

time of greater simplicity in both human relations and the possessions aspired to.

So, celebrating Turton with this collection of papers recognizes his valuable contribution to Thai studies and also stimulates the reader to consider how events over recent decades have paved the way for the challenges the country now faces. Without doubt, Turton has enhanced scholarly understanding of a wide variety of “human” issues particularly from an anthropological perspective. What happens next is anyone’s guess, but at least we may be better prepared to live (and die) with it.

Marco Roncarati

---

*Through the Eyes of the King: The Travels of King Chulalongkorn To Malaya* by P. LIM PUI HUEN (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2009). ISBN 978 981 2307 73 6 (hard)

Every journey can be reported in a narrative that may include pictures; in particular are the journeys of kings and rulers so recorded. Such a narrative of a journey is not necessarily a description of what the traveler has seen or whom he or she has met—describing the places visited and the people met often inspires the narrator to introduce additional evocations of places and faces. Elaborations of the differences between the hometown and the visited places in terms of daily life and culture are a good example of such additions; thoughts about the loved ones left behind and reflections on the homeland are another. Concurrently, narratives of journeys can be presented in various genres or in a combination of genres: memoirs, letters, travelogues, novels or poetry, for example. They can focus on a wide variety of themes beyond the theme of travel alone: tourism, environment, multiculturalism or nationalism. Moreover, the one who made the journey is not necessarily the narrator—it could be anyone who, for a wide variety of reasons, is interested in the journey: a contemporary, an eyewitness or participant the narrator could be, but he or she could also be a later scholar or writer who was not “there” but feels entitled to create or reconstruct a retrospective narrative. Inevitably such a narrative tells the

journey from a faraway perspective, a distant vision that will not concur with the vision the travelers themselves had of the importance and relevance of their experiences.

Narratives of journeys, usually chronologically organized texts about one event after the other, easily become uninteresting for readers who were not present; pictures could be used to make them more attractive, if only to provide the words about events and meetings with the wider context in which they took place, neither articulated nor described. And how often does it not happen that looking at these pictures takes precedence over reading the words of these illustrated journey reports? Perhaps needless to point out, these illustrations can be a dangerous complement: all too often they do not exactly support or refer to the events and meetings narrated. Pictures as often distort a narrative of a journey as they illuminate it, circling as they do around the question of who sees what and when?

Firstly, pictures are made by a photographer, a person with a necessarily personal vision, who will present events and meetings from his or her perspective, thus raising the question in how far that concurs with the views, atmosphere and emotions the travelers themselves had at the time the pictures were made. Obviously the differences in vision and experience can be considerable. Farmers, just one example, working in the rice fields may be presented in a picture as a peaceful event whereas to others those same working farmers may

tell a story of hardship and economic problems, registered and reported by someone else, or more or less silently recorded by the traveler in the journey's narrative to which such a picture of farmers is added.

Secondly, all too often pictures are images of people who expressly posed in being photographed, painted or drawn; what is effectively shown and seen are unnatural events, poses that do not match with the vision any narrator let alone the traveler might have of these same people,

Thirdly, compared to the infinite and indefinite number of events and meetings that can be described in a narrative of a journey, the number of pictures of a journey is necessarily limited. Not a single event described can be exhaustively depicted, no meeting totally portrayed. Such limitation holds even more urgently in the case of journeys that took place a longer time ago: the longer ago a journey took place, the fewer the pictures that would have been made and the harder they would be to find at a later date.

In short, a journey narrated in pictures, complementary or central to a narrative of words, needs a careful and adequate historical explication and justification of each image. Clearly, the more pictures of a journey that are available, the better, since each of them should be able to support the central narrative with a wider context. Conversely, where just a few pictures are available, the narrative suffers as a result. In the nineteenth century many events and meetings took place of which not many pictures

are available, and even fewer pictures are available of the various journeys made by kings and rulers. The words of the participants and observers of the journeys might be known and can be reported. The relatively few pictures made during those journeys cannot be repeated—and they should not be complemented with pictures made earlier or later but with great reservation and with lengthy explanations as they do not offer a vision of the very events and meetings of the journeys that are summarized in the narratives.

In Thailand, the journeys of King Chulalongkorn have been narrated in many ways, in many genres. Evidently, King Chulalongkorn repeated almost all his journeys both inside and outside his kingdom via his memoirs and his letters to His Majesty's family members and some high-ranking nobles. Moreover, the King's journeys were reported by his private secretary in official records and reports as well as by contemporary journalists and administrators in the Kingdom of Siam, in the Straits Settlements on the Malay Peninsula, in the Dutch East Indies, and in many states in Europe. Descriptions of His Majesty's journeys were repeated by following generations, in academic publications, in articles in newspapers, journals and magazines, in radio and TV programs, and, more recently, on Internet websites as well. In the spirit of so many other narratives about events and meetings during the King's reign, most of these repetitions of His Majesty's journeys tend to circle around the theme of royal nationalism.

Circling around that very same theme, *Through the Eyes of the King: The Travels of King Chulalongkorn To Malaya*, offers contemporary readers yet another narrative of some of the journeys King Chulalongkorn made to what is now called Malaysia. To the narrative about these journeys a great number of often intriguing and rich pictures and other illustrations have been added, treasured in various collections in libraries and archives in Southeast Asia.

It would be all too easy to say that these pictures complement the rather sketchy tale of the events and meetings in which the monarch engaged during these historical journeys. Yet, the images on many pages are not connected to the descriptions of the King's experiences. The discrepancies will doubtless create confusion not only about the narrator's vision—is this really H. M. the King's?—of his journeys, but also about the reach of the monarch's experiences in the so-called Malay States in the south. The confusion is only further confirmed in the descriptions themselves: the narrative is not clear about the status of the Malay States and their relations with Siam and the British. It is an awkward stretch to connect the book's confusing presentation of descriptions and pictures with its title. *Through the Eyes of the King* remains, nonetheless, a fine picture book.

Kannikar Sartraproong

---