

a source of new insights. The author quotes the *Bangkok Post* so often that this newspaper seems to be his primary source of information. Not even *The Nation* gets much of a look-in, let alone the Thai-language press, which the author ignores completely. The book is primarily an extended, poorly edited literature review that compiles secondary sources in a mostly uncritical format. It would seem that very little if any work has been done in transforming this text from its original format, a PhD dissertation submitted to the International Christian College in Glasgow, into a monograph. The publisher, Routledge, certainly needs to pull its socks up and make sure that raw, error-strewn texts such as this are subjected to at least a modicum of professionally competent editing.

Peter Jackson

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Duncan McCargo, ed., *Rethinking Thailand's Southern Violence*. Singapore, National University of Singapore Press, 2007, 225 pp.

One of the challenges in publishing academic studies on violent contemporary conflicts is how well what one has written stands the test of time, since by its very dynamic nature a situation of violent conflict can rapidly change. Moreover, violent conflict presents some extreme methodological problems for academic inquiry: accessing the conflict zone for sufficient periods required to gather usable data; being able to sift through the misinformation circulating in the propaganda war; conditions of martial law; and even the ability to obtain information from those involved in the conflict, who, out of an understandable desire to protect themselves, may not be willing to offer information, or else the information they offer may out of necessity be highly partisan or deliberately designed to misinform.

The case of the conflict in southern Thailand, currently Southeast Asia's most violent, is a particularly acute example of this challenge. To the problems stated above can be added the difficulties that researchers face coming to terms with the cultural and linguistic differences of the local population, and even the existence of Thailand's draconian *lèse majesté* law, which prevents any critical discussion of matters relating to the monarchy, which undeniably has taken a close interest in the situation in the south. Perhaps it is for all of these

reasons that, as has often been pointed out, the violence in southern Thailand is one of the “murkiest”, most difficult to understand conflicts in the region, if not the world, today.

*Rethinking Thailand's Southern Violence* thus comes as a welcome attempt to address these challenges. The book is an updated version of a collection of essays that were first published in a special issue of the journal *Critical Asian Studies* in March 2006, based on papers presented at a workshop held in Pattani in February 2005. The stated aim of the volume is to help provide some answers to the question, “what lies behind the violence in the Thai South” (p. 3). Written at a time when the international “war on terror” was still being vigorously pursued and explanatory frameworks based on studies of international terrorism had considerable influence on the way the violence in the south was represented in the media and in much scholarship, the essays in this book aim to “challenge the reader to question conventional categories and lazy assumptions” such as “the Thai state”, “militant groups”, “Muslim communities” and “security agencies” (pp. 8–9). The book’s principal message is that the answer to the question of the reasons for the violence lies in understanding Thailand’s – and the southern region’s – political and social context. Having stated an overly modest claim of making a “small start” in the direction of finding answers to the question above, the book has clearly succeeded.

*Rethinking Thailand's Southern Violence* is a tightly edited collection

of seven essays written by some of the most prominent Thai and international scholars working on the conflict in southern Thailand. One of the book’s strengths is that the broad range of issues covered by the essays, including the politics of monuments in the south (Chaiwat Satha-Anand); the relationship between the violence in southern Thailand and the political struggle between Thaksin and “network monarchy” (Duncan McCargo); the Thaksin government’s “hawkish” response to the violence (Ukrist Pathamanand); socio-economic factors behind the violence (Srisompob Jitipiromsri with Panyasak Sobhonvasu); the role of “jihadism” and Islamist ideology (Wattana Sugunnasil); local perceptions of the conflict (May Tan-Mullins); and the representation of the conflict in the terrorism studies literature (Michael K. Connors). The result is a well-rounded perspective on the reasons for the conflict. One can always make criticisms, not always fairly, of what or who else might have been included in an edited volume; in this case one feels that a “Patani Malay” voice may have given the collection an additional important point of view.

The book will be particularly noted for its inclusion of the second half of McCargo’s famous and controversial “network monarchy” thesis – the first half, “Network monarchy and legitimacy crises in Thailand”, was published in a 2005 issue of the journal, *The Pacific Review*, and ought to be read in conjunction with the essay in this volume. McCargo’s essays count as

the most novel contribution to the now voluminous scholarly literature on the outbreak of violence in the south since 2004. "Network monarchy" is the term he uses to refer to "the dominant mode of governance used in Thailand since 1980", in which "the monarchy operates through proxies led by former prime minister and Privy Council President Prem Tinsulanond". According to McCargo, Thaksin aimed to displace network monarchy governance with a more centralized form of political control headed by the Prime Minister himself. Significantly, the political management of the south since the early 1980s was centred on a "governance network" headed by Prem, himself a southerner and a key figure in the suppression of the communist insurgency in the 1970s and 1980s. The violence in the south, a highly sensitive and complex part of the country, given its ethnic and religious mix, lucrative trade in smuggled goods, and entrenched interests of the military, can thus be viewed as the main battlefield in Thaksin's attempt to "wrest control" of Thailand from "network monarchy" (pp. 39–67).

Overshadowing most of the essays in this volume is the figure of Thaksin, and his government's widely criticized handling of the conflict. Following the overthrow of Thaksin by a royalist coup on 19 September 2006 it was expected by numerous professional observers, including many academics, that the situation in the south would improve, given that supposedly the main problem, i.e. Thaksin, was now gone. The

royalist regime installed after the coup made much of this expectation, with the newly appointed Prime Minister and former Privy Counselor Gen. Surayudh Chulanond making a highly publicized apology to the local Muslim community for the previous government's handling of the conflict. In fact, the conflict intensified following the coup, with the number of violent incidents, deaths and injuries significantly jumping. So the natural question is to ask why. It is tempting also to ask whether the criticism of Thaksin's handling of a severe national security issue in the south, especially by influential figures allied with or part of McCargo's "network monarchy", was part of a coordinated movement to discredit Thaksin with the eventual aim of overthrowing his government.

This collection of essays will remain essential reading for scholars and others who seek to examine how the conflict broke out. Has it stood the test of time? The limitation of understanding the conflict as merely a local version of an international terrorist struggle is now widely accepted. Subsequent studies of local factors behind the conflict add to, but do not in general contradict, the main theme of the essays in this volume. Yet if we accept McCargo's argument of another struggle, between "network monarchy" and forces loyal to Thaksin, which continues through the time of writing this review (late 2007), the volume poses perhaps the biggest question which has yet to be answered: to what extent does this conflict con-

tinue to cloud our understanding of Thailand's southern violence?

An eagerly awaited monograph on the situation in the south is currently being prepared by the editor of the volume under review, Duncan McCargo, based on his own fieldwork of a year in the region. That book may answer this and other unanswered questions thrown up by this volume.

Patrick Jory

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Maurizio Peleggi, *Thailand: The Worldly Kingdom*. Singapore, Talisman Publishing, 2007, 256 pp.

*Thailand: the Worldly Kingdom* should be welcomed by students and general English-speaking readers with strong scholarly or even mundane interest in the country's modern history. It is a fresh and up-to-date reinterpretation of this history. Maurizio Peleggi pieces together chains of events and stories of Thailand's nation-building project in the past two centuries. He unveils the underlying fact that the complex historical processes that make Thailand 'a worldly kingdom' are essentially global. The emergence of Thailand is indeed closely tied with international connection, exposure, influence, and negotiation. A history of Thailand, as well as other modern nation-states, would be incomplete if written with a sole focus on local processes and a series of famous heroic contributions of 'great men'. Peleggi argues that Thailand as a modern nation-state has come into existence through reaction with the world. Civilization and globalization, the two most encompassing forces that have powerfully reshaped the world, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, not only define Thailand's state formation and its nationhood, but also play a very important role in determining the Thai identity, or Thainess. For him, such identity is 'a syncretic product', resulting from the 'translation, assimilation, and adaptation of exogenous ideas, practices and