

I was surprised to find my own research the focus of one of the essays in the book, Dugal McKinnon's piece on Rewi Alley. I will take the liberty given me, as an invited reviewer of this book, to reply to the criticism raised in that essay. Though the topic of McKinnon's essay is New Zealand ethnomusicologist Jack Body's 1998 opera on Alley, McKinnon devotes considerable attention to analyzing what for New Zealand reviewers was the most topical aspect of my 2002 book *Friend of China — The Myth of Rewi Alley* (Routledge Curzon), Alley's homosexuality. McKinnon critiques my depiction of Alley's sexuality as 'speculation, based on circumstantial and anecdotal evidence' (p.264). McKinnon instead quotes favourably from journalist/writer Geoff Chapple's March 2003 *New Zealand Listener* review of my book which claimed (without producing any evidence) that Alley was not in fact homosexual and also slanderously and cruelly attacked one of the key sources of my work on Alley, Courtney Archer. McKinnon interviewed Chapple to discuss the controversy over the book, but did not bother to interview me. For the record, I would like to state that the following interviewees all told me in the course of my research on Alley that they knew from personal observations and conversations with Alley that he was homosexual: Joy Alley (Alley's sister); Rod Alley and David Somerset (Alley's nephews); Courtney Archer, Nyrene Masson, Bob Spencer, Max Wilkinson (all worked with Alley at Shandan); Peter Townsend, Mavis Yan (worked in the co-operative movement with Alley). Due to reasons of space in the writing of the book I could only cite a limited number of quotes from these sources. But all interviewees' names were listed in the bibliography. After the controversy over the book erupted in the media, one of my interviewees publicly stated that Alley was not homosexual. She later told me in private that she had done so under pressure from members of the New Zealand-China Friendship Society.

China has long loomed large in the New Zealand and Australian imagination and been the subject of many historical and contemporary controversies. China has had an unusually strong impact on both countries and continues to do so. For China, in both Australia and New Zealand, has frequently been seen as the 'Other' which has had a key role in shaping the national identity of these two, relatively young nations. This role has been under-studied and misunderstood and, as such, this new volume of essays is a welcome contribution to greater knowledge of New Zealand-China, Australia-China relations, and the history and culture of Australia and New Zealand.

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*Southeast Asia and New Zealand: A History of Regional and Bilateral Relations*. Edited by Anthony L. Smith. Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies/New Zealand Institute of International Affairs in association with Victoria University Press, Wellington 2005. 392 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 0-86473-519-7.

THIS BOOK IS THE FIRST SUBSTANTIAL REVIEW of the history of New Zealand's relations with the 11 countries of Southeast Asia. Successive *New Zealand in World Affairs* survey volumes have usually had just one or two chapters devoted to Southeast Asia. Editor Anthony Smith and his collaborators are to be congratulated on seeing such an unwieldy project — 12 countries, 11 contributors — through to completion.

An introduction by Smith is complemented by a chapter examining the relationship of New Zealand with the region as a whole, including with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Two other thematic chapters look at defence and at trade and investment. The remaining nine chapters look at bilateral relations, if we include in that formulation the chapters devoted to the Cambodian recognition issue, 1978–1990, and

East Timor independence, 1999–2000. Laos and Brunei, with neither of which has New Zealand had substantial relations, are not allocated separate chapters.

The book has many strengths. The chapter on the economy has characteristic flashes of counter-to-expectation observation, for instance on the limitations of ‘value added’ production (p.83) and on what could be called the ‘Asianization’ of New Zealand’s economic diplomacy — ‘although not explicitly discussed, the Ministry [of Foreign Affairs] was adopting a meaning of “economic cooperation” which emerged from Asia and especially Japan’ (p.64).

The narrative accounts of bilateral relations are comprehensive. The chapter on Indonesia is particularly thorough, not least because of its measured and informed assessment of New Zealand policy over the East Timor issue in 1975–76 (pp.181–5). The chapter on relations with Singapore provides a vivid reminder of the instability of the then colony in the 1950s and early 1960s. In passing, the reader is reminded of the extraordinary fact that one man, Lee Kuan Yew, has dominated Singapore’s politics (his latest incarnation being ‘minister mentor’) from that time to this.

The author of the shorter chapter on Myanmar ponders (p.275) whether New Zealand’s rhetoric on that country’s human rights (or lack of them) is not ‘a case of the New Zealand government of the time being swept up in the excitement of grand statements, the moralizing, and the international kudos?’ But he recognizes that the actual policy maintained a ‘balance between pronouncement and pragmatism’ (p.274) — the opposite of ‘swept up’ and also a demonstration, as with the Cambodia recognition, of the extent to which New Zealand policy has been responsive to ASEAN goals and priorities.

The book does also have omissions and weaknesses. The omissions of index and, less seriously, of map and timeline will particularly hamper the most frequent users of the book — students.

Most chapters would have gained with less use of ‘New Zealand’, ‘Wellington’ or ‘New Zealand policymakers’ and more specifics of who was deciding policy.

A larger issue relates to sources. The source material is overwhelmingly of New Zealand origin. This is defensible for a first venture into the field, and it is true that substantial resources and time would have been needed to make good use of the records of foreign ministries in Jakarta, Bangkok or Kuala Lumpur, not to mention Canberra, Washington and London. But there is a downside. All the contributors recognize that New Zealand has been a relatively minor player in the Southeast Asia arena, but the reliance on New Zealand sources creates Wellington-centred narratives which in practice undercut that assertion. When the opinions and stances of governments other than New Zealand’s *are* cited, they are usually drawn from the reports of New Zealand diplomats.

One way round this dilemma would have been more thematic chapters. One of the themes that Smith instances in his introduction is a ‘decline’ in many of the bilateral relationships from their Cold War and Colombo Plan heyday. This could have been a starting point for a stimulating revisionist chapter. New Zealand’s interaction with Australia (or lack of it) in Southeast Asia would also have repaid chapter treatment.

Finally, a ‘where’ question. Is Southeast Asia part of the Pacific as well as part of Asia? Its history and cultures certainly find echoes in the island Pacific. The work done by New Zealand anthropologists, archaeologists, geographers and ethnomusicologists in island Southeast Asia also suggest such an angle of vision, one to which the fine but unexplained book cover (Maori motif, Borobudur?) pays tantalizing homage.

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