Southeast Asia: an additional bibliographical tool


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I is spite of the abundance of printed bibliographies and increasing relian-
ces on internet-based tools and infor-
mation, this bibliography can usefully
support general and introductory read-
ing on Southeast Asia in the social sci-
cenes. There are plenty of bibliographies
that cater for the needs of researchers
on Southeast Asia. Kemp’s relatively
recent (1998) Bibliographies of South-
east Asia published by KITLV lists over
5,360 bibliographies of which 433 refer
to the region as a whole. The remain-
cing close to 1,000 entries refer to more
specialised subject or geographical bi-
lographies. The magnificent indices
of Kemp's publication greatly facilitate
efforts to find specialised bibliographies
on the region, or any of its parts.
Contrary to what its title seems to indi-
cate, Antweiler’s (2004) contribution, Southeast Asia – A Bibliography on Socie-
ties and Culture, is not a comprehensive
reference bibliography of publications
 treating individual societies and cul-
tures within Southeast Asia. His aim is
rather to provide an ‘orientation about
general books on the whole region as
well as on books about specific topics
which are trans-nationally relevant with-
in Southeast Asia’ (Antweiler 2004: 3).
Perceiving the lack of short, general and
interdisciplinary bibliographies featur-
ing publications on Southeast Asia from
a general (regional) or disciplinary point
of view, Antweiler has collected about
900 references. These titles are pre-
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sented in alphabetical order by author
name, without annotations. However,
deviating from the general rule of a
regional focus, some works on specific
topics or ethnic groups are included if
they are of ‘exemplary relevance’ or of
‘general importance for the region’. In
practical terms, this refers to studies
that have greatly influenced Southeast
Asian research and can now be consid-
ered classics, such as Freeman’s (1986)
study on ‘Iban Agriculture’. Evidently,
there is a lot of discretion at work here
regarding what one would consider a
work of exemplary relevance.
Coming with no indices, this book would
be difficult to use if it did not include
a CD-ROM with all its contents on a
word file. This allowed me to perform
a number of searches on the CD-ROM
to find out more about the potential uses
of the bibliography. A simple full-text
search on the term ‘history’ for exam-
ple produced around 40 titles, most of
which would be of genuine interest to
anybody intent to read up on Southeast
Asian history. As Antweiler indicates
in the preface, the references selected
were for the most part relatively
recent publications (post 1980s).

The English language dominates, but some
German and French publications are
also included.
Looking for broad introductory mate-
rial on forest issues in the region, I
obtained 15 references from a search on
‘forest’, covering various disciplines,
also a good start to get a first
overview of the subject. A final
example: A search on ‘agriculture’
yielded nine hits, relatively low given
the long importance of the subject to
Southeast Asian studies. This indicates
that the compilation is also a function
of the research interests of the author,
and that subjects of similar importance
may have received differential treat-
ment. In addition, search terms need
to be quite generic to produce useful
results. Also, a certain familiarity with
research on Southeast Asia is required
to assess the value of a search result
as the author provides us with no fur-
ther information or annotations on the
entries selected.
Thus, selectivity and interdisciplinary
can be considered as the two merits of
Antweiler’s compilation. Drawing from
a narrow sample focusing on the region
as a whole, search results will tend to be
small and focused. The user is spared
long lists of hits that he or she would
then have to narrow down further.

The range of disciplines covered – from
anthropology, political science, history,
geography to economics – may provide
useful leads into any of the disciplines
of this vast field of study.

A shortcoming is the lack of a review
section introducing the major discipli-
ary traditions and research areas rep-
resented in this collection which would
expand on the remarks on selection cri-
teria in the introduction.

In sum, this book – or rather the accom-
panying CD-ROM – can be used to iden-
tify general and comparative studies on
Southeast Asia. Thus, it may be useful
for those who want to find material for
introductory courses on Southeast Asia,
but also for researchers of specialized
topics within the region who are try-
ing to identify studies with a broader
or more comparative view.

References

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China & Iran: Ancient Partners in a Post-Imperial World

By Jon W. Garver

In recent years, Iran’s nuclear aspirations have dominated its relations with the US and Europe. China stands as Iran’s staunchest ally on the UN security Council, as well as its primary source of economic stability. Constraints on China’s relations with the West, as well as its participation in regional and international affairs, continues to shape its foreign policy.

This interesting and timely book by Garver, the first of its kind, charts the evolution of Sino-Iranian relations through several phases, including Iran under the shah, the 1979 revolu-
tion, and the Iran-Iraq war. China and Iran also explores the contentious debates over Iran’s nuclear programmes and China’s role in assisting these programmes and supporting Iran’s efforts to modernise its military and oil industry infra-
structure.

Modern Japanese Cuisine: Food, Power and National Identity

by Katarzyna J. Cwiertka

Over the last decade the popularity of Japanese food in the West has increased immeasurably, contributing to the contin-
uing diversification of Western eating habits; but Japanese
cuisine itself has evolved significantly since pre-modern times. This book explores the origins of Japanese cuisine as we know it today, investigating the transformations and developments food culture in Japan has undergone since the late 19th century.

Among the key factors in the shift in Japanese eating habits were the dietary effects of imperialism, reforms in military and catering and home cooking, wartime food management and the rise of urban gastronomy. Japan’s patchwork of diverse regional cuisines became homogenised over time and was replaced by a set of foods and practices with which the major-
ity of Japanese today readily identify. This book demon-
strates that Japanese cuisine as it is currently understood and valued, in spite of certain inevitable historical influences, is primarily a modern invention conceived in the midst of the turbulent events of the late 19th and the 20th centuries.

Katarzyna J. Cwiertka is a recognised expert on the subject of Japanese cuisine and its modern history, and this book is a result of more than a decade of research. It also includes a section on the spread of Japanese food and restaurants in Western countries. Modern Japanese Cuisine will be of interest to the general reader interested in Japanese culture and soci-
ety, as well as to a more specialised audience, such as scholars of Japan, anthropologists and food historians.

The Urban Generation: Chinese cinema and society at the turn of the 21st century

Edited by Zhang Zhen

Since the early 1990s, while mainland China’s state-owned movie studios have struggled with financial and ideological constraints, an exciting alternative cinema has developed. Dubbed the “Urban Generation,” this new cinema is driven by young filmmakers who emerged in the shadow of the events at Tiananmen Square in 1989. What unites diverse directors under the “Urban Generation” rubric is their creative engag-
ment with the wrenching economic and social transformations underway in China. Urban generation filmmakers are van-
guard interpreters of the confusion and anxiety triggered by the massive urbanisation of contemporary China. This collection brings together some of the most recent original research on this emerging cinema and its relationship to Chinese society.

The contributors analyse the historical and social conditions that gave rise to the Urban Generation, its aesthetic innova-
tion, and its ambivalent relationship to China’s mainstream film industry and the international film market. Focusing attention on the Urban Generation’s sense of social urgency, its documentary impulses, and its representations of gender and sexuality, the contributors highlight the characters who populate this new urban cinema – ordinary and marginal-
ized city dwellers including aimless beings, petty thieves, prostitutes, postal workers, taxi drivers, migrant workers – and the fact that these “floating urban subjects” are often portrayed by non-professional actors. Some essays concen-
trate on specific films (such as Shuuer and Safari River) or filmmakers (including Liu Zhangke and Zhang Yuan), while others survey broader trends. Together the thirteen essays in this collection give a multifaceted account of a significant, ongoing cinematic and cultural phenomenon.