larsson, “In Search of Liberalism: Ideological Traditions, Translations and Troubles in Thailand,” *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 32:3 (November 2017): 531-561, esp. 538-539, 542, 552-553, has a similar effect. For an important, and relevant, recent treatment of Prince Wan’s thought, see Saichon Sattayanurak, *10 panyachon sayam lem 2 panyachon lang kanpatiwat 2475* [Ten Siamese intellectuals, volume 2: Intellectuals after the 1932 revolution] (Bangkok: Open Books, 2014), 142-255.

<sup>8</sup> Mitchell Tan, “Confronting Communism: Sang Phatthanothai and Thailand’s Dynamic Relationship with the Cold War World,” *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 33:1 (March 2018): 59-115.

Europe, the United States and the Soviet Union were locked in a dangerous, apparently existential, conflict. We call that conflict the Cold War.

An important strand in the thinking of Americans, outsiders to the region, saw Southeast Asia as a theatre in that conflict that they also called the Cold War. As Ang reminds us, U.S. President Dwight David Eisenhower first explained “the ‘falling domino’ principle,” in April 1954, with specific reference to Southeast Asia (69). Some thoughtful and deeply engaged Southeast Asians themselves shared Washington’s understanding of their region as a Cold War theatre. Some in the region also saw the benefit of playing along with that understanding, if only because it served their goals in domestic contests over national identities and domestic political orders. In her exemplary study of the Thai case, Sinae Hyun calls this posture “indigenizing the Cold War.”<sup>9</sup> At the same time, as Ang makes clear with reference to Philippine President Ferdinand Edralin Marcos and long-time Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman, some of these same Southeast Asians understood the inevitability of the region’s arrival at a *modus vivendi* with the PRC. And, of course, these various postures adopted by Southeast Asians were not mutually exclusive. But, even as American policy-makers, perhaps Soviet policy-makers, and some Southeast Asians saw the region in the decades after 1945 or 1949 through a Cold War lens, surely we historians need to encounter that perspective from a critical distance. We must decide how much weight to give to it in our work.

Faced with that decision, one reads *Southeast Asia’s Cold War* with the clear sense that the rather trendy cultural turn may not represent as inappropriate, premature, or ill-considered a borrowing from the historiography of the Cold War in Europe as it may appear. Ang is correct in associating John R.W. Smail’s 1961 article “On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Southeast Asia” with a “preoccupation . . . with the writing of ‘national history’” among historians of the region in that era (6). It is, however, worth recalling Smail’s contention that “social structure and culture” were the domains of historical autonomy in Southeast Asian societies subject to Western imperialism.<sup>10</sup> This insight points to a certain logic for the adoption of the cultural turn in the study of the region’s experience of the era of the Cold War. As I have argued above, that era saw Southeast Asian states and societies consciously confronting the pressing need to work out identities and to structure socio-political orders. A focus on the social and cultural history of the era is, then, hardly misplaced.

But there is a rub. At first glance, the apparent logic for adoption of the cultural turn in ‘Cold War’ studies on Southeast Asia would suggest that participants in that turn are following in the footsteps of O. W. Wolters—writing a history of Southeast Asians’ “localization” of forces and ideas from the wider world and their harnessing those forces and ideas to purposes of their own.<sup>11</sup> But, like Ang, Wolters kept Southeast Asia at the center of the story. His interest in localization originated in his determination to treat Southeast Asian events

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<sup>9</sup> Sinae Hyun, “Indigenizing the Cold War: Nation-Building by the Border Patrol Police of Thailand, 1945-1980,” unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of History, University of Wisconsin, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> John R.W. Smail, “On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia,” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2:2 (July 1961): 72-102, 85.

<sup>11</sup> O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), 55.



and to understand Southeast Asian mentalities, rather than in a concern with the manifestation in Southeast Asia of extra-regional developments. Though himself a prominent member of the Malayan Civil Service during the Emergency and a great admirer of Director of Operations and High Commissioner in Malaya General Sir Gerald Templer, Wolters is unlikely to have found scholarship centered on the so called 'global Cold War' worthy of his attention.<sup>12</sup> He was a Southeast Asianist.

Rather than the cultural turn in Cold War historiography, the truly ill-considered borrowing in the study of Southeast Asia from scholarship on Europe and the United States is perhaps the very idea that 'the Cold War' may serve usefully to define or characterize a period in the history of the region. One might argue that embracing that idea gives the region more relevance or interest to the scholars in North America or Europe who are most influential in 'the Cold War field.' That rationale would, however, exemplify a variant of what Benedict Anderson branded, forty years ago, as one of two types of "failure of nerve" often observed among "area-specialists," that of signing on to the latest fad in one's discipline.<sup>13</sup> The possibility that we are seeing, in the case of that 'field' as it relates to Southeast Asia, such a failure among young scholars who ought to be in the most intellectually adventurous stages of their careers would be dispiriting.

One might also argue that recourse to 'the Cold War' to characterize a period in the recent history of Southeast Asia represents a useful device for prodding specialists on different countries in the region to talk to one another, a 'convenient tag' suggestive of transnational commonalities.<sup>14</sup> But the study of Southeast Asia, as it developed from the years immediately following the Second World War, has always been a comparative field. Ang's book conforms to this tradition; hence both the appeal of the book's perspective to the Southeast Asianist and its value as a reminder to younger scholars of earlier generations' commitment to reading scholarship on as many parts of the region as time permitted.

The device is not, then, necessary, and neither is its adoption cost-free. I have myself in the past succumbed to the temptation to apply the Cold War tag.<sup>15</sup> I am therefore acutely aware of this cost. The era of the Cold War brought to Southeast Asia immense and lasting social and political distortions. This is undeniable. Those distortions resulted, in many familiar cases, from the conduct of local actors with either direct ties to Washington or strong commitments to Communism. But to make 'the Cold War' central to our study of their conduct, even if we use it as a lens to examine those actors' localization of a 'global' conflict, is to risk introducing distortions into our work. At worst, it lets many of those actors, from across Southeast Asian

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<sup>12</sup> See Craig J. Reynolds, "The Professional Lives of O. W. Wolters," 1-38 in O. W. Wolters, *Early Southeast Asia: Selected Essays*, Craig J. Reynolds ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, "Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies," 193-247 in Eliezer B. Ayal, ed., *The Study of Thailand: Analyses of Knowledge, Approaches, and Prospects in Anthropology, Art History, Economics, History, and Political Science* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1978), 232.

<sup>14</sup> I am grateful to Mitchell Tan for sharing his thoughts on this matter with me.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Michael Montesano, "Cold War Thailand through the Eyes and Imagination of a Leading Thai Cold Warrior," lecture in series on "The Cold War in Southeast Asia," delivered at the National Library, Singapore, 25 February 2009, <https://ari.nus.edu.sg/Event/Detail/843>, downloaded 15 July 2018.

political spectra, off too easily.<sup>16</sup> More generally, it distracts us from due focus on the worldviews, immediate priorities, and interests closest to home that were the most significant sources of Southeast Asian actors' conduct.

But does restoring Southeast Asian worldviews, priorities, and interests to the study of the era of the Cold War in the region not lead us into the second type of failure of nerve about which Benedict Anderson sought to caution scholars of the region? That failure lay, he wrote, in “defiantly crawling deeper into an ‘area-ist’ shell, insisting—in a defensive, ideological way—on the uniqueness and incomparability of the area of specialization, and engaging in the study of ever more narrowly defined and esoteric topics.”<sup>17</sup> Understanding the era of the Cold War as a chapter in Southeast Asia’s and its component parts’ interminable negotiation of its relationship with China certainly does not fit that description. It links the history of the region during that era to something far larger than the Cold War, after all. The danger, if anything, lies in placing too much emphasis on Sino-Southeast Asian relations—in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres—and overstating, under the influence of developments of the present moment, their importance in the history of the region in the decades after 1945. But it is just the sort of danger with which historians are trained to grapple.

As to the second plane on which Ang situates Southeast Asia during the era of Cold War, defined by the need for the states and societies of the region to negotiate their own identities during that era, the introduction to *Southeast Asia’s Cold War* offers an invaluable discussion of the overlapping histories of decolonization, “nation-building,” and the experience of the Cold War in the region (9-10). Those first two frameworks will strike some young historians as relics of yesterday’s or the day-before-yesterday’s scholarship, with far less of the trendy appeal that the study of Cold War culture has come to have. But reflection suggests that those frameworks open the way to a more comprehensive, not to say sounder, understanding of the matters on which that study has focused. The exciting recent work of Kung Chien Wen on relations between the Philippines and the Republic of China on Taiwan in the three decades following the end of the Pacific War is, with its attention to the question of sovereignty, a striking example.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, despite its exceptionally strong ties to the Soviet Union at several times during the era of the Cold War, even Communist Vietnam offers another such example. Peter Zinoman has brought fresh air to long-stale understandings of the *Nhân vãn–Giai phẩm* affair by lifting it out of the narrow context of strictly domestic Vietnamese politics and linking it to developments in the Communist world following the death of General Secretary of the

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<sup>16</sup> As Samson Lim, *Siam’s New Detectives: Visualizing Crime and Conspiracy in Modern Thailand* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2016), illustrates with striking effectiveness, many of the social and political distortions that one might easily attribute to ‘the Cold War,’ that appear in fact to number among its defining characteristics in the region, had in fact begun to manifest themselves rather earlier. His book thus represents yet another challenge to the utility of ‘the Cold War’ in periodization of recent Southeast Asian history.

<sup>17</sup> Anderson, “Studies of the Thai State,” 232.

<sup>18</sup> Kung Chien Wen, “Nationalist China in the Postcolonial Philippines: Diasporic Anticommunism, Shared Sovereignty, and Ideological Chineseness, 1945-1970s,” doctoral dissertation, Department of History, Columbia University, 2018. Readers are also directed to Mitchell Tan, “Spiritual Fraternities: The Transnational Networks of Ngô Đình Diệm’s Personalist Revolution and South Vietnam’s First Republic, 1955-1963,” unpublished manuscript, under consideration by *The Journal of Vietnamese Studies*.

Communist Party of the Soviet Union Joseph Stalin in 1953.<sup>19</sup> But, as a consideration of international influences on cultural and political developments in early post-colonial Vietnam, his article on that affair transcends in its importance that of a contribution to the study of the cultural Cold War in an arena far from its European theatre.

In some parts of Southeast Asia, the passage of time and the emergence of a new, often superbly trained, generation of scholars have led to increased critical scrutiny of societies' often conflictual quests for identity in the decades after 1945. This scrutiny has in turn heightened awareness of the impact on those quests of foreign, frequently American, scholars whose work is rather casually taken to reflect the imperatives Washington's Cold War project.<sup>20</sup> But a different perspective suggests that this awareness has, in the context of the international fashion for Cold War history, given rise to the same overdetermined scholarship on the place of the Cold War in the region's history that obtains outside Southeast Asia.<sup>21</sup> Close engagement with *Southeast Asia's Cold War* enriches that alternative perspective. Few of the arguments or contentions in this review will be news to the volume's author, whose wide reading and research have enabled him to achieve exactly what "a general interpretive history" should achieve (1). In recognizing and delineating underlying themes in the history of Southeast Asia during the era of the Cold War, his latest book charts the region's experience of that era without succumbing to the idea that Cold War itself defined that experience.

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<sup>19</sup> Peter Zinoman, "Nhân Văn–Giai Phẩm and Vietnamese 'Reform Communism' in the 1950s: A Revisionist Interpretation," *The Journal of Cold War Studies* 13:1 (Winter 2011): 60-100. In this connection, it is also worth calling attention to Edward Miller and Tuong Vu, "The Vietnam War as a Vietnamese War: Agency and Society in the Study of the Second Indochina War," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4:3 (October 2009): 1-16.

<sup>20</sup> I am indebted to Thanapas Dejpawuttikul for discussing this development with me. Benedict Anderson cautioned against the casual assumption noted here in the posthumous English-language version of his intellectual memoir; see Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *A Life Beyond Boundaries* (London: Verso, 2016), 34-35 and 45.

<sup>21</sup> A pair of recent examples illustrate how perniciously that overdetermined understanding of the place of the Cold War in the history of the region has seeped from scholarship into more general understandings. "Banyan: Lots of elections, little democracy," *The Economist*, 26 May 2018, 31, sloppily and confusingly cites a prominent American scholar of Southeast Asian politics associating the Cold War with a regional "collapse into authoritarianism." Margaret Scott, "The Truth about the Killing Fields," *New York Review of Books*, 28 June 2018, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2018/06/28/truth-about-indonesia-killing-fields/>, downloaded 9 June 2018) goes so far as to refer to the mass killings in Indonesia in the wake of the events of the night of 30 September-1 October 1965 in Djakarta and on its outskirts as a "cold war epic" and approvingly heralds the idea of a "global history of the cold war."

**Author's Response by Ang Cheng Guan, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore**

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Let me begin by thanking Tom Maddux for facilitating this roundtable review. I wish also to thank all the reviewers for taking the time to read my book. In the course of my research on modern Southeast Asia, I have benefitted from all their writings, including this set of reviews. For example, Kenton Clymer and Jürgen Haacke's respective clarifications of U.S.-Philippines relations during the Taft period and the conflict between the Burmese junta under the leadership of Ne Win and the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), all could potentially contribute to the depth and breadth of *Southeast Asia's Cold War*.

I deeply appreciate the kind words and comments of the four reviewers and am gratified that all concur on the book's usefulness and contribution to future scholarship. I wrote this book with the intention of filling a lacuna in the historiography of the Cold War—the lack of a singular account of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. It is written with the non-specialists, particularly students interested in the international and political history of Southeast Asia during the Cold War years, in mind. I hope that those who teach such courses will find the book handy and useful.

All four reviewers have identified a number of shortcomings in the book, which I can generally agree with. As I was writing the sequel to *Southeast Asia's Cold War*, I did a 'self-critique' of the book and my own conclusions in fact coincide with much of those of the reviewers.

Clymer notes that the book "lacks a certain emotional appeal." I agree, and on hindsight, I could have elucidated more on the human tragedies. Indeed, many lives were lost and communities destroyed. Some writers have pointed out that the war in Southeast Asia was more 'hot' than 'cold.' I should also have shifted the "flimsy allegation" that 'liberation theology' was the result of a Soviet plot to the footnotes. Doing so would have improved the flow of the narrative.

I agree with Mattias Fibiger that I left out or paid little attention to "a whole range of more interesting stories"—state building, economic development and others. I agree all these other issues—"the domestic causes and consequences of the Cold War" are important. However, the Cold War framework may not necessarily be the best heuristic to explain these issues in every case. One of the most challenging problems in writing international history involves striking the right balance between the analysis of situations in terms of everything happening at one time (within the chosen perspective) and the pursuit of a narrative of the sequence of events in one place or institution over a period of time. I found it difficult to weave the complexity of the domestic issues into the political history without essentializing them, and without making the narrative unwieldy. I look forward to reading Fibiger's Ph.D. thesis and book.

Jürgen Haacke felt that I was too brief in my account of the 'economic dimension' of the Cold War in the region. Again, this reflects not an oversight but a conscious decision to maintain a disciplined focus on political developments. But I agree that the economic dimension of the Cold War deserves to be examined and look forward to a complementary volume from a worthy scholar; I do not have the 'bandwidth.'

I enjoyed reading Michael Montesano's wide-ranging review, which locates my book in the broader Southeast Asia historiography. I found his references to Benedict Anderson, John Smail, O.W. Wolters, and his comments on the 'cultural turn' to be thought-provoking and refreshing. There is something more involved than just keeping up with the 'fashion' of the 'cultural turn' or the term 'Cold War.' There is one other important reason for the popularity of the cultural turn in the study of the region's experience during the

Cold War. That is, historians find it difficult, if not impossible, to write political history due to the lack indigenous archival sources. I adopted the term 'Cold War' as a shorthand in this book because it describes a period, which most scholars are familiar with. It was perhaps a missed opportunity not to propose a new term to represent the international history of the latter-twentieth century Southeast Asia.

Finally, I wish to thank H-Diplo and all the reviewers again for taking time to comment on my book. I hope the book and this discussion will shape 'future scholarship on the region's international history' in path-breaking ways.