

ULASAN BUKU/BOOK REVIEWS

The Knowledge-Creating Company: How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation by Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi, Oxford University Press, 1995, 284 pp.

What is the secret of the Japanese companies' success and leadership especially in automotive and electronics industries? According to two leading business professors at Hitotsubashi University, Professors Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi, the secret is the companies' ability to create new knowledge and use it to produce successful products, technologies, and systems. Based on research conducted since the 1980s on Japanese managers and corporations, the authors contend that survival and success of companies in uncertain business environments may depend on how well they continuously create new knowledge, disseminate it widely throughout the organisation, and embody it quickly in new technologies, products and systems. To do so, Nonaka and Takeuchi espouse a new theory on organizational knowledge creation as practiced by the Japanese which, they claim, is applicable universally. With their theory soundly grounded in epistemology, organizational theory, and the theory of innovation, Nonaka and Takeuchi challenged past and current Western-based practices and perceptions of knowledge, knowledge creation, organizational culture and structure. The authors provided excellent case studies of Japanese and American companies to demonstrate their theory in practice. They went a step further and proposed a universal management model on how a company should be managed that can facilitate organizational knowledge creation based on the convergence of Japanese and Western management practices.

This book was written with three goals in mind, namely (1) to construct a new theory of organizational knowledge creation; (2) to provide a new explanation of why certain Japanese companies have been successful at continuous innovation; and (3) to develop a universal management model that integrates management practices found in Japan and the West. Likened to a journey, the authors' discussions of the first goal covered a wide territory reviewing classical and contemporary thoughts on philosophy, management, and economics as they relate to epistemology or the theory of knowledge. To answer the question "What is knowledge?", Nonaka and Takeuchi began their longitudinal critical review of Western philosophers ranging from the ancient Greek period, namely Plato (rationalism) versus Aristotle (empiricism) to intermediate philosophers, Descartes (Continental Rationalism) and Locke

(British Empiricism). The authors followed the development of epistemology in the eighteenth-century as synthesized by Kant, Hegel, and Marx, and further into the twentieth-century with Husserl (phenomenology), Heidegger, Sartre, James (pragmatism) and Dewey to name a few. Though lesser known and systematically documented, the Japanese intellectual tradition was reviewed to reveal the Japanese approach to knowledge which integrates the teaching of Buddhism, Confucianism and major Western philosophical thoughts. As such, the authors explained the Japanese intellectual tradition of oneness of humanity and nature, oneness of body and mind, and oneness of self and other. Nonaka and Takeuchi's review also included classical contemporary economic and management theories as they relate to knowledge, spanning from Alfred Marshall (neoclassical economics) to Peter Senge (organizational learning). Ending their review with a discussion of the implications of Drucker's "the knowledge society" and "resource based approach", the stage was set to propose a new theory of organizational knowledge creation to assist organizations in dealing with and adapting to uncertain environments.

Nonaka and Takeuchi's theoretical framework began with a short discussion on the similarities and differences between knowledge and information. The authors defined knowledge as a dynamic human process of justifying personal belief toward the "truth". Knowledge creation is pegged on two dimensions, namely epistemological and ontological. Nonaka and Takeuchi argued that knowledge is created only by individuals. Whereas organizations cannot create knowledge, they support creative individuals by providing the contexts of knowledge creation as well as the communities of interaction. Therefore, on the ontological dimension, the authors suggest knowledge level ranging from individual, group, organization, and inter-organisation. On the epistemological dimension, Polanyi's distinction between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge was used. The interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge is known as knowledge conversion which is a social process between individuals and not confined within an individual.

The authors postulate four different modes of knowledge conversion which are discussed from various perspective of organisational theory. Socialization is the conversion of tacit knowledge to tacit knowledge where members of a team share mental models facilitated by fields of interaction. It is rooted in the theories of group processes and organizational culture. Externalization refers to the meaningful dialogues between individuals using metaphors and analogies as they articulate tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Combination, rooted in information processing, is the process of systemizing concepts into a knowledge system. As such, the combining or networking of

different bodies of explicit knowledge is evident when individuals combine existing data with data from outside the organization. Internalization refers to process of embodying explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge (learning by doing). It is related to organisational learning. Organizational knowledge creation is a continuous and dynamic interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge. Knowledge is shaped by shifts between the four modes and induced by several triggers and the content of the knowledge created can vary with the mode. These contents interact with each other in the spiral of knowledge creation on the epistemological dimension. The spiral interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge becomes larger as it moves up the ontological dimension and involves more communities of interaction across sectional, departmental, divisional, and organizational boundaries. The core of the organizational knowledge creation process takes place at the group level, and the organization provides necessary enabling conditions such as contexts or devices that facilitate group activities as well as the creation and accumulation of knowledge at the individual level. Five conditions identified by Nonaka and Takeuchi required at the organizational level to promote the knowledge spiral are intention, autonomy, fluctuation, creative chaos, redundancy and requisite variety.

The key to the theory is understanding the nature of the knowledge creation process beyond the dichotomies and synthesis on which it was based.

To accomplish their second goal and to demonstrate the applications of their theory, the authors detailed how knowledge creation took place at Matsushita Electric Industrial Co., Ltd. The case illustrated the development of a bread-making appliance "Home Bakery" and the authors also analyzed the continuous process of knowledge creation at the corporate level of Matsushita. What was evident from the case study is that the process of organizational knowledge creation is non-linear and interactive. The process involves five phases--sharing of tacit knowledge, concept creation, concept justification, archetype building, and cross levelling of knowledge--and moves cyclically and across levels. The first four phases move horizontally and the fifth moves vertically across layers of activities and different organizational levels.

For the new theory of organizational knowledge creation to be adopted and flourish, a shift from the present managerial practices of traditional top-down and bottom-up management is necessary. Both are inadequate in that top-down is suited only for dealing with explicit knowledge (combination and internalization) while bottom-up facilitates tacit knowledge (socialization and externalization), but not both. Hence, based on their studies of several Japanese companies, Nonaka and Takeuchi propose a third way to manage

knowledge creation. Called "middle-up-down", this model suggests knowledge is created by middle managers, who are often leaders of a team or task force, through a spiral conversion process involving both the top and the front-line employees. Middle management is at the center of knowledge management at the intersection of vertical and horizontal flows of information. This contradicts Western management thinkers who espoused the phasing out of middle managers. The middle-up-down approach suggest that top management's role is to create a grand theory, while middle management tries to create a mid-range theory that it can test empirically within the company with the help of front-line employees. The authors further provide three case studies for each management model citing the top-down approach at GE, bottom-up at 3M, and the new approach as practiced in Canon.

The managerial model must be complemented with a change in the organisational structure. Arguing that the traditional organizational structures (bureaucracy and task force) are inappropriate to facilitate organizational knowledge creation, the authors suggest a new organisational structure called hypertext organisation that synthesizes the efficiency of a bureaucracy and the flexibility of a task-force organization. A computer analogy was used to describe the structure in that a hypertext consists of multiple layers of texts and one can have access to different text layers at any one time on the screen. The hypertext organization is made up of interconnected layers or contexts that coexist within the same organization: the business system, the project team, and the knowledge base. Hypertext structure differs from matrix structure in which an individual is at only one level or context at any time. The advantage of this new structure is that the members are able to shift contexts, moving easily in and out of one context into another. The authors cited Kao as being "in transition" from matrix to hypertext and Sharp as the "more perfected" form of hypertext structure. The analogy becomes clearer when the authors describe hypertext organizations as operating on the Windows system while other organizations are still using the static MS-DOS. The authors proceeded to give examples of global knowledge creation and cited the cases of Nissan Primera and Shin Caterpillar Mitsubishi's REGA as excellent examples of successful knowledge creation that transcends socio-cultural, political, and organizational boundaries.

The discussions leading to the third goal--to create a universal management model-- give one an impression that in order for organizations to fully practice and benefit from organizational knowledge creation, a total paradigm shift is needed with the capstone being the synthesis of Japanese and Western approaches to management. Each is unique and facilitates the conversion of

tacit and explicit knowledge at the individual (Western) and group (Japan) levels, but their combined merits synergically facilitate organisational knowledge creation. Nonaka and Takeuchi presented seven guidelines a practitioner can adopt to implement an organizational knowledge-creation program within a company: (1) create a knowledge vision; (2) develop a knowledge crew; (3) build a high-density field of interaction at the front line; (4) piggy-back on the new-product development process; (5) adopt middle-up-down management; (6) switch to hypertext organization, and (7) construct a knowledge network with the outside world. The authors further call for "hypertransformation" so that multiple transformations occur in multiple dimensions as a dynamic, interactive, and simultaneous process. They assert that companies that can orchestrate a hypertransformation and do it quickly will gain sustainable competitive advantage.

The book, well written and logically documented, allows the reader to absorb what the authors would like to espouse by referring to the example or case studies cited. Local Malaysian practitioners dealing with transforming themselves as well as local employees may find it easier to relate to Nonaka and Takeuchi's theory in that it draws on collective reflection, something that is supposedly characteristic of our workforce but not widely practiced. The synthesized Japanese-Western managerial practices take into account the differences that exist and the willingness to learn from the other side. We have to make modifications in applying the theory as well as the synergistic East-West approach to suit the local socio-cultural context. The case studies were helpful in that they provided insights into how the Japanese employees went about creating knowledge.

After reading this book, one gets the feeling that it could be just another "management fad", only this time it came out of Japan with weird concepts such as middle-up-down management, hypertext structure, and hypertransformation. However, like several other so-called contemporary "management fads"--i.e. excellence, knowledge society, learning organisation, etc.--businesses are at risk of being left out in the fast-changing global environment where "the only certainty is uncertainty." Organizational knowledge creation, like it or not, is the key to survival for corporations and businesses competing in the global environment, as well as the local Malaysian business scene. A well argued blend of theoretical and practical approaches with soundly grounded theory of organisational knowledge creation, Nonaka and Takeuchi's book is likely to become a classic in the literature for organisational knowledge and innovation.

For practitioners, the book serves as a guide for survival into the future. To academicians, especially in the field of organizational theory and design, Nonaka and Takeuchi's book provides yet another way of looking at how organizations can prepare future managers for structures and practices yet to come.

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The Fall of Imperial Britain in South-East Asia by Nicholas Tarling, Oxford University Press, 1993, 229 pp.

This book is a broad survey of the fall of British imperialism in Southeast Asia and the emergence of new nation states after World War II. The way Tarling defines empire and imperialism has a direct bearing on his conclusions. Tarling rejects the view that Britain's power rested in territorial possessions which he identifies with imperialism. The origins of British imperialism in the late eighteenth century, in Tarling's view, had more to do with the preservation of British economic interests than "imperial purpose" or "territorial control" [p. 12]. Although it soon became necessary to exert power in order to secure its commercial interests, Britain conceived its policy in terms of a flexible framework of "a world of sovereign states" which "would provide security, stability, and economic opportunity" [p. 15]. Britain used its power "in ways that largely accorded with the desire to see such a framework of relationships emerge. In Europe it sought a concert of powers; outside it sought to bring about new forms of collaboration rather than to take over direct control" [p. 16]. Collaboration of indigenous elites was an essential feature of this framework and their failure or inability to do so "may help to lead to their displacement, to be followed, it might be, by the assumption of imperial control... The imperial phase may be no more than a phase..." [p. 17]. Tarling admits that British colonial policy changed from time to time, sometimes emphasizing Britain's economic interests and sometimes the need to protect its interests by territorial acquisition. But he contends that imperialism defined as territorial acquisition had a limited appeal in Britain itself [p. 62]. Where territorial control was assumed, it was less a manifestation of imperialism and "may rather be seen as a response to the rivalry of other powers, and the pressure exerted by economic and political change on the stability of the

indigenous states"[p. 63]. In a way reminiscent of a Wagnarian *leitmotiv*, Tarling reiterates his perception of British imperialism as a benign phenomenon governed by liberal economic values and implemented in order to promote a world system of nation states harmoniously engaged in free trade [pp. 55-56, 61, 64-65 and 140]. Tarling obviously ascribes colonial conquistadors with a degree of far-sightedness, self-denial and benevolence they did not really possess. This narrow definition of British imperialism is a major drawback and gives the impression that this book is an apologia for British imperialism rather than a serious effort to examine its decline and fall.

Given Tarling's propensity to view British imperialism as benign in nature, it is not surprising that he does not emphasize its ascendancy. The expansion of British imperialism in the region is downplayed. In Tarling's view, Britain's increasing involvement in the region in the nineteenth century was not due to its growing economic interests but the rivalry of other Western powers "reflected in the disintegration of Asian and African states"[69]. This is essentially a view held by colonial officials to justify their territorial acquisitions. Thus, explaining British intervention in Malaya in which economic and commercial pressures played a major role, Tarling finds the "fear of foreign intervention along the Straits of Malacca was decisive in producing a change of policy"[71]. There is no need to rehearse the arguments on this matter which are familiar to most readers. Suffice it to say that, behind the thin veil of the alleged fear of foreign intervention, it was the rapidly growing concerns of British economic interests and Malaya's potential value as a land of resources that really determined the so-called intervention. And it is misleading to depict intervention as "a form of protection"[p. 72], ignoring the economic exploitation and restriction of freedom of indigenous people in the so-called protected areas.

Britain's colonial policy in Vietnam, Borneo, Thailand and the Philippines may seem to justify Tarling's view of Britain's lack of lust for territorial acquisition for its own sake or to support its expanding economic interests. The way Tarling explains how Britain adapted its policy in the region during the 1870-1914 period gives the impression that, together with other European powers, Britain was moulding its great framework of nation states. But in reality, Britain had no choice but to allow other European powers to operate alongside itself as long as they remained within the accepted boundaries of spheres of influence. Tarling himself seems to agree with such a view [p. 89], but argues that Britain pursued its old policy of relying on co-operation and manipulation of local elites to preserve its authority within the territories it held, while other colonial powers resorted to different methods. This is a complacent view, looking at the situation from Britain's eyes without due

allowance to the factors affecting the momentum for political change in the colonies themselves.

Tarling's discourse of Britain's position during the inter-war years is far from satisfactory. For instance, Tarling says that Britain did not introduce political reforms in its colonial possessions because the need to do so was not urgent and would have raised innumerable difficulties exposing the weakness of the British [p. 107]. This may sound like a realistic assessment of the situation if one is inclined to depict the British colonial policy as a paragon of pragmatism and benevolence. Tarling himself, however, admits that economic interests were a major consideration against introducing political reforms which would have weakened Britain's hold of colonial possessions such as Malaya. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, where the British had less room to impose their 'world-view', they felt much less need for change, Tarling correctly surmises [pp. 108-110].

Tarling's account of the post-1930 period is merely a survey of changing political vicissitudes in the Asia-Pacific region caused by the rapid rise of Communism in China, Japanese aggression and the widespread economic repercussions of the Great Depression. There is very little discussion on British response to those changes. The British, Tarling says, were justified in their attitude that it was the threats from within rather than without which could weaken the colonial structures, for they endured until the Japanese invasion [p. 114]. Tarling is correct when he says that for British policy in Burma, and *mutatis mutandis* elsewhere in Southeast Asia, "the preservation of the international framework came first. Creating loyal and integrated communities was far behind because it was a difficult if not impossible task the benefits of which were at best long-term" [p. 126]. And yet, the British policy failed to reconcile various local forces with its broad political agenda for the colonies, which shows its inflexibility despite rapid political development in colonies.

It is difficult to agree with Tarling that the British altered their policy in the wake of WW II [pp. 130-131]. He argues that, perhaps with the exception of the United States of America, colonial powers were reluctant to adapt their policies to the changed circumstances and, although British plans for post-war era failed in the end, they were plans which involved high principles. The return to Southeast was, says Tarling, "a mission, a task, a job" for the British. This is a dubious claim given that only a small fraction of colonial officials held such views and that the politicians who ultimately made decisions were more concerned about economic considerations than lofty ideals. Tarling ascribes too much generosity and foresight to the British when he says that "in

the event the fact that their basic aim was stability made it easier for the British to drop their plans when they proved impractical than for the French or the Dutch to alter their objectives when they proved unattainable" [p. 158]. The British had no choice but accept the situation on the ground level, as proved by the way the British handled the situation in Burma and Malaya [pp. 159-165]. It is difficult to agree with Tarling's proposition that the British had a new plan for post-war era, for there is little new in the alleged new plan aimed at creating "a new kind of British empire, in which trusteeship gave way to partnership, and which, at least in the longer term, would consist of dominions expected to behave in the autonomous but local way the settler dominions had behaved" [p. 157]. Tarling himself admits this when he says that "to meet the challenges of the future in South-East Asia, the British had new plans, albeit they were in keeping with old principles" [p. 167].

Britain's plans for the post-war era were, as Tarling says, unrealistic. Britain had insufficient resources to implement them and the plans were at odds with the nationalists who had emerged as new leaders. And Britain was much less in a position to influence other colonial powers to forge a regional framework [pp. 170-171]. One is not so convinced by Tarling's view that Britain's plans, such as they were, "not merely an attempt to give Britain a place in the world, but also an attempt to deal with what was later called the 'Third' or 'Developing' world by providing there an 'order' that would 'succeed' the 'imperial' one" [pp. 172-173]. Tarling, once again, seems to find a degree of foresight and statesmanship in British policies on the basis of slender evidence.

Tarling's views on British imperialism in Southeast Asia are conservative and often invoke comparison with those held by colonial officials. It is perhaps meaningless to quibble about the inadequacy of evidence supporting contentious views in a general survey like this based on secondary works. To present Britain's imperialism as a benign phenomenon undertaken for the benefit of colonial countries is, however, misconstrued and at odds with the historical reality in its totality of experience. One should perhaps respect Professor Tarling's honesty for stating his views which he may well know are incongruent with those of other historians.

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Cosmos and Society in Oceania, Daniel De Coppet and Andre Iteanu (eds.), Oxford, Washington, D.C., Berg Publishers, 1995.

The laws which govern the spiritual and societal orders have always been an alluring subject for anthropologists in the field. In considerations of a philosophical and epistemological nature, the western mind has centered on the theme of supposed separateness of cosmos and society. Yet a number of ethnographies have questioned the existence of supreme and subordinate realms in the ideologies of non-western, small sized communities. For the contributors to the above publication, the cosmologies of the islanders of the Pacific seem to offer a dazzling array of configurations of sacredness intermingled with worldliness as if ocean waters diluted an assumed harshness of material and spiritual differentiations. The descriptions offered in this collection, despite a diversity in approaches and foci, demonstrate that the cosmos of the Islanders is holistically apprehended and therefore made of a different "spiritual material" than that presumed in Christian values with their underlying dichotomy of the higher spiritual and the lower mundane.

As the reader's mind travels through the essays, the underlying perspectives used in the multifaceted studies become increasingly perplexing. Concepts, idiomatic examples, symbolic analogies, switching of different levels of analyses, are manipulated to indicate the highly volatile interplay between the sacred and the profane.

Thus we find, at the conceptual level, a number of terms applied to the varieties of differentiation/non-differentiation between godly and human forces. Gell, in his beautifully wrought account of Polynesian twin goddess sculptures and the art of tattooing, mentions provisional separateness and jointness or symbolic closure and multiplications as explanatory principles. In Fiji the complex interrelationship between gods, chiefs and ordinary human beings is conceptually viewed by Toren as one in which hierarchical power imbued with *mana* is constantly attenuated by countervailing forces of equality. The resulting picture is one of a dynamic interplay between articulation and blending of the cosmos versus wordly influences. While discussing illness and its interpretation among the Gnau of New Guinea, Lewis describes in a realistic manner the negotiations with ideology and the multiple explanations which allude to shifting ideas concerning inflictions of a cosmic nature. Others like Josephides and De Coppet phrase the socio-cosmic relationships in terms of non-coherence, non-opposition or coalescence. Cosmological authentication is another idea used by Weiner to show how the sacred cloth of

women performs a role in exchange relationships in which female reproductive power dissipates while at the same time making way for political influence.

The ancestral realms are a major concern for Monnerie, Iteanu and Hirsch, around which the phenomenon of subordination and dominance is redefined as one of complementarity, alternation, coexistence, confluence and recreation of unification via pathways of ritual.

Besides the richness in interpretative schemes contained in this volume a wide-range of focal study areas have been covered; of art, carnal desire, initiation, gender relations, myths, role of peacemaker and killer, sibling rivalry. In her analysis of the process of remembering, Munn offers a valuable perspective which underlies the symbolic construction of memory during funeral songs among the Kaluli of New Guinea. She demonstrates the spatial-temporal intermingling of past and present in which the absence of the supernatural (the dead souls) is experienced as co-presence, while the pervasive present is kept at bay.

For any social scientist not well-grounded in symbolic anthropology, this publication might be considered a tough exercise in comprehending the highly abstracted levels of meaning exhibited in the essays. Graduate students with an interest in exploring the intricate symbolic worlds of island and highland societies of the Pacific will however benefit greatly from the painstaking research efforts found in this book. Many a student will be rewarded by the rich materials presented and would eventually want to know more about the typical processes of encompassment and holism. The dimension of change in such processes due to foreign intrusions has, however, not been a major concern of the researchers in this collection. Except for Toren's discussion of the "fitting in" of the Christian god in Fijian cosmology and De Coppet's reference to the use of money (not shells), no examples can be traced of how modern ideas and/or their material manifestations have modified the fascinating interweaving of the cosmic and the social in Oceania.

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Contemporary Television - Eastern Perspectives by David French and Michael Richards (eds.), New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996, 371 pp.

The study of television, at the university level, has been approached in numerous ways. One model adopts a conservative orientation -- a vocational approach that will prepare students for the competitive labour-market. The second model is sceptical of this practical activity component and thrives on an entirely theoretical instruction that aims to enable students to conduct critical debates, analysis and research. A third model suggests that a unique field like communication, specifically television studies, will gain from a theory-media skills alliance that will forge a connexion between theory and practical activity as this will invite students to express understanding about media production in a thoughtful and analytical way, informed by academic debate.

This book edited by Michael Richards and David French is relevant to all three models as it aims to widen the scope of debates pertaining to the role of television in the diverse Asian continent. Clearly in an era where Asian countries are fast experiencing a proliferation of conventional, cable and satellite television, there is an urgent need to understand the dilemmas and disparities arising from the internationalisation of television.

Part I of this book gives an excellent introduction to the main contours of the contemporary debates on television in the global context. The editors rightly link the Asian story of television to the 'media and development' phase in which the mass media are seen as benign and technocratic - as neutral tools that can be used effectively to induce the process of modernisation by presenting Western ideas, Western values and Western technologies to rural populations. This phase is still very much alive in many parts of Asia today.

The editors then turn to develop themes on the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), Media Imperialism, Globalisation and Global Culture, Resistances to Global Culture, Television as a constituent of the public sphere and the Asian Television Market. This section also points to the urgent need for an informed public discussion on the future of television. In this regard, Richards and French stress that universities as centres of research and academic excellence have to play a significant part in supporting public debates on television, particularly at a time when the commercial value of knowledge is gaining prominence and this in turn is being produced, stored and disseminated through television channels. Given these developments, the editors note that there is an urgent need for media education to work towards the establishment of an environment for public communication through an

active understanding of contemporary media practices and its politics of representation. Research and publications are essential to facilitate fruitful debates in the public sphere and this collection of articles is a successful attempt in the acutely under-researched area of critical studies of television in Asia.

Part II and III of this book comprise chapters written by authors in Asian countries and these two sections tell us a lot about the variety and vitality of television in rapid-changing social and political environments. The concerns of commercial television, the limitations of state service, the dependence on international business institutions, the role of broadcasting and national identity, television-civil society relationships: these are some of the themes that are explored.

Readers of *Kajian Malaysia* will, in particular, appreciate two excellent chapters from this section that examine the Malaysian context as the authors have presented interesting materials that study the building of national unity in a situation of ethnic diversity.

In Chapter 8, *'The Impact of the International Marketplace on the Organisation of Malaysian Television'*, Zaharom Nain pays considerable attention to the complex socio-political make-up of the country and to the structure of the Malaysian economy to provide a theoretically sophisticated and historically informed understanding of television in contemporary Malaysian society. He argues that the state is actively collaborating in transferring its functions to the market. He concludes in dismay that the space for genuine liberation is far from visible at the the present time.

Mustafa Kamal Anuar and Wang Lay Kim share similiar sentiments in Chapter 14 as they demonstrate that the role and place of Malaysian television in relation to ethnicity and gender is highly problematic. Using cogent illustrations, they point out that the social responsibility of television to promote ethnic and gender understanding can be distorted especially when the ruling party faces crises of hegemony that will threaten its political survival.

The final part of this book looks at the process of technological convergence and the television and audio-visual sector as core interests of main world economies. The editors examine the GATT process and the challenges that will confront governments across the world in the area of international television.

Curiously, though the editors discuss the role of the university and the importance of communication education in the first part of this book, this critical theme loses its significance in the rest of the book. Even the contributions by the authors in Asia do not particularly focus on this field and for me this remains a major gap in this book. This, perhaps, indicates the confusion and ambiguity surrounding the role of the university, research and communication education in Asia.

In spite of this limitation, the present book, a collection of "Asian Readings" of television realities, offers a rich variety of theoretical, intellectual and historical material that will be most useful to inform communication education, research, publications and general public debate. This book provides valuable resource materials that are essential for television studies, specifically in the Malaysian context where techniques of television production are confused with theories of television; and where critical inquiry is left subservient to technical skills in the curriculum of communication studies. Given this situation, I believe that this is an indispensable book for academics, students, researchers and professionals in mass communication.

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Women and Culture: Between Malay *Adat* and Islam, by Wazir Jahan Karim, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1992, 255 pp.

This is a book that fascinates and frustrates by turns so that at the end the reader is compelled to decide if the fascination outweighs the frustration.

The fascination derives from the obvious importance of the subject, its topicality, and the rich and finely presented fieldwork material deployed in making its principal argument. The frustration is caused by a looseness and inconsistency in the argument, and a sometimes cavalier use of evidence (and what passes for evidence), so that one feels, upon finishing the book, no more enlightened as to the meaning of its central concept of 'bilaterality' as when one began. Indeed 'bilaterality', offered as an explanatory principle here,

frequently takes on the appearance of a mantra suggesting an explanation that is not quite there.

The book deals with the high status of archipelagic Southeast Asian women, specifically Malay women, relative to their counterparts in other societies and cultures, an important subject that has attracted much attention from casual observers as well as scholars. The relatively high status of Malay women is all the more remarkable given that Malay society is overwhelmingly Muslim. For that matter, the relatively high status of women in Malay-Muslim society (including Indonesia) stands in striking contrast to other Muslim societies (particularly in South and West Asia and in Africa) as well as the non-Muslim societies of East and South Asia.

It is therefore tempting to attribute this contrast to the influence of indigenous pre-Islamic culture, summarized in the term *adat*, as is attempted by *Women and Culture*. Its subtitle, "between Malay *adat* and Islam", hints of a tension which, being the crux of the book, is discussed with much engaging material indicating how the force of *adat*, however modified, is maintained in the face of many challenges. But the subtitle finds itself at odds with the conclusion of the book which proffers an integration rather than a persistent tension.

In two largely historical chapters (Chapter 2, "The State in Early Malay History", and Chapter 3, "*Adat* as Ideology and Practice"), *Women and Culture* first establishes the status of Malay women as defined by *adat*, then discusses its complex interplay with Islamic positions on women. Historians are likely to be somewhat uncomfortable with some of the arguments as well as some of the evidence deployed in these two chapters. This reviewer, although not a historian, admits to a considerable unease at the author's use of what are latter-day overtly fictional dramatizations of events culled from the *hikayat* literature. Reconstructions of this nature generally have as their central purpose the promotion of dramatic interest rather than the maintenance of historical fidelity. Despite recently popular post-modernist approaches to history, it is highly doubtful that such dramatizations can serve as the evidential base for historical discourse if the writing of history is not to be dissolved into just another literary genre.

It is perhaps symptomatic of this historiographical carelessness that Chapter 2 contains a map, purportedly of the Malay Archipelago and Melaka in the 15th Century, which has Province Wellesley and Bencoolen marked on it. In fact neither Province Wellesley nor Bencoolen existed prior to the end of the 18th century. Likewise, a footnote illegitimately attributes contemporary

sensitivities to historical facts when it glosses "Kling" as a derogatory term for someone of Tamil origin.

These two chapters lead to a convenient summary of the role of women in the development of Malay nationalism, contemporary Malay politics and political parties (Chapter 4, "Party Politics, Voluntary Movements and the Formal Construction of Power") and culminate in Chapter 5 ("Contemporary *Adat* and Islam in a Malay Village: Gender Relationships and Power").

Chapter 5, the best chapter of the book, has a fine discussion that is based on fieldwork conducted in a village in northern peninsular Malaysia in the 1980s. But it could have shown a keener sensitivity to census categories such as "housewife" or "full-time" or "part-time" employment, and the attribution of persons, whether by themselves or others, to such categories. The attribution of persons to these categories, if not the categories themselves, registers cultural change and, in combination with status perceptions, status change as well. The discussion flows into Chapter 6 ("Islamic Revivalism, Gender and Power") which treats Islamic revivalism and its impact upon Malay women with a rich sense of the tension that pervades contemporary culture in the face of modernization.

However, the concluding chapter apparently dissolves this tension by arguing that Malaysian Islam is distinctive in that it "rests comfortably" on the "bilaterality of *adat*" (226), and that Islamic revivalism should be better read as being anti-Westernization rather than anti-*adat*. Indeed it maintains that *adat* "continues to integrate the public and private and formal and informal distinctions of gender roles" even as it concedes that this happens "despite attempts from leaders of the *dakwa* movement to undo this integrative function" (227).

This is surely a curious formulation, and one more suggestive of tension than of "resting comfortably". The author observes that "while on the macro-level the *dakwa* movement projects itself as an indigenous response to cultural destabilization and an attempt to reconsolidate Malay values ... it seems to oppose culture and *adat* on the level of inter-personal gender relationships" (227). But she promptly dismisses this observation by stating that *dakwa* "has only barely scratched the surface of the indigenous order" (227). She concludes that "it is the massive symbolic appeal of *dakwa* as a strategy of social opposition to Westernization, urbanization and capitalism which is sociologically more important" (227-8), and that "it is the spirit of opposition

which counts, not so much the way in which the system is being opposed" (228).

The author's use of "bilaterality" is ambivalent since the term ultimately appears to mean little more than a social order having rules which blur hierarchies and seek to balance them. So employed, the term indicates something in need of explanation itself rather than an explanatory principle (even if there is more than a hint that the answer is to be found in the original template of a bilateral system of kinship). The author's argument for the central integrative and organizing function of *adat* and "bilaterality" raises an obvious question: "Why hasn't the opposition to cultural destabilization rested on *adat* and culture, or on that integration of *adat* and Islam that is Malaysian Islam in the author's view?"

Indeed, much of the author's main argument and conclusion, and much of the material presented in the substantive chapters, seems opposed to the statement in the opening theoretical and methodological chapter ("Gender, Culture and History") that

"*adat* and *Islam*.. serve to provide contradictory and conflicting statements of gender relations....[I]n contemporary history where *adat* and *Islam* are both confronted with Westernization, gender choices may be split, with men upholding fundamentalism to reject Westernization and women upholding *adat* or Westernization depending on which provides them with a wider practical venue for autonomy and self-expression" (7).

The author suggests that both revivalism and westernization are ultimately rejected by a majority of the Malays and contends that this rejection indicates that "Malays constantly attempt to steer towards a 'cultural core'- *adat* codes and values of basic religiosity (non-*dakwa*) which are felt to be in keeping with tradition" (208). Moreover, the author sees this 'cultural core' as being encapsulated in what she calls *syarat*, a term that is intriguingly glossed as "the system of interpretation of common rules of *adat* and Islam and/or merging *sunna* institutions in Islam with the ritual regalia of Malay *adat*", fusing "practices which are compatible and discard[ing] those which are not" (208). Yet *syarat* appears to be specifically Islamic as distinct from *adat*, as when the author notes that "compliance with *syarat* Islam and *adat* distinguishes the practising Muslim from the infidel and the 'cultured' individual from the 'common' (*orang beradat/orang tidak beradat*)" (208).

This reviewer may simply be uninformed about the provenance of the term *syarat* as it is employed in the book, but his cursory check with colleagues, dictionaries and encyclopaedias indicates that the author's usage may be entirely novel. Partly because of this, the interested reader is advised to read this whole section of the book carefully since it contains the author's core argument about how a fine balance between hierarchy and equality, and the status of women, replete with all the inherent tensions, has been maintained.

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