

Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf and Mohammad A. Quayum eds.,
Imagined Communities Revisited: Critical Essays on Asia-Pacific Literatures and Cultures. Selangor: ILUM Press, 2012. 246 pp.
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Imagined Communities (1983), Benedict Anderson's seminal work, has had a huge impact on research in areas of identity, politics and nationhood over the years and, even today, the book is still quoted and referenced in papers, articles and texts which deal with these issues. It was therefore fitting that the organisers of the 2009 conference on Asia-Pacific literatures and cultures included the phrase "imagined communities" into the title of their conference and added the word "revisiting" to it because Anderson's ideas fall in so nicely with the myriad concerns faced by Asia-Pacific communities and it was interesting to see to what extent these communities have grown and changed and in what ways "imagined communities" continues to affect and shape the Asia-Pacific imaginary.

Imagined Communities Revisited: Critical Essays on Asia-Pacific Literatures and Cultures stems from the conference and is a handsome and well-compiled collection. The book has twenty-four chapters divided into twelve sections. It is an eclectic book on many levels. For one, it covers a range of topics from diaspora and identity to literary politics, sexuality, gender and cartoons. Apart from that, the chapters in this book deal with diverse genres as well as literary and cultural forms. The writers, both scholars and artists, come from Canada, Fiji, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Macau, New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, Philippines and the USA. Some of the chapters deal with particular authors and texts and some deal with national, regional and transnational themes. Suffice to say, the book is rich, wide-ranging and caters to different interests. A significant inclusion to the collection is the Foreword which was penned by Anderson himself, who attended the conference and gave the keynote address.

In his "Foreward" Anderson asks what is "the main reason why over the 110 years of announcements of winners of the Noble Prize for Literature, there has never been an awardee from any country in Southeast Asia – while every other region has had its turn?" (vi). He conjectures that it could be because of literary cliques, prejudices, politics and so on, the whole gamut of reasons why, often, people, communities and countries are marginalised and, effectively, forgotten. Anderson then cites a list of dynamic writers from this part of the world whose works have been so stirring and should garner greater international recognition. It is significant that the rest of *Imagined Communities Revisited: Critical Essays on Asia-Pacific Literatures and Cultures*, in varying ways, demonstrates Anderson's call for attention with its striking array of articles which highlight

the talent of artists and writers from Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific regions.

As stated in the “Introduction,” there are chapters which detail individual authors and their contributions, among them Edwin Thumboo and Ricardo de Ungria. Then there are the chapters written by well-known Malaysian writers like Muhammad Haji Salleh and Wong Phui Nam.

Equally riveting are the articles which capture the changes and challenges faced by communities in this region. For instance, Eleanor Ty’s article, “Performative Identities: North American Youths in Recent Films” focuses on films set in Canada and the US post-2000 and showcases the evolving face of the Asian Americans and Asian Canadians, from a conventionally hyphenated-identity to one that is premised on multiplicity. Then there is the interesting chapter by Jesus Cyril Conde on “The Other Side of a Centre of Christianity: Open Rationality in the Oral Literature and Culture of Highland and Lowland Communities in the Bikol Region of the Philippines” which introduces the reader to the religious practices of a little-known tribe which are an admixture of traditional Christian ways and other value systems, “an animist worldview” (193), which has led to the formation of what could be termed as “open rationality” (208) and a different, even fluid, way of perceiving reality.

Sonia Mycak’s article looks at multicultural literary production in Australia and zeroes in on the Ukrainian-Australian community who have succeeded in keeping their literature alive, even thriving. She hopes that her research would show “how small literary cultures which are not commercially viable can exist and continue to function” (129) and, more than that, how they can animate mainstream literature.

Imagined Communities Revisited: Critical Essays on Asia-Pacific Literatures and Cultures is an informative and interesting collection, introducing the reader to the fascinating world of literature and other cultural and art forms from Southeast Asia and Asia Pacific regions. It is a valuable tome for scholars researching in this area. It ultimately highlights the rich diversity and yet, cohesive spirit of creativity and survival, underpinning the cultures in this part of the world.

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