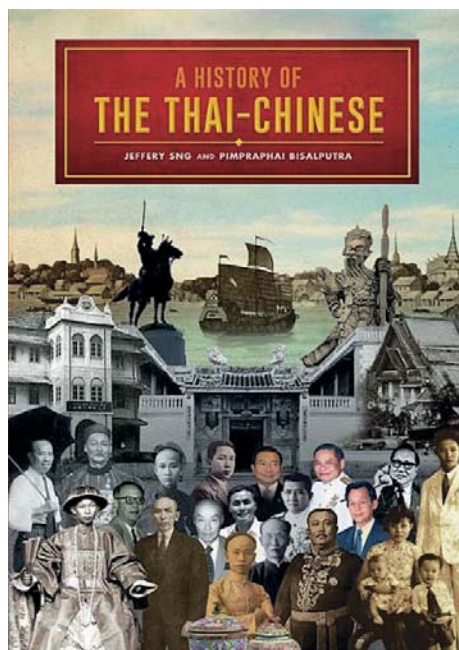


A History of the Thai-Chinese by Jeffery Sng and Pimpraphai Bisalputra (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2015.) ISBN: 978-981-4385-77-0. Bt1,295 / US\$39.00.



Despite numerous research data, supported by various governments and academic institutions, that at least up to the conclusion of the Second World War, Thailand was home to the largest ethnic Chinese population outside of the Chinese mainland, academic publications concerning the Chinese community in Thailand appear to be among the rarest in comparison with her ASEAN neighbors. It is indeed quite depressing to admit that, until very recently, nothing has been done that could even be considered at a comparable level to G. William Skinner's classic masterpiece, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, published nearly six decades ago, in 1957. Some even suggested that such a work could not be done for a whole host of reasons: because the Chinese have become so assimilated; because the Chinese in Thailand were, and remain, very

closely intertwined with the kingdom's ruling powers—including royalty, military, as well as the major political parties; or, because the situation in Thailand is just so unique that it is impossible to relate the history of the Chinese in Thailand with that of any of her neighbors.

A History of the Thai-Chinese by Jeffery Sng and Pimpraphai Bisalputra is awe-inspiring. This is a work that, at long last, has surpassed Skinner's *Chinese Society in Thailand* and has done so in a way that has opened a new horizon for the entire field of Chinese diaspora studies in Thailand. There are a few important innovative perspectives that the authors have employed in accomplishing this academic feat that are worth mentioning within the very limited space permissible.

First, and perhaps most daring, is the huge historical time span covered in this single-volume publication—from 14th century Ayutthaya to the present day. At first glance, one may think that the authors are simply following in the grand Skinnerian tradition, considering the fact that *Chinese Society in Thailand* goes back even further, to the Sukhothai period sometime in the 13th century. A big difference—that gives *A History of the Thai-Chinese* a significant advantage—is the fact that Bisalputra is one of the leading names in the history of the Ayutthaya period. Combined with Jeffery Sng's profound knowledge of and adept insight into Thai modern political history, the duo are able to create a masterpiece which transcends the traditional modern/pre-modern divide in historical periodization. Thus, readers can observe an almost flawless logic and teleological continuation from the history of the Thai-Chinese in the Ayutthaya era all the way up to the present day. The 14th century was included not simply as 'background

information,’ but as an essential starting point of the complex rhyme and reason of the 600-odd years of Thai-Chinese history presented in the book.

The authors’ attempt to shy away from the traditional ‘impact-response’ narrative, which tends to view the East as static and to recognize all forces of change as being driven by modernizing agents from the West, is not only noble, but enormously necessary for developing a more progressive and realistic perspective for the field of history in this area of the world. Of all histories, the history of the Thai-Chinese should not fall back into the imperialist fallacy that divides all forms of temporality in Asia into times before and after colonial modernization. For that matter, even from the perspective of local Thai historians, the history of the Chinese in Thailand should not even be narrated according to the dynastic divide of the late 18th century. This is because there is, and remains, a crucial continuation through family businesses and the extensive network of dialect and hometown associations of the Chinese across the South China Sea from the earliest days of Ayutthaya to the modern era.

Another novel aspect of *A History of the Thai-Chinese* lies in the fact that the authors have managed to amass a great deal of data and documents related to the history of Chinese families, clan associations, secret societies and all sorts of interesting socio-cultural networks of the Chinese in Thailand throughout the period under investigation. The history provided is therefore not only from the perspective of the state—which has long monopolized the production of historical records and documents in the field of Thai history—but also provides a complex and comprehensive view from the more personal side of family businesses and community legends.

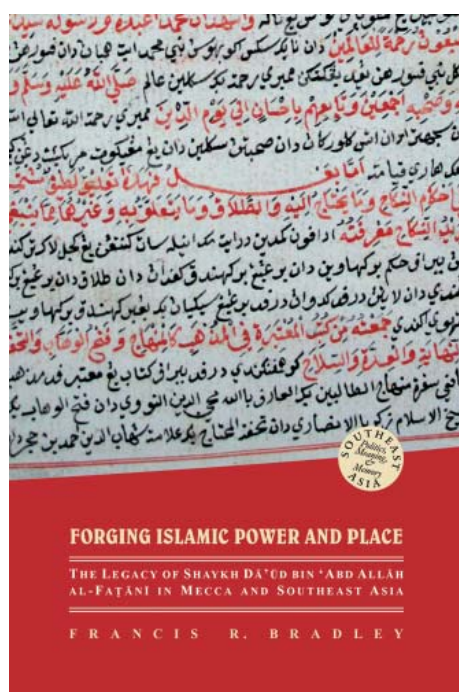
While *A History of the Thai-Chinese* is solidly grounded in rich and rare historical documentation, thanks to Bisalputra’s years of research and extensive family network, Sng greatly contributes to the volume through his enlightened transnational perspective on the history of the Chinese diaspora. This book is a rare exception to the tradition of writing the history of the Chinese overseas simply as an extension of either Chinese national history or the national history of the host nation—in this case, Thailand. The authors are well aware of the innate transnational nature of the Chinese in Thailand, and therefore, never attempt to limit the scope of the narrative to the national boundaries in the way that so many other pieces have previously. Perhaps most impressive is the fact that the book does not shy away from numerous controversies, and difficult political matters concerning the Chinese in Thai politics, especially in the modern period. Despite the tumultuous political atmosphere that has engulfed Thailand for the past decade, Sng and Bisalputra have managed to demonstrate that it is not impossible to discuss and analyze such sensitive matters in the pursuit of knowledge and enlightenment.

A History of the Thai-Chinese has managed to cross many thresholds and broken many boundaries. It is a study that bridges major divides in historical periodization—both dynastic divides from the Thai tradition and the modern/pre-modern divide in the grander scheme of Orientalist historical narrative. It investigates and recounts the history of the Chinese in Thailand from a truly transnational perspective—not minimizing diaspora history as simply an extension of national history. Perhaps most importantly, this tome has managed to break the monopoly of the state’s perspective on the history of a transnational minority community by diversifying historical sources to include

important aspects from family and business histories as well. In short, the authors have succeeded in revolutionizing the history of the Chinese in Thailand. At long last, a new classic to match Skinner's *Chinese Society in Thailand* has arrived!

Wasana Wongsurawat

Forging Islamic Power and Place: The Legacy of Shaykh Da'ud bin 'Abd Allah al-Fatani in Mecca and Southeast Asia by Francis R. Bradley (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015). ISBN: 978-0-8248-5161-3. US\$54.00



Patani Malay nationalism, like most nationalisms, holds certain things sacred: the Patani Malay language (including its written form, *Jawi*, or Malay written in a modified Arabic script), the memory of a glorious sultanate, its Islamic tradition with its *pondok* system of religious education, its many historical defeats at the hands of the Thai kingdom, its famous Kresik mosque, and its great historical personages. Of these, few are more renowned among Patani Malays than the prolific Islamic scholar, Shaykh Da'ud al-Fatani (1769-1847). Indeed, Shaykh Da'ud's reputation extends beyond Patani, which contributes to his popularity; his works are well known to Southeast Asian Muslim scholars. While scholars of Patani's history and its Islamic tradition duly mention the significance of Shaykh Da'ud and the "Patani school" of Islamic scholarship he helped found, very few

have actually closely examined this corpus of written work. Part of this oversight can be put down to the comparatively undeveloped state of studies of Patani, but part of the reason is that most of these writings have yet to be published and can only be accessed in manuscript form in the original *Jawi* script. It has taken an American scholar, Francis Bradley, to delve into this rich tradition of Patani Islamic scholarship and present the fullest account of Shaykh Da'ud's life, work and legacy that has yet been written.

Bradley has made the astonishing discovery of the existence of 1300 *Jawi* manuscripts produced by scholars of the former Patani sultanate, on such diverse topics as law, prayer, mysticism, poetry, Arabic grammar, Malay translations of Arabic literature and Patani Malay oral tradition (pp. 2-3). The manuscripts were found in libraries in Malaysia, the Netherlands, London, the United States and South Africa. According to Bradley, this represents "one of the largest collections ever assembled in the region",