



THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

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**New Book Explores Historical, Cultural, and Institutional Factors
Affecting Management of Tropical Grasslands**

Southeast Asian Grasslands: Understanding a Vernacular Landscape

Edited by Michael R. Dove

Southeast Asian Grasslands: Understanding a Vernacular Landscape is a masterful compilation and synthesis of studies on the anthropogenic grasslands of the region, spanning more than 50 years. The new publication pulls the disparate strains of this literature together, identifies common insights and themes, and examines the way that views of grassland have evolved—an important contribution to the understanding of the relationship between society and the environment. The book is published by The New York Botanical Garden Press.

The roots of contemporary views of grasslands extend back into the colonial administrations of the 19th century and, in particular, to their concern for estate crop production and their biases against extensive subsistence agriculture. Disagreements over the interpretation and management of grasslands have in fact dominated their management for a century and a half, yet research on tropical grasslands has focused and continues to focus largely on their biophysical dimensions.

The purpose of this volume is to examine this pattern of conflicted intellectual and developmental engagement with grasslands, based on canonical studies from the past half-century on Southeast Asia, which has some of the most extensive and most intensely debated grasslands in the world. These studies reveal that the evidence to understand the dynamics of these grasslands has long been available, but it has generally had little or no impact on grassland policy. Indeed, they demonstrate that policy regarding the region's grasslands has been dominated for a century and more by a persistent set of beliefs that are divorced from everyday reality. The perspective afforded by the studies in this volume encourages us to think not just about environmental problems, but also about the sociology of the science and policy that addresses such problems.

Chuck Peters, a tropical forest ecologist at The New York Botanical Garden who has worked in Southeast Asia, comments, "This is more than just a book of collected readings; it is about big questions. Big questions like, what is man's relationship to nature? or, what is natural and what is managed? or, what happens when things appear at first glance to be one thing, yet, on closer analysis, turn out to be something altogether different? Of perhaps greatest relevance to current events, the book nicely deconstructs how societal concerns and political motives can lead "objective" scientists to the totally wrong conclusion. In Dove's capable hands, grasses become a metaphor for the entire people-and-plant interface. There are many new ideas to take away from this volume."

About the Book's Editor

Michael R. Dove earned his Ph.D. in anthropology at Stanford University. He is the Margaret K. Musser Professor of Social Ecology, Professor of Anthropology, Curator of Anthropology in the Peabody Museum, and Co-coordinator of the joint doctoral degree program between the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and the Anthropology Department at Yale University. His research focuses on the environmental relations of local communities in less-developed countries, especially in South and

Southeast Asia. His most recent books are *Conserving Nature in Culture: Case Studies from Southeast Asia* (co-edited with P. Sajise and A. Doolittle, Yale Southeast Asia Program) and *Environmental Anthropology: A Historical Reader* (co-edited with C. Carpenter, Wiley-Blackwell).

About The New York Botanical Garden Press

The New York Botanical Garden Press (www.nybgpress.org) has one of the largest publishing programs of any independent botanical garden in the world and provides a means for communication of research carried out by scientists at The New York Botanical Garden and elsewhere. Begun in 1896, the program focuses on advances in knowledge about the classification, utilization, and conservation of plant life.

Contributions from The New York Botanical Garden is a venue for the publication of classical works in botany that are rare, out-of-print, translations, or annotated bibliographies. Adopting a broad definition of the field of systematic botany, the *Contributions* series aims to further the advancement of botany by making these materials available.

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Orders can also be placed with:

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The New York Botanical Garden is a museum of plants located at Bronx River Parkway (Exit 7W) and Fordham Road. It is easy to reach by Metro-North Railroad or subway. For more information, please call 718.817.8700 or visit our Web site at www.nybg.org

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