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Book Review

李志贤主编《东南亚与中国——连接、疏远、定位》（新加坡：新加坡亚洲学会，2009年），新加坡亚洲学会丛书15，ISBN: 978-981-08-3239-1，282页。

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Over the past several decades, scholars who are mostly Chinese-educated or bi-lingual scholars have carried out important studies on the important and often neglected subject of China-Southeast Asian relations. These scholars are principally university and college lecturers as well as school teachers from the South Seas Society, the Singapore Society of Asian Studies, the Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, Department of Chinese Studies and Chinese media corporations, just to mention a few examples.

It was only in the 1990s that the subject attracted the interest of English-speaking scholars particularly those from universities and other higher learning institutions. Many of these researchers are in the field of media studies, political science, international relations, anthropology, policy-making and strategic analysis, and they have produced a growing volume of literature on China-Southeast Asian interactions. Few of the writings so far, however, are by scholars who are historians and sinologists.

The book under review is a result of conference proceedings held to mark the 25th anniversary celebration of the Singapore Society of

Asian Studies. The event took place in December 2007 in a context of growing awareness of China's rise and of growing close SEA and China interaction. The participants came mainly from institutions in the region. A Southeast Asian rather than a China approach is emphasized in the title of this book. This perspective was adopted despite the fact that some of the participants were scholars from China (including Taiwan). Nevertheless because of a common Chinese language and cultural background, a strong China sentiment and even partiality is evident in some of the contributors' discussions.

The book title is directly taken from the workshop, which featured discussions on long-term Southeast-China interaction marked by three major phases, that of "connecting, distancing and repositioning". This was further organized thematically in three parts, that of history, culture and future prospect. There were altogether twelve papers with contributors being predominantly from the field of history and literature. There were also papers by a linguistic as well as a political science scholar.

The proceedings focused on several key issues and themes and these include Overseas Chinese migration and business network (by Dai Yifeng), Nanyang mandarin capitalist (by Chong Siou Wei), Sino-Siamese tributary system (by Li Daogang), Penang rice crisis and the Chinese May Fourth Movement (by Goh Leng Hoon), cross-straits returned Overseas Chinese students (by Li Yinghui), cross-border ethnic minorities (by Zeng Shaocong), China's image through Southeast Asian Chinese newspapers (by Zhou Zhaocheng), a critique of Nanyang studies in Singapore and Malaysia (by Ngoi Guat Peng), Cultural China in Malaysia (by Hou Kok Chung), Singaporean Chinese Naming custom (by Lee Cher Leng), Chinese religious temple (by Xu Liying), and contemporary international political economy (by Samuel C.Y. Ku).

The "history" part of the book provided a broad framework and context within which five "culture" papers were placed. They fitted and complemented very well with the result that this well organized

book is both comprehensive and cogent. The reviewer is particularly impressed with the five “culture” papers because they touched on several key areas of Southeast Asia-China interactions ranging from Chinese media, Nanyang research, cultural China to Chinese naming practice and religious belief. More significantly and of great benefit is that the contributors, consisting of both local and expatriate scholars serving in Singapore and Malaysia, offered insightful observations from different vantage points. The section dealing with future prospect of China-Southeast Asian relations by Ku was, in particular, very well written as he sums up the proceedings with an assessment of the contemporary and coming political economy of the region.

The absence of the scholars from other Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Philippines, Burma and Indo-China is noticeable. Furthermore no Western sinologists specializing in Southeast Asia or Chinese Overseas were invited. The reason understandably is because the Singapore Society of Asian Studies being a private organization without strong financial sponsorship was unable to invite a larger group of scholars. Clearly the omission is one of financial constraints rather than cultural or ideological consideration. There was, however, one English-language panel with two scholars from Indonesia and Philippines discussing problems affecting the Chinese in those two countries.

There is also a volume in English edited by Ho Khai Leong. Hence, this Chinese edition should, if possible, be read alongside that of the English volume, and vice versa. Overall, this is an important book to those who are interested in understanding the rise of China and its impact in this region as well as for those who are keen to see how China is understood and engaged through historical and cultural discourses by Southeast Asians in general and Southeast Asian Chinese in particular.