

## Annotated Bibliography

Anderson, Benedict. "Cultural Roots." *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed., Verso, 2006, pp. 9–36.

In this chapter of the historian's landmark text on nationalism, Anderson sets out the historical context for his analysis of the nation as an imagined community. Using examples from across the world, Anderson directs our attention to aspects of the popular worldview held by many cultures before the 17th century, namely the sacrality of written language, and kingdom as the only viable political system.

Anderson argues that it is only recently possible to imagine a nation as an entity beyond one's immediate neighbourhood, after a radical change in the way societies perceive time (borrowing an analytical tool from Walter Benjamin). For Anderson, the novel and the newspaper provide two views of the modern idea of simultaneity, and are two important modes of imagining since the 18th century. Through a detailed examination of examples, Anderson clarifies the role of measured, calendrical time in imagining a community.

Thongchai, Winichakul. "Writing at the Interstices: Southeast Asian Historians and Postnational Histories in Southeast Asia." *New Terrains in Southeast Asian History*, edited by Abu Talib Ahmad and Tan Liok Ee, Ohio University Press, 2003, pp. 3–29.

In contrast to Anderson's focus on time and simultaneity, Thongchai's main concern is the role of place in shaping national identity; to Thongchai, "a national history is the biography of a spatial identity" (9). Thongchai points out that new conceptions of spatial identity have emerged in recent decades, caused by conditions such as globalisation

(and equally important to Thongchai, its twin process of localisation). Thus, he argues, the dominance of national histories will be challenged by alternative forms of narrative, for instance a transnational history of Southeast Asia, or the history of an ethnic group within a state.

Thongchai also proposes the study of history at the interstices, the margins of a nation that includes people along geographical boundaries, and also ‘marginalised’ or minority groups. The histories of these people, far from being isolated case studies or exceptions to the normative Western theories of nation, are to Thongchai a productive way to think about – or even move away from – a national history. The essay ends with a reflection on the role of historians of the home in Southeast Asia, and a warning that scholarship is not intrinsically more valuable just because it was written by a local.

*Singapore Dreaming*. Directed by Colin Goh and Woo Yen Yen. Scorpio East Entertainment, 2006.

This is a story of a typical Singaporean family, already filled with dramatic possibility from the start. Poh Huat, the father of the family, aspires to a higher social status while growing tired of his wife Siew Luan, who in his eyes can only do household chores and brew herbal tea. They have two children: Mei, a secretary seven months pregnant with her first child, and Seng, who returns from studying in the US. Mei’s husband Chin Keong is looked down upon by the rest of the family for working as an insurance seller, while Seng’s girlfriend Irene stays with his parents, already playing the part of filial daughter-in-law. The film follows the characters through Poh Huat winning the lottery, his equally sudden death, and the aftermath of these life-changing events.

What struck me the most was the tension in every aspect of the movie: between complex characters who often disagree (Why does he get support for further education when I got better grades? Why did you buy a car

before you even get a job? etc.); between the different expectations placed upon the characters by themselves, their family, and society; and the ironic contrast between the words and the actions of the characters, for instance Mei denouncing maid abuse while treating her own maid poorly on one occasion.

Copies of the DVD are available in the NUS Central Library and the NLB public libraries.