

REVIEW

Southeast Asia: Documents of Political Development and Change, edited by Roger M. Smith (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1974), 589 pages, \$19.50.

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The publication of this book and others like it reflects a change in attitude among Western students of Southeast Asian politics. It is as if the pace of events in the area has so confounded the most ambitious theories of "political modernization" that a grudging acceptance of what Southeast Asians themselves have been saying has finally been achieved. The effort, by itself, is welcome; only the choices can be quibbled about.

Compiling anthologies of this sort is a perilous enterprise. There is so much material to choose from and consequently, as many plausible grounds for complaining about the exclusion of some. The looseness of the selection criteria ("... materials which... best describe the political thoughts and actions of Southeast Asians and their governments during the past twenty-five years." p. 13) allows the contributors wide latitude in their choices but it also accounts for the highly uneven quality in selections. The choice of official documents and speeches by key leaders is uniformly good. It is in the selection of material from the opposition and from not-so-prominent observers where some contributors do better than others. The contrast, for example, between the section on Thailand which is almost wholly made up of official statements and other documents, and the section on Indonesia which includes a good collection of statements by students, young journalists and intellectuals is striking.

It may be argued that the Thai military has so tightly controlled politics since the thirties that there has not been much opposition activi-

ty, but surely there is much that recommends the inclusion of Pridi Phanomyong's controversial economic plan of 1933. It is also surprising that nothing has been included of the many newspaper and magazine articles which served to create the intellectual mood among Bangkok students who provoked the political upheaval of October 1973. Similar gaps can be found in the sections on Burma and the Philippines. Jose Ma. Sison's article is interesting but the crucial split in Communist ranks could have been better described with selections from documents discussed at the founding congress of the Communist Party of the Philippines in December 1968. The Burma section could have been strengthened with selections from statements and other documents from opposition groups such as the Karens and the communists. As it is, only the government side is presented on the key issue of national integration.

By far the most interesting documents are the speeches of leaders such as Sukarno, Sihanouk and Ne Win. They have an intimacy about them which reveals as much about their personalities as they do of their ideas. Beside them, the speeches of Philippine and Malaysian leaders seem dull and vaguely derivative. It is, I suppose, precisely the charisma of these leaders which animates their speeches. In the case of Malaysian and Filipino leaders, the fact that their statements and speeches are made in a foreign language must contribute to their strangely stilted abstractness. Unfortunately, there is bound to be less and less of the Sukarno and Sihanouk style speeches. Southeast

Asian politics seem less hospitable to charismatic leaders these days. Then too, as audiences enlarge with the increased use of electronic media, there is less scope for the homey intimacies of Sukarno, and more need for the careful, ghost-written, reportorial style of Suharto.

Much of the material here is already available in English but for most Southeast Asians it might as well not be because none of us have decent library collections on Southeast Asian countries other than our own. For Filipinos, the English translations of French language texts on Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam are particularly useful. Documentary collections of this

sort justify themselves for the convenience they afford us. In addition, it allows Southeast Asians who have always had to depend upon Western interpretations of their politics, a chance to draw their own conclusions. But it is ironic that this important service again has had to be performed by Westerners.

Note

At the time he reviewed this book for PSR J. Eliseo Rocamora was with the Institute of Asian Studies, University of the Philippines System.