

BOOK REVIEW

***Liberation from Liberalization: Gender and Globalization in Southeast Asia.* Roksana Bahramitash. London and New York: Zed Books, 2005; 211 pages; ISBN 1-84277-439-5; \$39.95US (paper).**

Liberation from Liberalization examines gender and neo-liberalism under the aegis of globalization in the modern development of three states in Southeast Asia: Taiwan, Indonesia, and the Philippines. In a well-structured explanation of the path towards modernization taken by these nation-states, Bahramitash outlines the theoretical models of economic development that glorify the free-market system from the post-World War Two era onward, the alternative models offered by a developmentalist or interventionist state, as well as related theories of gender and development with particular emphasis on women's work, both paid and unpaid, at different societal levels. This theoretical exposition is followed by a generalist country-by-country approach to the "failure of mainstream orthodoxy" (62) of a free-market ideology, starting with the more successful experience of Taiwan and continuing on to the fiascos of US-backed autocratic regimes in Indonesia and the Philippines. The interweaving of empirical evidence with cultural and historical discussions about the role of women in these countries at each stage of development makes this work a must read.

Measuring human development takes into account not only quantifiable factors such as GDP or GNP but also the quality of life index measured in terms of health, education, and mortality rates, among others. Bahramitash argues that a "combination of an interventionist state and high levels of female employment" (174) advances societal conditions since working women tend to spend their income for the well being of their families, whereas men have been shown to more often spend their discretionary income on personal vices. Standard measurements of social development and change provide an incomplete account of women's often invisible contributions to economic development and Bahramitash's use of such measurements to challenge mainstream views is praiseworthy. In all of the three case countries explored, Bahramitash strongly emphasizes that these states relied on women's labour during times of recession and that they have all made successful economic inroads without due acknowledgement of women's contributions on all fronts.

This book is highly critical of the policy-orientation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund geared towards structural adjustments which have resulted in unending poverty in many poor countries such as those found in Southeast Asia. Bahramitash demonstrates through a number of cases that governments that remain subservient to the dictates of international lending institutions at the expense of national interests suffer at the hands of a mobilized public often led by women's organizations. This work illustrates

women's "labour of love" (57) to their families, communities, and the nation by selected women's organizations in Southeast Asia. While not entirely feminist advocates, many of these groups function as quasi-states in providing social welfare assistance to indigent people amidst ineffective administrations. Many of these groups have also gained political clout through years of collective organizing and have made successful inroads in demanding progressive laws aimed at gender equality.

Some minor errors in this volume include incorrect reference on FTZs (Free Trade Zones) in Bataan, referred to as "Batan," in the Philippines (153, 156, 157) and the lack of updates to legislative changes particularly about the banning of mail-order bride businesses in the Philippines (165) with the enactment of Republic Act 6955 (Anti-Mail Order Bride Law) in 1990. Crucial points left out of the analysis include the impact of geography on political management (Taiwan's small administrative regions compared to those of Indonesia) and the relationship between different levels of state development at the time of western incursion, which often determines the extent of foreign influences. Still, Bahramitash's work on the gendered dynamics at play in the process of development is an excellent contribution to our understanding of the interconnectedness of colonialism, globalization, state structures, economic paradigms and women's roles for students, teachers, and practitioners in the field.

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