

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

materials to the indigenous socio-cultural terrain.' (p.21)

Peleggi's approach to understanding Thailand's modern history, by his own confession here, is 'unorthodox' (p.8). It is a trendy global history approach, which resituates Thailand in the wider process of the emergence of the modern world. In employing this approach, Peleggi intends to move away from at least three existing historiographical conventions, namely, (1) recounting historical actors and events in chronological or linear framework; (2) describing chains of historical events from a 'from-above' perspective or through agencies of great men, e.g., kings, noblemen, and the elite; and (3) narrating historical changes from the popular or 'from-below' perspective of commoners. Putting this book into the particular context of Thai and Southeast Asian historiographies, he apparently wishes to demystify the 'exceptionality of Thai nation building' (p.8) by interjecting an alternative view of claims, such as Thailand never having been a colonized country, or Thailand's emergence of the modern nation state owing a great deal to modernizing initiatives launched by wise and powerful modernizers. These views he considers rather overrated, if not patriotically biased. There is no such exceptional or uniquely Thai path that gave birth to the Thai modern nationhood, because Thailand has been part of a common global process and shared cultural experience of modernity with her Southeast Asian neighbours and most

countries around the globe in the past two hundred years.

While the scholarly success and impacts of Peleggi's attempt to write a Thai edition of global history remain to be seen, his move is admirably creative and experimental. The fundamental part of Peleggi's approach is an analytical insight of both archaic and modern global processes which have created 'a diffuse geo-cultural space' (p.11). The historical process and imagination are fuelled by diffusion, interaction, adaptation, and localization of layers of geo-cultural spaces, such as Indic, Sinic, European, American, Theravada Buddhist, and indigenous geo-cultural terrains. Peleggi explores actions and reactions, continuities and discontinuities within and/or between these geo-cultural spaces as his major themes of modern Thai history. Instead of arranging the domain of modern Thai history into periods, reigns, or centres of political power, he opts for the thematic treatment. Included are the themes of landscapes, boundaries, institutions, ideologies, modernities, mnemonic sites, and others. These themes make up the book's seven chapters, highlighting 'the relationship of the forces constitutive of [sic] the Thai nation-state to the constellation of phenomena—from imperialism to nationalism, from urbanization to the diffusion of mass media, from the institutionalization of religion to the politicization of youth' (p.8). These themes are carefully chosen and extracted from the vast quantity of historical sources.

Peleggi's thematic treatment of mod-

ern Thai history is an answer to existing volumes, particularly Keyes (1987), Wyatt (1982), Pasuk Pongphaichit and Chris Baker (2000), and Scot Barmé (2006). Like these works, Peleggi's book is written for general readership. His smooth prose is readily accessible. He weaves together selective events and presents them in an easy-to-grasp manner. However, Peleggi's book is different from the rest with its global approach and insistent arguments pertinent to the global process. It stands sharply apart from Keyes' insistence on Buddhist fundamental contributions to, and Wyatt's emphasis on agency of kings and noblemen in, the making of the modern Thai nation state. It is different from Pasuk and Baker's political-economic focus. It also refuses exclusively to explore the roles of commoners or popular media in the historical process, methodological and theoretical stances adopted by Barmé.

There are some limitations and weaknesses in *Thailand: the Worldly Kingdom*. First, Peleggi's emphasis on civilization and globalization leads to an unavoidable and too intensive analysis of external influences. The global version of Thai history which Peleggi presents is not global enough. There are few discussions on Siamese civilization and globalization from European or American perspectives. Second, a global history implies concentrations on global contacts, which are most likely represented by Bangkok and its political leaders, the cosmopolitan elite and wealthy tycoons. People liv-

ing in the geo-cultural spaces beyond or with less exposure to globalization are methodologically neglected. Third, thematic analysis, while providing some comprehensive picture of the bounded subject, is selective rather than intensive or exhaustive by nature. This approach opens itself to the criticism of what is a historical theme and how a theme can be identified out of some complex, disorderly and disjointed events or against the actors' complicated motivations. A theme usually carries plural and multi-vocal contents, therefore, and could be either overlapping or repetitive.

Finally, the book contains too many minor factual and spelling errors. The decision to transliterate all personal names, especially names of kings, princes and other public figures, is rather anti-conventional and problematic. The transcription of Thai terms does not strictly follow the rules set forward by the Royal Institute. Inconsistencies or misspellings of Romanized Thai words are numerous throughout the book. e.g., *thansamai* or *samai mai*, not *than samaimai* (p.10), *san chao* or *hing phi* for spirit's shrine, not *ban phi* (p.50), names of folk dance genres in the North and Northeast (p.51), *sao praphet song*, not *sao praphet ying* (p.89), or *Chao-praya*, not *Chaophrya* (p.189). Some English translations of Thai terms are rather awkward, e.g., *kan phatthana*, not *phatthana* for development (p. 11, 17), *phum panya thongthin*, not *phum panya* for local knowledge or native wisdom (p.21). There are many factual errors: the government offered a general amnesty

to the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in 1979, not 1980 (p.18), Puey Ungphakorn was a one-time governor, not director, of the Bank of Thailand (p. 73), a location for a new national capital proposed by Phibun was Phetchabun, not Phetchaburi (p. 124), the stronghold of the Communist Party of Thailand in Isan covered not only Sakhon Nakhon, but many neighboring provinces in the northeastern part of the region – indeed, the first armed fight between a CPT unit and the government force took place in Nakae district, Nakhon Phanom (p. 132) – or making Thao Suranari the wife of Nakhon Ratchasima's governor rather than deputy governor (p.187). There are also many misspellings and inaccuracies in the bibliography.

Peleggi's book may look too general for serious students of Thai and South-east Asian history, but his global history approach should spark some interesting debates in the field. Some of his insightful views and brave treatments of the global formation of modern Thai nation-state and identity should offset the factual errors and shortcomings appearing in the book. *Thailand: the Worldly Kingdom* is the most up-to-date reader on the introductory history of modern Thailand.

Pattana Kitiarsa

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Don McCaskill, Prasit Leepreecha, and He Shaoying, eds., *Living in a Globalized World: Ethnic Minorities in the Greater Mekong Subregion*. Chiang Mai, Mekong Press, 2008, pb, xi+374 pp., Bt 895.

*Living in a Globalized World* is an indication of new times in the research and publication about the region, both in its focus on China and mainland Southeast Asia, and in the collaboration among scholars from Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and China. This is a new and positive development, and hopefully indicates a trend of thinking past national boundaries. The nicely designed cover of the book shows (someone dressed as) an ethnic minority woman talking on a cellphone and simultaneously working on a laptop computer. She has an ipod, but it is unplugged because she is already on the phone and the internet. The picture draws on a stereotypical contrast between tradition and modernity, the local worlds of ethnic minorities and the global realities that they are being pulled into

The introductory chapter, written by the three editors, relates some of the features of globalization, such as an increasing interconnectedness that may undermine the ties of culture and place, and gives an overview of national integration policies in the four countries. The bulk of this chapter is concerned with the results of surveys in Dai, Hmong, and Mien study villages. The findings persistently make statements in relation to ethnicity, such as that “77