

CORRESPONDENCE

The Editor
Journal of Southeast Asian History
Department of History
University of Singapore
Singapore

Sir,

I would like to take the liberty to request the publication of the following comment on Professor Tinker's review of my book *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution*, which appeared in your Journal, volume VIII, no. 2, pp. 331-332.

Any reviewer is free to disagree with what he is reviewing, but he is not free to claim that it contains what it does not contain. Professor Tinker claims that I had assured things which I never have, for example that "on the authority of Megasthenes . . ." I "assured that the democratic form of government prevailed" in ancient India. What I *did* write was that (page 20) Megasthenes *claims* that most of the cities of ancient India adopted a democratic form of government. If this is a "familiar legend", as Professor Tinker writes, than it is as much so as the one about the democratic character of the Magna Charta. Nor is it correct that "Sarkisyanz . . . comes to recognize that any sort of religion (or none) is compatible with any sort of politics". This a thesis of Mr. Tinker, not of Sarkisyanz. I am sorry that Professor Tinker had not propounded this insight earlier: If Max Weber or Troeltsch had been enriched by this insight of my distinguished British colleague, they could have saved much precious time which they had, so I now learn, wrongly spent in finding out which religion goes with which politics. Another advantage of Professor Tinker's thesis that any religion is compatible with any politics is that it simplifies things and thereby favours the gentleman scholar as against the specialist. Incidentally, he is wrong in assuming that Adolf Hitler believed in the Old Gods of the North: he did not, but kept referring to Providence (*Vorsehung*), like a deist.

Yours sincerely,
MANUEL SARKISYANZ.

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The Editor,
Journal of Southeast Asian History,
Department of History,
University of Singapore,
Singapore,

Dear Sir,

Perhaps you would permit me a few comments on Professor Syed Hussein's review of my monograph *The Gift addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet* (JSEAH vol. 9 No. 1). Not because I have anything but appreciation of the ways he suggests in which the philological study of a text may be deepened, and made of greater sociological relevance — something close to my heart, but because some of the points he raises appear to derive from a misunderstanding of what I actually wrote.

I am aware that 'encroaching' per se is not an analytic term, though doubtless it could be so defined as to have heuristic significance. However I used it merely as a general term describing one aspect of the fortunes of Islam in Java in a manner in which I imagined that no-one could take exception; for the Islamisation of Java is a process which demands and can not receive the discriminating analysis it deserves until more texts of the type as the *Tuhfa* have been edited and studied. Nevertheless I see no harm in taking such a generalisation as a point of departure, unless Professor Syed Hussein feels that 'all generalisations are without value except this one.'

My point is, however, that Professor Syed Hussein in suggesting that I regarded the Javanese *Tuhfa* as exemplifying the 'encroachment' of Javanism, has attributed to me a view precisely opposite to the one I expressed. For indeed, I thought I had made it abundantly clear that I regarded the *Tuhfa* as a genuinely Islamic document, resisting the encroachments of Javanism, and subordinating Javanese concepts and terms to the concerns of Islam in a manner analogous to the early Muslim use of the word Allah. Another reviewer has taken me to task for just this view.

As to the career of its author I wonder if it is possible to draw a line between 'speculation' on the one hand, and a 'modestly reasonable suggestion' on the other? What else can one do when the work is anonymous, and criteria which would serve to identify an author are not available? If a Javanese author says 'he does not know the language' he is uttering a conventional phrase. Even Mpu Tantular, the author of the great Old Javanese Kekawin Sutasoma, said as much in his dedication to this work. Sometimes

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it might be a worthwhile exercise to speculate awhile about the meaning of speculation.

It is to be regretted that when Professor Syed Hussein takes me to task for carelessness in statistical extrapolation, he seems again to have misunderstood my words on p. 11 'Thus in Mecca he ('Abd al-Ra'ūf) . . . was a teacher to hundreds if not thousands of Indonesians.' Nowhere did I suggest that hundreds if not thousands of Indonesians came to Mecca every year or that these numbers were resident in Mecca during any one year. My only suggestion (speculation?) was that during his nineteen years in Mecca he could reasonably have been expected to have met a number of pilgrims and students of this order of magnitude.

To come to Professor Syed Hussein's last point, it is true that I did not use the term 'status of the text'. In truth, I do not think this can be defined with any certainty, although a wider and deeper study of related Javanese material may turn out to be suggestive. But the discussion I devoted to relation of the basic Ms to other Javanese versions of the work, the identification of quotations from Malay works, my remarks concerning Malayisms, the suggestion of other Javanese sources yet to be discovered, and above all the inclusion of an edition and English translation of the 17th Century Arabic *Tuhfa* from which the Javanese version is ultimately derived, even if not constituting an exhaustive enquiry, should be sufficient to preserve the reader from misunderstandings.

On page 3 of my introduction I included a postscript, noting that the work was completed in broad outline in 1960 (thus too early to benefit fully from the reviewer's contributions), and that in 1964 I could see 'many ways in which it could be improved', but that I entertained the hope that 'at least the texts published would have some enduring value.' It may well be that Professor Syed Hussein regards this postscript inadequate as an extenuation for the deficiencies of the work, of which I am even more aware now than I was in 1964. It would have been generous, however, had he mentioned it.

Yours faithfully,
A. H. JOHNS

Journal of Southeast Asian History
University of Singapore

Dear Sir,

Allow me to clarify some points of my review of Dr. Johns' *The Gift addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet*. First let me once

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again express my appreciation for Dr. Johns' effort to translate the text. I have made this clear in my review and I had expressed the hope that Dr. Johns would benefit us with more such attempts. If Dr. Johns obtained the impression that I had not been sufficiently generous in my appreciation may I here correct that impression.

My criticism had confined itself to the introduction and I had appeared somewhat severe, thereby giving the impression that I had not been sufficiently generous. However, the value of the translation as a whole should not be minimized by such a criticism since what was criticized did not affect the value of the translation. I am not holding Dr. Johns responsible for not giving us all the answers. Neither did I question his frankness and objectivity, nor his recourse to speculation when it became elucidative and helpful to recognize new problems and explanation. But I do object to a string of speculations which bring us back to where we start.

I may furnish one instance from page 23 of his book. This I have to present in summary form. (a) It is impossible to be certain on the present available version. (b) More than one earlier versions possible. (c) More than one eclectic Malay or Javanese versions of certain sections of the Arab *Tuhfa* possible. (d) That the translation could have been derived from these versions. (e) That the nucleus of the translation was in existence in the 2nd half of the 18th century. (f) That the Arabic *Tuhfa* must have been known in Java at least in the 17th century.

Considering the uncertainty surrounding the text and the identity of its author, and the probability of other versions, Dr. Johns suggested the following conclusion: "Amid them all, this version of the *Tuhfa* presented clearly and persuasively to the Javanese the basic minimum of Islamic practice and in so doing, furnished yet one more example of the devoted work of the Sufi brotherhoods, extending the sway of Islam and adding depth to its teachings." (p. 20) My question is, 'How could Dr. Johns conclude that the translated Javanese version presented the basic minimum of Islamic practice, when there could be earlier or other versions not yet discovered that present even less Islamic practice than the translated text which Dr. Johns had already decided as the minimum?' This is the kind of speculation which deserves criticism, a speculation which Dr. Johns himself contradicted since he made it clear by implication that there was no basis for comparison as no other possible and probable existent versions have yet been discovered.

I am sure that Dr. Johns will appreciate my inability to pass over such a conclusion as it judged definitely on certain aspects of the text pertaining to its nature. Though the intention might be

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speculative, it has appeared in the form of a definite judgment. I hope Dr. Johns will agree with me that if I were to object to such a speculation, it is not an attempt to demand more than what can reasonably be expected from a researcher in his position. The task which Dr. Johns has attempted is indeed difficult and no one is more appreciative than I am of his effort. Realizing the difficulties involved I would be the last to pick on truisitic points of criticism. I am also very appreciative of Dr. Johns empathy and consideration of the religious and cultural framework of his theme, devoid of bias and theoretical compulsion. This is the reason why we can all look forward to more such contribution from Dr. Johns.

My main object here is not to answer all the points raised in Dr. Johns' reply to my review but only the one on speculation. I accept his reply entirely and my review should be reconsidered in the light of Dr. Johns' reply, particularly the part on the pilgrims' statistic.

Yours faithfully,
SYED HUSSEIN ALATAS.