

SEEDS OF PROGRESS — An Agricultural Scientist in Southeast Asia

By L.R. HUMPHREYS. Published by the Centre for the Study of Australia-Asia Relations, Faculty of Asian and International Studies, Griffith University, 1994. 69 pp. Price A\$10 + A\$2 Postage. ISBN 0 86857 575 5.

This contribution is one in the "Australians in Asia" series (No 12) published by the Centre for the Study of Australia-Asia Relations of Griffith University. The series has as its main purpose the recording of the experiences of some of those Australians who "discovered" Asia during and in the two decades after World War II. In that respect, this contribution is an exception, in that it covers the period 1967–1992. The countries discussed by Prof. Humphreys are Laos (1967–1975), Indonesia (1970–1982), and Thailand (1970–1992).

In terms of "the recording of experiences", there are several themes that are interwoven throughout the book:

- * the beauty of the Asian countryside and the pervasive presence of its religions and history;
- * cultural differences between Asia and Australia both at the personal and administrative level;
- * means of enhancing the lifestyle of disadvantaged communities;
- * agricultural improvements mainly in livestock achieved in these countries by Prof. Humphreys and his University colleagues; and
- * the effectiveness or otherwise of aid donors in contributing to regional advancement.

The basis of good science is observation. Prof. Humphreys exhibits his excellent observational powers in a very positive, sensitive and picturesque manner in describing the beauty he saw in

the Asian countryside. His obvious fondness for the people shines through as does his profound respect for their religions.

I found minor irritations in the occasional use of an ethnic word without a corresponding English translation, or obscure uses for English words e.g. 'essayed' for 'attempt'; or obscure words 'concatenation of circumstances'. However to me the descriptive passages of the countries and their peoples were by far the best aspect of the book.

The other themes I believe were and are of critical interest to the audience to which *Tropical Grasslands* is directed. They are especially topical for Universities, CSIRO and Government Departments, and private enterprise dealing and trading with Asia. Today, especially outside the agricultural sphere, there is much debate about the place of Australian Agricultural Foreign Aid.

Questions such as:

- * Did/does it provide effective humanitarian assistance to disadvantaged groups?
- * Did it deliver useful technical expertise or was it largely irrelevant?
- * Did it reduce the competitive advantage of Australian primary producers in the region and outside it?

are constantly raised. At best this contribution provides a most superficial discussion of these topics. Given Prof. Humphreys' well acknowledged scholarship, I hope he can be persuaded to treat the basic themes of this work in much greater detail in a subsequent publication. The topics certainly merit it.

P.N. Thurbon