

## **Biographical Notes**

### **Ronald David Hill (24 August 1935 -) - Academic**

Historian-geographer Ronald David Hill was born and raised in New Zealand. Both his grandfathers were agriculturalists, and stories of them and their work made a lasting impression on Hill.<sup>1</sup>

After completing his primary and secondary education, Hill entered the Victoria University College (now known as the Victoria University of Wellington) in 1954. He studied historical geography under Ray Watters, his former teacher in secondary school. Hill pursued his honours and MA degrees in the Geography Department. His MA dissertation was on the earliest phase of European agricultural settlement in the Wairarapa district of New Zealand.<sup>2</sup>

At the University, Hill was a student of Keith Buchanan, who directed his students toward research in what was then referred to as the “Third World”, and Donald McKenzie who found him a post at the University of Singapore. In 1962, Hill joined the Department of Geography at the University of Singapore, where he also embarked on his doctoral studies.<sup>3</sup>

Supervised by Dr Ooi Jin Bee, Hill’s PhD research was on rice-farming in the north-eastern part of Malaya. His dissertation was later published as *Rice in Malaya: a study in historical geography* (first published in 1977).<sup>4</sup> The publication was seen as pioneering work that brought together a wide range of sources together with Hill’s fieldwork and experience on the cultivation and cultivators of rice in Malaya.<sup>5</sup>

In 1973, Hill moved to the University of Hong Kong to take up a position at the Department of Geography.<sup>6</sup> Hill continued to research different aspects of Malaysian agriculture and published *Agriculture in the Malaysian Region* in 1982. By the 1980s, Hill was an authority on aspects of agriculture in Malaysia.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, Hill also researched and wrote about the geography of Southeast Asia in general. His publications included *South-East Asia: a systematic geography* (1979) and *Southeast Asia: people, land and economy* (2002).

Hill would spend the rest of his academic career at the University of Hong Kong. In the year 2000, he was an honorary professor in the Department of History and Department of Ecology and Biodiversity at the University of Hong Kong.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hill, R. D. *Rice in Malaya: a study in historical geography*, Singapore: NUS Press (2011), p. xix.

<sup>2</sup> Hill, *Rice in Malaya*, p. xix.

<sup>3</sup> Hill, *Rice in Malaya*, p. xix; “Making of rice economy in KL”, *Business Times*, 13 Feb 1978.

<sup>4</sup> Hill, *Rice in Malaya*, p. xix; “Making of rice economy in KL”, *Business Times*, 13 Feb 1978.

<sup>5</sup> Hill, R. D. *Rice in Malaya: a study in historical geography*, Oxford University Press (1977), book jacket.

<sup>6</sup> Hill, *Rice in Malaya*, p. xx.

<sup>7</sup> Stott, Philip, “Review: Agriculture in the Malaysian region by R.D. Hill”, *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 149, No. 3 (Nov. 1983), p. 361.

<sup>8</sup> Hill, R. D., *Southeast Asia: People, land and economy*, Allen & Unwin (2002), back cover; “People”, *Department of History, The University of Hong Kong website* (2018), retrieved from [https://www.history.hku.hk/staff\\_honorary.html](https://www.history.hku.hk/staff_honorary.html)