

chapters conclude that academic capitalism is only a partial explanation for the erosion of academic freedom. In Japan and South Korea, political factors are also detrimental to the humanities and social sciences, which is true for other systems as well.

This book is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the present threats to academic freedom in different systems. The authors convincingly demonstrate that many challenges arise from C&C; indeed, as discussed, here we can find many similarities among the different systems. Political factors, on the other hand, shed light on the distinctive features of the different systems. As shown in the case of China, the combination of authoritarianism and academic capitalism poses a particular threat to academic freedom.

References

- Ahlers, Anna L. and Thomas Heberer. "Kooperation auf Augenhöhe." *Forschung und Lehre*, 20 August 2021. <https://www.forschung-und-lehre.de/politik/kooperation-auf-augenhoehe-4031>.
- Kinzelbach, Katrin, Staffan I. Lingberg, Lars Pelke and Janika Spannagel (2022). "Academic Freedom Index – 2022 Update." Friedrich Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. <https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-fau/frontdoor/index/index/docId/18612>.
- Malik, Kenan. "If Education is All about Getting a Job, the Humanities are Left Just to the Rich." 21 July 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jul/31/education-frees-working-class-not-getting-better-job>.
- Perry, Elizabeth J. (2020). "Educated Acquiescence: How Academia Sustains Authoritarianism in China." *Theory and Society* 49, pp. 1–22.
- Scholars at Risk (2019). "Obstacles to Excellence: Academic Freedom & China's Quest for World Class Universities." <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/obstacles-to-excellence-academic-freedom-chinas-quest-for-world-class-universities/>.

doi:10.1017/S1479591422000341

Island Encounters: Timor-Leste from the Outside In

By Lisa Palmer. Australian National University Press, 2021, 208 pages+i–xix. Print, AUS\$60, ISBN 9781760464509. Ebook, Open Access, 9781760464516

Christopher Shepherd

Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

Author for correspondence: Christopher Shepherd, E-mail: chris.shepherd@anu.edu.au

(Received 31 August 2021; accepted 31 August 2021)

Lisa Palmer's *Island Encounters: Timor-Leste from the Outside In* is a travelogue, memoir and experiential ethnography of Timor. The book revolves around a family trip from the western tip of West Timor to the eastern tip of East Timor, undertaken over several months in 2018. Palmer, her Timorese husband and two children stayed in township hotels or with the husband's family, from where they visited origin houses, sacred sites, rituals, shamans, local "royals" and so on. In collaboration with an NGO, Palmer also led a study-tour of students from an Australian university. She approaches Timorese tradition as a confrontation with modernity, which she addresses through various development interventions including a mining project in the Baucau area and a government mega-project in the enclave of Oecusse. At the same time, she recounts aspects of the politics and history of the island.

Island Encounters is published by an academic press in a series titled "Monographs in Anthropology" and it is under review for *IJAS*, which publishes reviews of academic books only. And yet, the book has no references, no footnotes, no bibliography and no index; it does not meaningfully consider any of the scholarship on East Timor – including the abundant English- and

Portuguese-language history and ethnography – or the region, or any theoretical perspectives from the anthropology of religion, the anthropology of development and political science; and we find no introduction or conclusion offering an analytical framework, methodology or argument.

Island Encounters' ethnographic content alone presents as academic writing, but even this is problematic. Palmer adheres to an approach called cultural affirmation (CA). CA emphasizes the cultural or ontological differences – often “incommensurable” – between indigenous or local knowledge and Western science. It filters empirical data in order to valorize, defend or idealize what it recognizes as tradition (and equivalents), and to overlook, question, diminish or revile “the modern”. Proponents of CA share views and resources with like-minded NGOs, activists and practitioners of alternative development models or cultural revival. They endorse indigenous logics and practices to the point of imitating them. CA’s normative and ideological filter contrasts with field anthropology, the latter of which occupies the middle ground of a non-judgmental cultural relativism and treats the intersection of tradition and modernity as “hybrid” phenomena that warrant dispassionate investigation.

Island Encounters casts all things animist in Timor as “deep custom” “deeply cultural” and “deeply spiritual” (pp. 1, 7); the other side of this supposed “deep Timor” is modernity, colonialism, Christianity and materialism, which are depicted as anything from “a veneer” (p. 25) to “aspirational” (p. 7) to “obnoxious” (p. 19). The meaning of Palmer’s “cultural depths of the entire Timorese landscape” (xviii) or her “richly connected worlds of Timorese cultural and ecological communities” (p. 12) are functionalist and idealist; they are “emblematic of the ways relationships between people and place... are configured” (p. 102), they point to “life intimately connected to nature and the spirit world” (p. 41), or they ensure “the prosperity and pathways of current and future generations” (p. 178). *Island Encounters'* frequent permutations on pro-social statements of “theory” possess a ritualistic quality in their own right. The author, in fact, succumbs to the very outsider ethnocentrism she yearns to overcome, namely a Durkheimian view of religion based on an opposition between the natural and supernatural, the secular and the sacred. Because the work resists an examination of core assumptions, it does not explore the ground-breaking literature of “new animism” which suggests that animism might well be an entirely earthly, empirical mode of gaining knowledge and managing social and environmental adversities in dialogue with the dead (who are not necessarily “spirits” as we understand the term).

The subtitle, *Timor-Leste from the Outside In*, prefaces the book’s entertaining dramatic arc: Palmer’s journey across the island is a metaphor for her personal journey from an “outsider” Australian researcher to an “insider”, integrated researcher. The author’s animistic convictions become clear to the reader by the time Palmer crosses the border into East Timor, when she wonders whether the crumbling roads there result from ritual neglect, while the roads on the Indonesian side are “so good because they carried out the required ceremonies and secured the requisite ancestral permission” (p. 73). She gives no consideration to road maintenance or government infrastructure policy. From then on, she affirms animist causality at every turn: a swimmer is taken by a crocodile and only ritual can bring back the chomped remains; her student falls ill, but is cured by a long-distance rite (p. 151); a spring runs dry, signaling the neglect of “custodial responsibilities” (p. 104); infighting crocodiles indicate “disharmony in the land of the living”, whose “revelation upturned any idea we might have had that this was a ‘natural’ battle of territorial animals” (p. 152). Apropos “nature”, Palmer’s positions descend into hubris when she tries to reconcile Western science with animist knowledge. She knows that sea level rise threatens to engulf a beach, but the written account defers to a local ritual master who insists that a row of trees marking an “ancestral border” at the top of the beach will keep the sea at bay (p. 149). Palmer betrays her desire to condition the subject: she does not want foreign knowledge intruding on her East Timor. Palmer often expresses optimism about Timor’s future, though her grounds are not clear. Is it not reasonable to suggest that within a decade or so, environmental and political stresses will push the vulnerable half-island nation over the edge? Eventually, everybody will join the ancestors.

As Palmer becomes more and more animist with every page, this reviewer becomes more and more incredulous. “Day by day, we came to appreciate the intricacies and seriousness of observing the

customs of this world” (p. 134). In the villages, Palmer noted “how women were in constant communication with the spirit realm, even though they might deny it publicly” (p. 137).

One day, as we chatted away in the fields and rain clouds began to loom on the horizon, one of the older women immediately cupped her hands to her mouth and blew in the air loudly. She looked at me with a smile. “I am just letting the ancestors know to stay away – not to come yet – we are still harvesting the rice.” It seemed to work. The clouds soon cleared. (p. 137)

Island Encounters is not only keen to assert the efficacy of animism (when it works) but also its pervasiveness. Surely, Palmer herself made animism more pervasive when the locals came to know what she wanted to hear?

Palmer exalts ordinary activities so long as they belong to “tradition”: labor is “effortless” and “highly choreographed”; men “deftly” thresh the rice; a woman prepares food with “utmost skill”, for “one wrong move, and...[a spirit-related adversity]” (p. 142). But when villagers sit down to watch satellite television, Palmer indicts the technology as the “culprit” that interrupts old song and storytelling (p. 139). By now, Palmer is in the fields harvesting rice, in the kitchen peeling vegetables, or out in the forest collecting firewood. She defends traditional gender roles and agriculture against encroaching development programs.

The family eventually stage their own ritual for Palmer’s husband’s birthday, feeding cooked meat and rice to the spirits and laying flowers at the graves. “You would never have a celebration like this... without involving the ancestors – they would be offended” (p. 141). When the family has their own house built in the husband’s grandmother’s village and moves into it the following year (2019–20), a goat is slaughtered for the house-warming party (p. 192). “If only briefly, we lived a life wherein the hold of *lulik* – of the ancestors – is unquestioned. Their presence permeates the mind, the body, everyday relationships, practices and interactions...” (p. 142). Palmer is not interested in how Portuguese ethnographers of the 1930s and Anglo-American ethnographers of the 1960s and 1970s remarked on the extensive acculturation as well as growing skepticism among Timorese towards their own animism. Instead, she makes history go backwards. Of course, cultural essentialism thrives as cultural erosion intensifies.

Now that Palmer views Timor “from the inside”, she discovers that everything is “infinitely richer” (p. 134). One suspects that to claim a sort of enriched insider status attempts to place oneself above regular “outsider” social scientists; however, it does not compensate for poor analysis. Still, knowing when it is better to be an outsider, Palmer sits out the pandemic in Australia. Six months of Melbourne lockdown could have offered her the right setting to investigate more fully the ways in which outsiders remain outsiders, albeit with differing points of intersection with the field site. The work dismisses a wealth of scholarship on the region about how foreigners have historically transformed indigenous social structure, authority and animism; even ethnographers transform animism in the process of providing incentives, paying for sacrificial animals, recording and filming, or simply demonstrating intense interest (see, for example, Buckingham, 2018). Fortunately, Palmer reveals enough to leave her descriptions – such as that of the nicely documented honey harvesting ritual (pp. 55–70) – wide open to meta-ethnographic interpretation.

When Palmer cannot tune out completely from ubiquitous modern expressions, she demotes them. One day, the Palmer family take part in a burial in a remote mountain village (pp. 174–79). Evoking past brutality, the laying to rest of the recovered bones is tragic enough – and traditional enough – to warrant Palmer’s absolute solemnity in her poignant rendition thereof. Later the same day, Palmer’s husband has his own “death business” to attend to in town. It turns out to be a Catholic wake, not a traditional burial as such. Solemnity is now out of the window. Palmer jokes about the repetitious rosary and wailing (p. 180). The author’s flippant depiction of the claustrophobic event and the fidgeting kids is genuinely comic, but it also lays bare what we see so often in the CA literature, namely a piety – perhaps sanctimony – reserved for what “real” tradition is imagined to be; for Palmer, Catholicism does not qualify. A few pages on, Palmer covers her tracks. What has transpired at these “ostensibly different death rituals”, she states, was “essentially the same” which is, predictably, “ensuring that

family relations were in order” (p. 182). Palmer’s bind is this: CA asks of her to validate only some Timorese phenomena; but social science requires her to give even-handed treatment to all things Timorese. Functionalist platitudes are all she can find to bridge the two.

It is not certain that Palmer is alert to the inescapable contradiction in her work. Examples abound. Political success in East Timor rests somewhat on whether candidates can secure ancestral sanction. Palmer’s observations point to a sort of anything-goes, promotional, ancestor-opportunism among rivals (curiously, she shifts from the “truth register” of CA to the “belief register” of cultural relativism). As much as all that opportunism amounts to a strategic appropriation of “the sacred realm” that drives social division rather than Palmer’s preferred pro-social, authentic animism, she cannot easily dismiss the phenomena; tribalized national politics, after all, belong to the Timor package. Again, Palmer gets herself into an interpretative tangle: she palms off the worst displays of ancestral political populism to Indonesia; she identifies a deeper “spiritual politics” for East Timor (p. 77); and to apologize for the divisive aspect of this deep spiritual politics, she locates its roots in the “even deeper” centuries-old colonial contest between animism and Catholicism (p. 82) as if animism had once possessed a pre-colonial purity. “Deep”, “deeper” and “even deeper” come to look like the author’s hypnotic rhetoric.

Asymmetries multiply. As Palmer does the hard sell on the good cultural products, the bad either vanishes or is under-represented: internecine warfare, head-hunting, accusations of sorcery and vicious reprisals, shamanic quackery, domestic violence, alcoholism, gambling, inequitable gender relations, jealousy, homicide, impoverishment, corruption or the gory details of animal sacrifice. The work does well to bring home the extent of East Timorese suffering at the hands of Indonesia, yet it forgets to specify when the East Timorese themselves were the perpetrators. Indonesia’s “civil militia”, one may recall, were East Timorese (pp. 2, 29, 31), and what this militia did exactly evades Palmer’s narrative.

Island Encounters has indeed sacrificed social science at the altar of CA. The quality of Palmer’s fieldwork, good writing, engaging stories and the odd insight are let down by wanting depth of thought and insufficient editing with considerable extraneous material. Even so, *Island Encounters* is sure to find its place in the literature on East Timor. It will make for a light and enjoyable read for non-specialists. It will also offer a useful resource for students of Timor, development practitioners and even academics with a stake in the country’s development industry.

Reference

Buckingham, Will (2018). *Stealing with the Eyes, Imaginings and Incantations in Indonesia*. London: Haus Publishing.

doi:10.1017/S1479591421000516

A Century of Development in Taiwan: From Colony to Modern State

Edited by Peter C. Y. Chow. Edward Elgar, 2022. 400 pages. Hardback, £108.00, ISBN: 978-1-80088-015-3. Ebook, £25.00, ISBN: 978-1-80088-016-0.

Edward Vickers

Kyushu University, Fukuoka, Japan
E-mail: edvickers08@gmail.com

(Received 4 September 2022; accepted 4 September 2022)

Peter Chow is to be congratulated for assembling this collection of fascinating studies of various aspects of Taiwanese politics, sociology, culture and economics during the past century. The chapters