
This systematic and critical history of Southeast Asian writing in English, focusing precisely on rather little explored literary traditions from the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong, is an outstanding intervention in emerging debates about political, cultural, literary and consumptive functions of English in these erstwhile imperial colonies. Born out of the long-tested erudition and cogent insight of worthy scholars like Rajeev S. Patke and Philip Holden, the book’s panoramic purview engages with the differing specific ideologies within individual national literatures in the region. At the same time, the *Concise History of Southeast Asian Writing in English* identifies the overall multicultural and historical perspective that ushered in creative processes of writing in English in these countries.

Not many books which endeavour to approach the broader reach or the evolutionary route of a specific regional linguistic or literary tradition can retain their sufficient focus on individual writers and their works. However, this *Concise History* has provided comprehensive examples from speech habits of people, and specific texts of poetry and fictional prose. This attribute of the book is surely a credit to the intellectual depth of its writers. The chapters have been deftly outlined, elaborating the emergence of distinct national consciousness after colonial rule and its development, reflected through the evolution of English linguistic and literary traditions, amidst processes of change and diversity in different countries of the region. The writers have identified and examined zones of intersection across different genres and media to view language use and variation and ultimately the development of writing in English as a total phenomenon in the region. Having contextualized the debate on evaluations of nationalistic paradigms of genre and tradition, the book discusses cross-national and cross-cultural events and even diasporic influences to gauge the impact of wider forces of globalization, modernity and postmodernism in which these paradigms operate.

At times the book does have the feel of a hectic read, but a revisiting of the arguments in the book reveals the feeling to be a result of reader’s personal loss of passion while going through weighty sections that demand intellectual involvement. At the same time, terse discussions on individual works of writers and poets trigger the curiosity of a serious reader who, having his starting clue here, would want to know more about these works.

An added attraction of this volume is its literary fluency, which is evidence of the writers’ deep and intimate knowledge of the subject. No doubt, the authors of *The Routledge Concise History of Southeast Asian Writing in English* have provided a much missed articulation of English literary practice in the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong and thus have contributed to further establish the canonical authority of a certain aspect and dimension of Southeast Asian writing in English. Further in this regard, not only have they been successful in justifying the volume’s regional approach but also in making it a required read for researchers and scholars having penchant for knowing literatures in English from different nations and regions. To me, as a reader, this book opened up many possibilities of knowing and connecting with the themes and approaches of English literary writings from the region and I hope it will do the same to many others as well.

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