“My husband doesn’t have a head for business,” complained Ngọc, the owner of a children’s clothing stall in Bến Thành market. “Naturally, it’s because he’s a man.” When the women who sell in Ho Chi Minh City’s iconic marketplace speak, their language suggests that activity in the market is shaped by timeless, essential truths: Vietnamese women are naturally adept at buying and selling, while men are not; Vietnamese prefer to do business with family members or through social contacts; stallholders are by nature superstitious; marketplace trading is by definition a small-scale enterprise. Based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork and life history interviews, Essential Trade looks beyond the façade of essentialism to analyze traders’ performances of expected styles of gender, kinship, social networks, spirituality, and class as processes of subject formation that have helped them to navigate four decades of volatility caused by war, socialism, and market socialism. The book provides a compelling account of a “political economy of appearances” in postwar southern Vietnam as seen through the eyes of the dynamic women who have built their businesses in the stalls of Bến Thành market and joined the ranks of Vietnam’s growing urban middle class.
This book explores the untold history of the removal of métis [mixed-race] children from their Vietnamese, Cambodian and Lao mothers as part of a colonial plan to reproduce the French race in Vietnam. Throughout the colonial period and, on a lesser scale, the postcolonial period, French child welfare organizations conducted extensive searches of the Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Lao countryside for métis children who had been abandoned by their French fathers. Because these children had been raised without French cultural influence, authorities deemed them legally “abandoned” and separated them from their mothers—sometimes by force. The children were then placed in state-run institutions called “protection” societies, whose curriculum of re-acculturation would transform them, in the words of one French administrator, into “little Frenchmen.” The colonial state, in short, usurped the role of the family.

Khmer Women on the Move
Anuska Derks

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Item type: book

This book offers a fascinating ethnography of young Cambodian women who move from the countryside to work in Cambodia’s capital city, Phnom Penh. Female migration and urban employment are rising, triggered by Cambodia's transition from a closed socialist system to an open market economy. This book challenges the dominant views of these young rural women—that they are controlled by global economic forces and national development policies or trapped by restrictive customs and Cambodia's tragic history. The book shows instead how these women shape and influence the processes of change taking place in present-day Cambodia. Based on field research among women working in the garment industry, prostitution, and street trading, the book explores the complex interplay between their experiences and actions, gender roles, and the broader historical context. The focus on women involved in different kinds of work allows new insight into women's mobility, highlighting similarities and differences in working conditions and experiences. Young women's ability to utilize networks of increasing size and complexity allows them to move into and between geographic and social spaces that extend far beyond the village context. Women's mobility is further expressed in the flexible patterns of behavior that young rural women display when trying to fulfill their own “modern” aspirations along with their family obligations and cultural ideals.
Forests, as physical entities, have received considerable scholarly attention in political studies of Asia and beyond. Much less notice has been paid to the significance of forests as symbols that enable commentary on identity, aspirations, and authority. This book challenges common views of the rural countryside as isolated and disconnected from national social debates and politics under an authoritarian regime. It offers a novel understanding of local perspectives under authoritarianism, demonstrating that Lao people make implicit political statements in their commentary on forests and wildlife; and showing that, in addition to being vital material resources, forests (and their natural potency) are linked in the minds of many Lao to the social and political power of the state. The book explores the intertwining of symbolic and material concerns in local debates over conservation and development, the popularity of wildlife consumption, the particular importance of elephants, and forest loss and mismanagement. In doing so, it draws on ethnographic fieldwork around Vientiane, the capital, and Nakai, site of the contentious Nam Theun 2 hydropower project. Nam Theun 2, supported by the World Bank, highlights the local, regional, and global dynamics that influence discussions of forest resources in Laos. Government officials, rural villagers, and foreign consultants all contribute to competing ideas about forests and wildlife. The book advances research on forest politics by rethinking how ideas about nature influence social life.

This book explores the dissonance between the goals of the colonial state and the Buddhist worldview that animated Burmese Buddhism at the turn of the twentieth century. For many Burmese, the discourse was not nation or modernity but sāsana, the life of the Buddha's teachings. Burmese Buddhists interpreted the political and social changes between 1890 and 1920 as signs that the Buddha's sāsana was deteriorating. This fear of decline drove waves of activity and organizing to prevent...
the loss of the Buddha's teachings. Burmese set out to save Buddhism, but achieved much more: they took advantage of the indeterminacy of the moment to challenge the colonial frameworks that were beginning to shape their world. Beginning from an understanding that defining and redefining the boundaries of religion operated as a key technique of colonial power, this book explores how Burmese Buddhists became actively engaged in defining and inflecting religion to shape their colonial situation and forward their own local projects. It intervenes not just in scholarly conversations about religion and colonialism, but in theoretical work in religious studies on the categories of “religion” and “secular.” The book contributes to ongoing studies of colonialism, nation, and identity in Southeast Asian studies by working to denaturalize nationalist histories. It also engages conversations on millennialism and the construction of identity in Buddhist studies by tracing the fluid nature of sāsana as a discourse.

Refiguring Women, Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma
Chie Ikeya

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This book presents the first study of one of the most prevalent and critical topics of public discourse in colonial Burma: the women of the khit kala—“the women of the times”—who burst onto the covers and pages of novels, newspapers, and advertisements in the 1920s. Educated and politicized, earner and consumer, “Burmese” and “Westernized,” the woman of the khit kala embodied the possibilities and challenges of the modern era, as well as the hopes and fears it evoked. This book interrogates what these shifting and competing images of the feminine reveal about the experience of modernity in colonial Burma. It analyzes both the discursive figurations of the modern woman and the choices and actions of actual women who unsettled existing norms and contributed to making the woman of the khit kala the privileged idiom for debating colonialism, modernization, and nationalism. This book challenges the reigning nationalist and anticolonial historical narratives of a conceptually and institutionally monolithic colonial modernity that made inevitable the rise of ethnonationalism and xenophobia in Burma. It demonstrates the irreducible heterogeneity of the colonial encounter and draws attention to the conjoined development of cosmopolitanism and nationalism. The book illuminates the important roles that Burmese men and women played as cultural brokers and agents of modernity. It shows how their complex engagements with social reform, feminism,
anticolonialism, media, and consumerism rearticulated the boundaries of belonging and foreignness in religious, racial, and ethnic terms.

Sounding Out Heritage
Lauren Meeker

This book explores the cultural politics that have shaped the recent history and practice of a unique style of folk song that originated in Bắc Ninh province, northern Vietnam. The book delves into the history of quan họ, showing the changes it has undergone over the last sixty years as it moved from village practice onto the professional stage. The book presents a vivid and historically contextualized picture of the quan họ “soundscape.” Village practitioners, ordinary people who love to sing quan họ, must now negotiate increased attention from those outside the village and their own designation as “living treasures.” Professional singers, with their different performance styles and representational practices, have been incorporated into the quan họ soundscape in an effort to highlight and popularize the culture of Bắc Ninh province in the national context. With its focus on the politics of rescuing, preserving, and performing folk music, the book shows how a tradition can become a self-conscious heritage and national icon. In 2009, Quan Họ Bắc Ninh Folk Songs was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Defining and reframing quan họ as cultural heritage has further complicated the relationship between village and professional quan họ and raises crucial issues about who has the authority to speak for quan họ in the international context. The book offers an in-depth account of the impact of cultural politics on the lives and practices of quan họ folk singers in Vietnam and shows compellingly how a tradition can mean many things to many people.

Caged in on the Outside
Gregory M. Simon

The moral practices and concepts that circulate in Minangkabau society in West Sumatra, Indonesia articulate and help manage tensions between conflicting values and conflicting experiences of selfhood, particularly the tension between social integration and individual
autonomy. The book examines these tensions ethnographically in multiple arenas: the structure of the city of Bukittinggi and its economic life, the nature of Minangkabau ethnic identity, the etiquette of everyday interactions, conceptions of the self and its boundaries, hidden spaces of personal identity, and engagements with Islamic rituals and moral conceptions. Applying the lessons of the Minangkabau case more broadly to debates on moral life and subjectivity makes the case that a deep understanding of moral conceptions and practices, including those of Islam, can never be reached simply by delineating their abstract logics or outlining the public messages they send. Instead, we must examine the subtle, sometimes intentionally obscured meanings these conceptions and practices have for the people who live them. Whether in the context of suffering or flourishing, moral subjectivity always confronts the challenge of responding to and managing the enduring tensions of human selves, which necessarily entail bodily, relational, and reflective dimensions.

Ghosts of the New City
Andrew Alan Johnson

Chiang Mai (literally, “new city”) suffered badly in the 1997 Asian financial crisis as the Northern Thai real estate bubble collapsed along with the Thai baht, crushing dreams of a renaissance of Northern prosperity. Years later, the architectural ruins of the excesses of the 1990s still stain the skyline, signs of a trauma, brought back vividly by the political crisis of 2006, that haunts efforts to remake the city. For many Chiang Mai residents, new developments harbor the seeds of the crash, manifest in anxious stories of ghosts and criminals who conceal themselves behind the city’s progressive veneer. Hopes for rebirth and fears of decline have their roots in Thai conceptions of progress, which draw from Buddhist and animist ideas of urbanity and sacrality. Cities, in this cosmology, were centers where the charismatic power of kings and animist spirits were grounded; these entities assured progress by imbuing the space with sacred power that would avert disaster. Via revisiting Clifford Geertz’s “theater state,” I argue that new ideas of urban revitalization and questions about history’s forward trajectory reflect anxieties within older, animist and Buddhist ideas of sacred space and centralized power rooted in older, animist and Buddhist models.
Forging Islamic Power and Place
Francis R. Bradley

Following a defeat by Siam in 1786, the Patani community experienced a period of displacement that resulted in many resettling elsewhere in the Malay world and Mecca. This marked the denouement for the old order of orangkaya in the region and the rise of a new moral order. Led by Daud bin Abd Allah al-Fatani, the ulama employed a knowledge network to spread handwritten texts bearing new ideas on the place of Islam in the community. Throughout the nineteenth century, the ulama established a zone of pondok schools across what is now southern Thailand and northern Malaysia where they set in motion an Islamic textual turn. Islamic leaders came to harness the symbolic power imbued in their texts and teachings to transform the relationship between the populace, Islam, and established authority. Thus when the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 ultimately established the border between the modern states of Malaysia and Thailand, it cut directly through an organic cultural zone that had emerged over the previous century.

The Lost Territories
Shane Strate

The Lost Territories explores the legacy of defeat and victimhood in the production of Thai historiography and the formation of national identity. Unlike Royal-Nationalist narratives, which celebrate the kingdom’s eternal independence, National Humiliation historiography presents Thailand’s past as a series of emasculating encounters with the West. The 1893 Franco-Siamese forms the cornerstone of National Humiliation discourse since it resulted in the amputation of the lost territories from the nation-body. Throughout the twentieth century, maps of the lost territories have instilled each new generation with a sense of shame owing to the country’s decline from regional power to European client state. National Humiliation narratives have generated suspicion and hostility towards neighboring countries by misinforming the Thai public regarding past border conflicts. The military has used related imagery to maintain a central role in politics while pursuing an expansionist foreign policy agenda. National Humiliation continues to be exploited by state
and civic authorities to prey on anxieties regarding Thai independence and to promote an exclusive vision of national unity.

**Embodied Nation**

Simon Creak

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Item type: book

This book examines how sport and ideas of physicality have shaped the politics and culture of modern Laos. Viewing the country's extraordinary transitions—from French colonialism to royalist nationalism to revolutionary socialism to the modern development state—through the lens of physical culture, the book illuminates a nation that has no reputation in sport and is typically viewed, even from within, as a country of cheerful but lazy people. It argues that sport and related physical practices—including physical education, gymnastics, and military training—have shaped a national consciousness by locating it in everyday experience. These practices are popular, participatory, performative, and, above all, physical in character and embody ideas and ideologies in a symbolic and experiential way. The book travels through more than a century of Lao history, from a nineteenth-century game of tikhi—an indigenous game resembling field hockey—to the country's unprecedented outpouring of nationalist sentiment when hosting the 2009 Southeast Asian Games. Despite increasing female participation since the early twentieth century, the book demonstrates the major role that sport and physical culture have played in forming hegemonic masculinities in Laos. Even with limited national sporting success—Laos has never won an Olympic medal—the healthy, toned, and muscular form has come to symbolize material development and prosperity. The book outlines the complex ways in which these motifs, through sport and physical culture, articulate with state power.

**Luc Xì**

Vu Trong Phung

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What does it mean when a city of 180,000 people has more than 5,000 women working as prostitutes? This question frames Vũ Trọng Phụng's 1937 classic reportage Luc Xì. In the late 1930s, Hanoi had a burgeoning commercial sex industry that involved thousands of people and hundreds
of businesses. It was the center of the city's nightlife and the source of suffering, violence, exploitation, and a venereal disease epidemic. For Phụng, a popular writer and intellectual, it also raised disturbing questions about the state of Vietnamese society and culture and whether his country really was “progressing” under French colonial rule. This book provides historical background on colonialism, prostitution, and venereal disease in Vietnam and discusses reportage as a literary genre, political tool, and historical source. A fully annotated translation of Lục Xì follows, in which Phụng takes readers into the heart of colonial Hanoi's sex industry. Drawing from his interviews with doctors, officials, and prostitutes and the writings of French doctors on prostitution and venereal disease, Phụng provides a rare, firsthand look at the damage caused by the commercial sex industry. His sympathetic portrayal of the Vietnamese underclass is considered one of the most accurate, but he also provides one of the most acerbic, humorous, and critical views of the changes wrought by colonialism in Southeast Asia.

Siam's New Detectives
Samson W. Lim

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Siam’s New Detectives: Visualizing Crime and Conspiracy in Modern Thailand is an analytical history of the visual tools—fingerprints, maps, diagrams, and photographs—employed by the Thai police when investigating crime. It covers the period between the late nineteenth century and the end of the Cold War, providing for the first time in English an overview of the development of modern police practices in Thailand. Based on a diverse set of primary sources including police reports, detective training manuals, trial records, newspaper stories, memoirs, archival documents, and hard-to-find crime fiction, the book makes two related arguments. First, the factuality of the visual evidence used in the criminal justice system stems as much from formal rules, such as proper lighting in a crime scene photo and standardized markings on maps, as the reality of the things being represented. Second, some images, once created, function as diagrams, helping the police produce truths about the criminal past. This generative power makes images useful as investigative aids. It also means understanding how modern legal systems operate requires an examination of the visual culture of the law, particularly the aesthetic rules that govern the generation and use of visual evidence.