

BOOK REVIEW

Southeast Asia And The Germans

Horst Erdmann Verlag
Tubingen-Basle, 1977, 313 pp.

Southeast Asia, a region some ten to thirteen thousand kilometers from Germany, used to be indeed a far-away place to the Germans. Names like Siam, Burma, Malaya, Java, Singapore, and the Philippines sounded strange to the people of Germany.

However, with the coming of faster means of transportation and communication and the rapid growth of trade, tourism, and economic cooperation, greater interest in Southeast Asia has developed in Germany and an increasing number of Germans have been coming to the region in recent years.

But the Germans are not entirely newcomers in Southeast Asia. Although Germany — unlike Great Britain, Holland, Spain, and Portugal — did not have national or colonial interests in this part of the world, many Germans made notable contributions to the economic, social, and cultural life of the countries in Southeast Asia in the past. Most of

these people were scientists, explorers, traders, and missionaries. At first they came motivated only by adventure or curiosity, but later by enthusiasm and deep affection.

Southeast Asia And the Germans is a documentation of the experiences and contributions of those German pioneers. The occasion which gave rise to the publication of the book was the holding some time ago of the "Southeast Asia Cultural Week" in the university town of Tubingen, West Germany. Twenty-five articles make up the volume.

The articles are on varied subjects, covering the region from Burma to the Philippines and spanning a period of four hundred years.

With Engelbert Kaempler, the reader takes a glimpse of the Siamese Royal Court in the late 17th century. Fedor Jagor, the historian-ethnologist who is familiar to Filipino students of history for his work on the Philippines, des-

cribes Singapore of 120 years ago. Adolf Bastian does the same for Burma in a piece entitled, "The Court of Mandalay and I," while Tommy Rosiny describes the Ma Hla Shve dances.

Also in Burma, a German by the name of Dietrich Brandish did commendable work in forestry. In Thailand, Germans built the first railway line. In Malaysia they were in industry, linguistics, and literature. In Indonesia, German-Indonesian encounters date back as early as the beginning of the 16th century and the first German to marry in Southeast Asia was probably Andries Parijs of Berlin who married a girl from Bali in 1617. Among the Germans who made a name in Indonesia was Franz Wilhelm Junghuhn who explored the volcanoes of Java and Sumatra.

In the Philippines, the first botanist was not a Spaniard but a German, Georg Joseph Kamel, who was born in Moravia. He came to the Philippines as a Jesuit priest in 1688 and became an apothecary and pharmacist in the Jesuit college in

Manila. He was the first to make botanical studies of the Philippines and today his original drawings and descriptions of Philippine flora (and also fauna) are still found at the British Museum in London and the Jesuit College in Louvain, Belgium.

There is a chapter on other Germans who came to the Philippines and made their mark on Philippine history and culture. A separate chapter deals on Jose Rizal in Germany. As may be recalled, the Filipino national hero had many friends in Germany among whom were Ferdinand Blumentritt, Adolf Meyer, Louis de Wecker, Pastor Ullmer, and Fréderich Ratzel.

The book is a revelation. It shows how nationals of a great country had played important roles in the development of other countries without their country having any political interest in these places. It also portrays interesting vignettes of history and culture in the countries of Southeast Asia. — dps.