

Book Review: *Of Peninsulas and Archipelagos: The Landscape of Translation in Southeast Asia*, by Chittiphalangsri, Phrae and Vicente L. Rafael (eds.). Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2024, 262pp. Paperback £39.99, Hardback £145.00, E-book £35.99. ISBN 9781032344133 (Paperback) ISBN 9781032344126 (Hardback) ISBN 9781003322030 (E-book).

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Of Peninsulas and Archipelagos: The Landscape of Translation in Southeast Asia, edited by Chittiphalangsri and Rafael, fittingly fills the lacuna of books on Translation Studies from a non-Western perspective, particularly from Southeast Asia. This aligns with what Tymoczko (2014) argues about "moving beyond Western conceptualizations of translation" (pp. 4), which is still relevant today. There are important publications in Translation Studies, particularly from scholars based in non-Western regions and countries, such as *Translation Studies in the Philippines: Navigating a Multilingual Archipelago* edited by Moratto and Bacolod (2024) and *African Perspectives on Literary Translation* edited by Inggs and Wehrmeyer (2021). That said, additional new publications such as the book reviewed here, are always greatly welcomed.

In the preface of this book, Rafael accurately asserted that it represents "the first time a group of chapters seek to contribute to the study of translation in one of the most overlooked regions of Translation Studies, Southeast Asia" (pp. 2). There are over than 1,200 languages spoken in the region (Kosonen, 2017) belonging to different language families. From the book's preface, it is clear that this book provides an in-depth exploration of "the practice of translation as much as a view of what a theory might look like when seen from the varying perspectives of islands and peninsulas that constitute the region's geography" (pp. ix). Rafael introduces the term 'translationscapes' to describe "Southeast Asian translation practices" (pp. x), further amplified

in Chapter One. In the Introduction by Chittiphalangsri, the term 'traversing' is used as a term which "means traveling through and against the all the tensions and disorientations" (pp. 17) of the translationscapes and antipodes in Southeast Asian context.

The book contains nine chapters and an Introduction (Chapter One), categorised into four sections: *Part I Mapping Uncharted Terrains*; *Part II Singularity, Untranslatability, Creolization*; *Part III Precarious Urban and Gentrified Translationscapes*; and *Part IV The Archipelagic Enterprise*. This book organises the chapters thematically instead of by language families, facilitating readers' comprehension of the conceptual framework unifying the theme.

Part I Mapping Uncharted Terrains features two essays. Chapter Two by Teri S. Yamada, *The Changing Contours of Cambodia's Landscape of Translation* deals first with the translation of Sanskrit language used in Sanskrit Eulogistic Inscriptions (Prašasti). The second topic in this chapter relates to how French scholars helped with "collecting rubbings of inscriptions, manuscripts from temple libraries, oral folktales, and songs" (pp. 36) during the Khmer Rouge era when Cambodians were starting the practice of "testimonial memoirs" (pp. 41) via translation. Covered is the 2021 visual art poem by poet-videographer Chheangly Yeng.

Chapter Three by Trent Walker, entitled *Epiphytic Literatures: A Botanical Metaphor for Indic-Vernacular Bitexts in Southeast Asia* touches upon Indic-vernacular bitexts during Theravada Buddhist culture (1450 to 1950). Walker introduces "epiphytic" as a "metaphor for bilingual Indic-vernacular translations in mainland Southeast Asia" (pp. 56) and provides five examples of Pali-vernacular bitexts to languages in mainland Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam). This botanical metaphor of Pali translation is fruitful for understanding how Pali, an Indic-language, is adopted in mainland Southeast Asian countries.

Part II Singularity, Untranslatability, Creolization is straightforward in its title. Chapter Four contributes to the singularity keyword of Part II, entitled *One Thai: The Politics of Singularity in the Thai Landscape of Translation* by Koraya Techawongstien and Phrae Chittiphalangsri. This chapter explores the use of central Thai or Standard Thai, especially Bangkok Thai, as the main focus in the translation curriculum in Thailand. The chapter authors criticise this practice as an extreme form of domestication in translation that glorifies traditional patriotism, neglecting other ways (pp. 82). In recent years, however there are instances that source texts from other languages are translated into Thai minority dialects and languages despite its

limitation in circulation. This attempt is considered positive as “‘*plural others*’ attempts to “speak” their own languages from the periphery” (pp. 99, italicised in original).

Chapter Five by Vinh P. Pham presents a case study of the translation of aporia(s) in Kim Thúy’s novel, *Mãn* (2013). Written in French, not the writer’s mother tongue, the chapter titles of the novel are written in Vietnamese and accompanied by the French translation. This fascinating chapter mentions the untranslatability of societal relations in “mẹ-Mères” words, which in Vietnamese and French are translated as ‘mother’. This chapter explores the romantic element in the novel, notably the affair of Mãn, which Pham argues as “self-exploration through the expression of romantic desire” which is still overlooked in the refugee narrative (pp. 116).

Chapter Six, *Sinophone Thainess: The Problematic Landscape of Creolization in the Thai-Chinese Translation Zone* by Gritiya Rattanakantadilok and Kornphanat Tungkeunkunt focuses on Thailand, and how the decades-long Thai government’s assimilationist policies have caused the young people of Sino-Thai slowly lose the ability to read, write, and understand their mother tongues. Novels are used in this chapter to illustrate how creolisation take place in Thai literary landscape by the writer. Rattanakantadilok and Tungkeunkunt argue however that few titles only creolised at a surface level. They conclude: “the novels tend to novels tend to assimilate to a majority standard that allows for two previous cultures to interact” (pp. 139).

Part III is titled *Precarious Urban and Gentrified Translationscapes*. Chapter Seven *An Urban Pastoral in Laos: Translating George Sand in (Post) colonial Vientiane* by Chairat Polmuk. The novel has been translated into Lao, according to Polmuk, to introduce the country undergoing a French-supported campaign of colonisation (pp. 145), bringing about a change in Lao’s literary landscape. Using Bakhtin’s heuristic framework of the chronotope, Polmuk analyses George San’s novel translation by Thao Kene in 1944 into Lao. Polmuk argues that Thao Kene, the translator, used domestication and concludes that using Bakhtin’s theory along with affect theory helps us sense something of the nostalgic feeling in post-colonial Lao.

Chapter Eight *Grime to Shine: The Gentrification of Singapore’s Vernacular Literature in Translation* by Nazry Bahrawi presents a case study on the translation of novels from Malay or Bahasa Melayu into English, some of which have won Cultural Medallion Prize. Insights into the “gentrification” process as proposed by Ruth Glass and Sharon Zukin, (scholars in urban studies) are cited in which Bahrawi argue: “In Singapore’s case, the Bahasa translated texts seem to target a market whose members possess a higher level of disposable income than

the ones targeted by the original Bahasa texts, specifically, the liberal, cosmopolitan and creative crowd of the nation's middle and upper classes" (pp. 179). This is in line with UNESCO's "cultural policies toward literature" (pp. 179).

In the final section, *The Archipelagic Enterprise*, brings together two chapters from two archipelagic countries, The Philippines and Indonesia. Thomas David F. Chaves' Chapter Nine, *Self- Translation as Archipelagic Thinking: Four Metaphors of Bilingual Philippine Protest Poetry* investigates four metaphors of protest poetry self-translation. This paper also introduces the notion of 'archipelagic thinking' by Édouard Glissant (1981) "to explain the complex, heterogeneous societies of the island-worlds whereof he speaks" (pp. 186). The four metaphors are sanctuary, amplification, symbolic equity, and freedom, self-translated poetry "becomes a project of multiple possibilities in interpretation and theorization" (pp. 205).

The final chapter, *Song, Text, Ball of Clay: Participatory Translation in the Agrarian Heartland of Java* by Megan Hewitt, presents the multiple actors "of participatory translation as a decolonizing force against practices of neo-colonial extraction, in order to trace the multiplicity of connections between song, text, and a ball of clay, which together constitute *rasa*, feelings and sentiments shaped to be reshaped through participation in the materialities of translation" (pp. 209). A small task of translating a *tembang* (Javanese song-poem) is conducted as part of this chapter and Hewitt recommends "other translators and scholars to explore the ways in which translation can be reinscribed in participatory action" (pp. 230).

While this book cannot cover all Southeast Asian countries, it provides an excellent foundation and an erudite introduction into contexts of translation and its study in Southeast Asian countries. With the interdisciplinary nature of this book, there was however room to broaden the scope by covering more countries in Southeast Asia, and it is not clear why not all are included. Exploring translation between languages of various South-east Asian nations, such as from Burmese to Indonesian, is, for example, equally important. Nevertheless, despite this minor gap, this book is a significant contribution especially for scholars in the region.

This book is particularly of interest to students, scholars, and academics in Translation Studies and those interested in the languages and cultures of Southeast Asian countries. To conclude, *Of Peninsulas and Archipelagos: The Landscape of Translation in Southeast Asia* offers a fresh perspective on a less known critical territory in Translation Studies and is a welcome contribution to the advancement of Translation Studies in Southeast Asia.

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