In the wake of the Asian financial meltdown, numerous analysts focused on the lack of regulation and transparency as factors precipitating the 1997 crisis. Partly as a result of pressure from international financial institutions, countries have started to improve the regulatory frameworks in which their public finances operate. Christophe Antons’ book Madrigals, Mandarins and Budgetary Politics: Rule of Law in East and Southeast Asia? brings together a variety of perspectives from legal scholars on the reforms now underway. Traditional Asian understandings of law as an instrument of state power notwithstanding, do we see signs of a greater regional importance attached to the rule of law?

By William Visser ‘t Hooft

In what is perhaps the most obvious example of law as an instrument of state power, the MOF is the centre of government bureaucracies responsible for understanding law and development in East and Asia and the place of the rule of law in various East Asian countries. Differences and similarities between country institutions are examined, as are practical understandings that can be expected to resist pressures to reform. For example, government bureaucracies responsible for implementing new commercial laws will be hesitant to give up their power to courts and lawyers.

The book’s main merit lies in its diversity and its emphasis on factors other than cultural ones. Although cultural factors are not to be neglected, recent socio-legal research points to the fact that institutional and procedural aspects of national legal systems matter and may be resistant to transna- 
tional harmonization.<

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ese Law.

Dr Richard Boyd is Reader in Japanese Politics at the Department of Japanese and Korean Studies, Leiden University. His recent work has been on the politics of reform and the politics of economic development in Latin America and East Asia. He is currently joint responsible for an international research project on the state in Asia.

By Richard Boyd

This highly readable collection of 14 different papers is the result of an IIAS workshop held in January 1998. In examining prospects for legal reform in Asia, the book addresses diverse fields of commercial law: intellectual property law, competition law, financial market regulation, among others. The book is divided into five parts. In the first theoretical section, the authors focus on perceptions of the rule of law in economic development. Part two focuses on Japan as a model for law and development in East Asia and specifically treats the influence of administrative decision-making on Japanese commercial law. Harald Baum, critical of the simple ‘West vs. Asia’ mental framework, explores important forces of change at work in Japan. In particular, strong bureaucrati- 

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