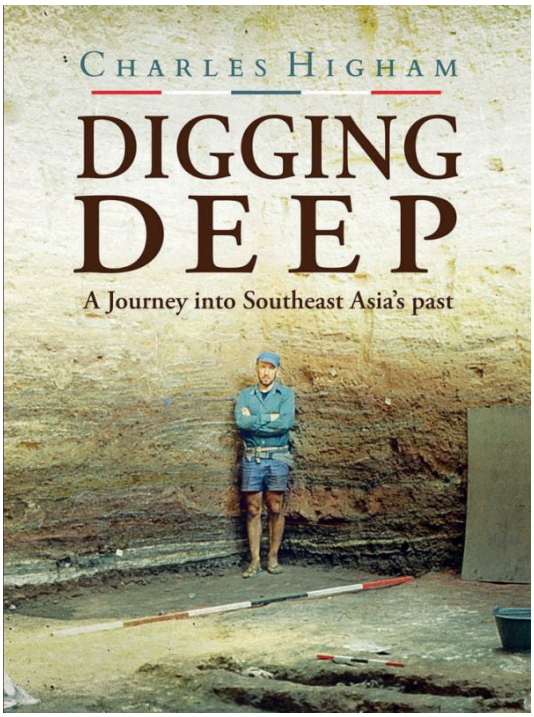
Charles Higham, *Digging Deep: A Journey into Southeast Asia's Past*, Bangkok: River Books, 2022, 256 pages, ฿850, ISBN 978-6164510586 (Paperback)



Digging Deep, the autobiography of *emeritus* professor Charles Higham, begins with a recollection of his first childhood home in Wimbledon, UK. This anecdote—perhaps intentionally—foreshadows a career specializing in the investigation of Southeast Asia's prehistoric settlements. The fourteen chapters roughly cover two aspects of Charles' life, the first part (Chapters 1 to 5) recounts his personal growth, educational trajectory, and sporting prowess, while the second part (Chapters 6 to 14) describes his extensive archeological experiences in Southeast Asia. The publishers should be commended for the inclusion of the numerous color photographs of key figures, field sites and the author's own personal evolution. The sheer volume of images adds nuance to a text that is unmistakably written in Charles's voice. Self-confident, exacting, and with dashes of humor and bite, the author's 242-page record presents the life of a "Constant Archeologist" who worked near-ceaselessly in dozens of countries beginning in the 1960s. More broadly, it is an often entertaining and honest report about what it is like to do archeology and highlights how it is often exhausting, dirty, and uncomfortable work, traits that are overshadowed by the more "glamorous" aspects of archeology in the public eye.

The specificity of Higham's memoir points to the collection of detailed field notes that together frame his role in establishing the baselines of mainland Southeast Asian prehistory. For those unfamiliar with its regional archeology, the turbulent political history throughout most of the 20th century greatly restricted the amount of local and international fieldwork in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar. Due to Thailand's unique geopolitical position, Anglophone archeologists including Higham were able to work almost continuously during this period and greatly expanded regional understanding of its early settlement history. In contrast to his mentors and contemporaries such as Gorman, Solheim, Glover and others, Higham focussed on transforming his exhaustive field experiences and regional knowledge into a series of books, such as *Early Cultures of Mainland Southeast Asia* (2003), which today remain the primary texts for teachers, students, and lay scholars interested in the subject. *Digging Deep* is essential metadata for these books, providing insights into the events that lead to

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selection of each site, the efforts to record excavations, as well as the mid-20th century European intellectual milieu that would come to shape the archeologist and the questions he sought through decades of fieldwork in Southeast Asia.

Digging Deep also provides useful insights into his archeological style, namely the use of large excavations—indicated by the book's title—as well as the necessity for "chronometric hygiene" (p. 145) and publication. Higham is known for selecting sites that, until a recent excavation by the Franco-Myanmar project, produce the deepest records of occupation in mainland Southeast Asia. The vast numbers of burials and associated mortuary assemblages are on clear display throughout the book and form his primary bases for understanding how people lived, interacted, and died at each settlement. His unflinching dedication to chronological certainty is clearly stated throughout the book as well as a call to action that failure to produce full site reports is akin to looting. Both are lessons that any archeologist should heed to ensure solid foundations for future work. This idea of legacy is apparent in the numerous individuals who worked with him, including his irreplaceable Thai collaborators and numerous Western students and colleagues. While he ends the book writing "There remains, indeed, much more to do" (p. 242), he is clearly satisfied that this new generation of scholars is continuing to expand our understanding of this dynamic region.

Professor Higham's book provides behind the scenes access to the person we experience through his books, articles, and conference presentations. While autobiographies may not be to everyone's taste, they have, as with the need to produce full site reports, inherent value by providing details that shape the overall character and ethos of an archeologist. Regardless of any unanswered questions, notably his long search for connection to the origins of Angkor, the book is a testament to a life dedicated to Southeast Asian archeology. And for that, you cannot help but to thank Charles for his continuous efforts to dig deep.

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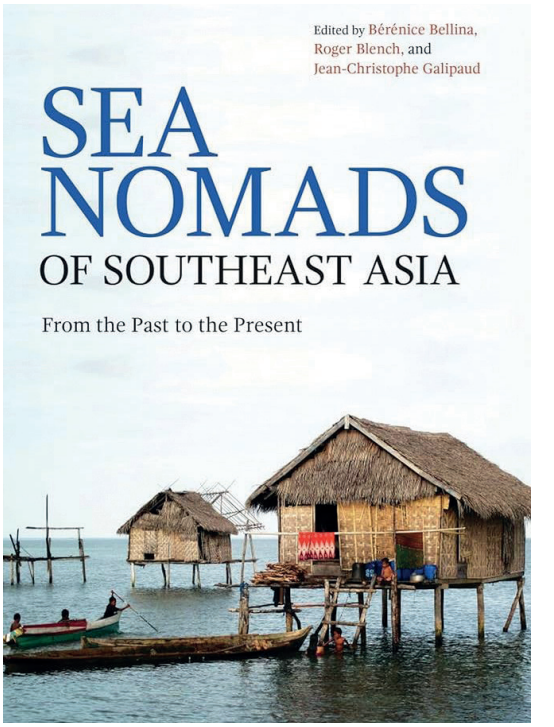
Bérénice Bellina, Roger Blench & Jean-Christophe Galipaud, eds, *Sea Nomads of Southeast Asia: From the Past to the Present*, Singapore: NUS Press, 2021, 400 pages, $36 SGD, ISBN 978-9813251250 (Paperback)



Sea Nomads of Southeast Asia is a welcome addition to a growing body of publications concerned with Southeast Asia's seafaring population. In their introduction the editors inform us that the object of the volume is to explore the "*longue-durée* historical trajectory" of Southeast Asia's sea nomadic societies and "their role in regional historical developments" (p. 2). Sea Nomads thus focuses not only on contemporary sea nomadic societies, their origins and development, but also on "the prehistoric period before the emergence of the earliest trade-related polities" (*ibid*.). Hence, the book brings together the work not only of anthropologists, historians, and linguists, but also, to a degree that makes it unique, that of archeologists.

The editors tell us that this volume had its origin in a pair of conference panels: one at the 20th Indo-Pacific Prehistoric Archaeological Congress in Siem Reap (2014), the other at the 15th International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists in Paris (2015). In the *Borneo Research Bulletin* (Vol. 52, 2021: 295–306), I have reviewed this book at greater length; here I focus mainly on the individual chapters that are likely to be of most direct interest to the readers of this journal.

Following the highly informative Introduction (pp. 1–27), the first three chapters focus on the prehistoric past. This "past" begins with the Pleistocene arrival of the first fully modern humans in island Southeast Asia and ends with the region's emergence as a major hub of East–West trade. Recent archeological research has established that early fishermen-foraging populations were present in the offshore islands of Southeast Asia by some 45,000 years ago, long before the introduction of agriculture and a Neolithic way of life.

In Chapter 2 (pp. 28–50), archeologists Sue O'Connor, Christian Reepmeyer, Mahirta, Michelle Langley, and Elena Piotto describe some aspects of these late Pleistocene fishermen-foragers, specifically those of Timor-Leste and the eastern Lesser Sunda Islands of Indonesia. The authors focus not on these groups generally, but on their shell-working technologies and on their use of shell in the manufacture of fishhooks, beads, pendants, and other ornaments. Tracing the distribution of these technologies over time and from island-to-island, they identify long-enduring networks of inter-island communication and exchange. The authors term these linkages "communities of practice": groups sharing similar patterns of manufacture and use. They note that archeologists formerly regarded shell-working and the use of shell fishhooks and other shell implements as a unique hallmark of later Malayo-Polynesian-speakers who began to spread south and westward throughout island Southeast Asia sometime around 4,000 BP. However, as these researchers show, not only were shell implements fashioned much earlier in eastern Indonesia, but these tools and the ways in which they were made also differ from those identified with early Malayo-Polynesian-speakers. Indeed, even the taxa of the shellfish used differ (p. 43).

In Chapter 3 (pp. 51–101), "Late Pleistocene to Mid-Holocene Maritime Exchange Networks in Island Southeast Asia", David Bulbeck presents a major *tour-de-force*, a systematic synthesis of nearly all available archeological evidence

regarding the existence of early exchange networks in maritime Southeast Asia. This evidence consists of material cultural traits, such as cave art, shell and bone tools, mortuary practices, pottery, and inter-island trafficking in obsidian, and takes in all of island Southeast Asia, including not only the Lesser Sundas, but also the Philippines, coastal Borneo, Sulawesi, and the Malukus. The Holocene transition that followed was marked by a further proliferation of these networks, now accompanied by rising sea levels. Bulbeck tells us (pp. 84–85) that these findings are in general agreement with recent genetic research thus pointing to substantial population dispersals during the terminal Pleistocene and early Holocene. These dispersals overlap and interconnect with interaction networks, but do not exactly coincide, suggesting to Bulbeck that rather than closed societies fleeing rising sea levels, as some have suggested, the communities engaged in this interaction were open communities receptive to external contacts, novel technologies, and to "social connections" that "assist outbreeding and periodic, small-scale transmigration" (p. 85). By the mid-Holocene, these networks not only expanded, but also consolidated. In addition, they now reached the coastline of mainland Southeast Asia, southeastern China and Taiwan, where Neolithic cultures were already well established. Bulbeck thus argues that, in addition to advances in sailing technology, the prior existence of these exchange networks contributed to the subsequent rapid dispersal of Malayo-Polynesian speakers from Taiwan throughout the whole of island Southeast Asia.

Concluding his chapter, Bulbeck notes that this dispersal was also the likely source of new maritime-dependent populations, including the ancestors of the present-day Sama-Bajau (p. 87). Supporting archeological evidence comes from a pottery-making site at Bukit Tengkorak on the eastern coast of Borneo. Here pottery shards include those of ceramic stoves similar to stoves still used by Sama-Bajau sea nomads (Sama Dilaut) who have long inhabited the region.

More directly relevant to the readers of this journal, Bérénice Bellina, Aude Favereau, and Laure Dussubieux examine in Chapter 4 (pp. 102–141) the role of "minorities", or "marginal" people, including sea nomads and other seafaring groups in the rise of early trading polities on the Isthmus of Kra, beginning in the 4th century BCE. The isthmus itself, a narrow stretch of the Malay Peninsula separating the Bay of Bengal from the Gulf of Thailand, acquired strategic economic significance with the rise of what the authors call the "maritime Silk Road". Signaling this rise was the appearance of ports-of-trade at river mouths and along the Peninsula coastline. The chapter describes in some detail the trade goods and other archeological material recovered not only from the sites of these ports-of-trade, but also from their much less studied "hinterlands". Over time, the growth of trade stimulated economic specialization, with local communities and newcomers to the region taking up complementary roles in an increasingly complex and interdependent economy. A few emerged as politically hegemonic groups, others assumed subordinate positions, or lived in relative autonomy in areas distant from centers of state power. Among these latter groups, specialized seafarers engaged in the

transport of goods, supplying trading centers with maritime commodities, and acting as intermediaries in trading relations between ports-of-trade and their hinterlands. The economic and political matrix in which these seafarers emerged appears to have been strikingly like that which, centuries later, gave rise further south to the Orang Laut, and further east to the Sama-Bajau.

The Isthmus of Kra, as a point for the overland transport of goods between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, flourished for a time, but a long decline began by the first centuries CE, with the rise of Malay trading states to the south, in Sumatra and the Straits of Melaka. Although no surviving sea nomadic communities appear to have been left behind, these developments nonetheless, the authors argue, "laid the foundation of", or, perhaps, more accurately, provided "a template for the historical sea nomads [...] further south", notably the Orang Suku Laut (p. 132).

All of the individual chapters that follow deal with contemporary sea nomadic societies and their historical development since the appearance of the first maritime trading states in Southeast Asia. Today, these societies are divided between three main groups, each culturally and linguistically distinct, with separate origins and largely independent histories: (1) the Moken and related Moklen of the offshore islands of southwest Myanmar and Thailand; (2) the Orang Laut, or Orang Suku Laut, of the Straits of Melaka, the east coast of Sumatra and the islands of the Riau-Lingga Archipelago of western Indonesia, plus a small offshoot group, the Urak Lawoi', living further north along the west coast of the Malay Peninsula; and (3) the diverse, but predominantly sea-oriented Sama-Bajau of the southern Philippines, east coast of Borneo, Sulawesi, and much of eastern Indonesia. The members of these three groups all speak Malayo-Polynesian languages, and so, in linguistic terms at least, are inheritors of the Malayo-Polynesian diaspora.

Anthropologist Cynthia Chou in Chapter 5 (pp. 142–156), "The Orang Suku Laut: Movements, Maps and Mapping", examines contemporary Orang Laut notions of place and territoriality. Chou tells us that, although they identify themselves as "sea people", the Orang Laut are not aimless wanderers lost in their surroundings, but rather, even while on the move, live within well-defined lanscapes comprised of islands, estuaries, and shoreline. As with the sea nomadic Sama-Bajau, the Orang Laut view the sea as "an inalienable gift from the ancestors" (p. 146). "Places represent pauses in movement" and different local groups speak of "possessing different networks of kin-based territories" (p. 148). "Places and territories are collectively owned" and, Chou tells us, "ownership" is constantly validated by stories of the past and shared knowledge kept alive by lived experiences in the present.

Chapter 6 (pp. 157–176) deals with the "linguist background" of sea nomadism, Chapter 7 (pp. 177–197) with a "genetic perspective" on Bajau origins in Indonesia, Chapter 8 (pp. 198–213) with ship construction and navigation, and Chapter 9 (pp. 214–235) with Sama-Bajau relations with the Makassarese Kingdom of Gowa-Talloq in eastern Indonesia.

In Chapter 10 "Nomads in the Interstices of History" (pp. 236–253), anthropologist Jacques Ivanoff describes

in general terms the strategies by which the semi-nomadic Moken have attempted over time to preserve their independence and the ritual integrity of their distinctive way of life. Their survival appears to have always been under threat. In precolonial times, the primary threat came from pirates and slave-raiders intruding from the neighboring Malay world into the Andaman Sea where the Moken then lived. Later, during the colonial era, the threat became a monetized world economy, and today, the threat is from tourism and a massive influx into their homeland of Burmese fishermen. Much of the Moken way of life may thus be read as a response to external threats, and today the group is responding with a resurgence of rituals during which scattered communities gather at ritual centers to re-engage with their collective past.

Chapter 11 fits somewhat uncomfortably with the rest of the book. Titled "Ethno-archaeological evidence of 'resilience' underlying the subsistence strategy of the maritime-adapted inhabitants of the Andaman Sea" (pp. 254–281), Ayesha Pamela Rogers and Richard Engelhardt apply "Resilience Theory" to the present-day situation of a population on Phuket Island that they refer to, using a vernacular Thai label, as the Chao Le (ชาวเล). This population is composed of Moken, Moklen, and Urak Lawoi. The situation this population faces is a familiar one in much of present-day maritime Southeast Asia, i.e., rapidly growing populations on small islands and coastal strands trying to eke out a living in over-exploited waters while at the same time competing with newcomers drawn to their island homes by a burgeoning tourism industry. In contrast to other chapters, this is primarily an essay in theory-building and methodology. The method the authors employ, an "ethno-archaeological approach", involves collecting ethnographic information about artifacts and practices that leave an imprint on the environment and thus survive the passage of time. This method, they argue, serves as a way of linking present-day Chao Le settlements to past archeological sites so as to reconstruct a regional history of past and present patterns of resilience. Regrettably, they say little about the results of this research.

The last three chapters (pp. 282–357) deal with maritime communities in Timor-Leste and with Sama-Bajau groups in eastern Indonesia.

To sum up, *Sea Nomads of Southeast Asia*, owing, perhaps, to its origin in conference presentations, is a somewhat uneven volume that never quite succeeds in bringing its often-disparate chapters together within a unifying perspective. It opens, however, with an excellent introduction and contains a number of valuable chapters that, nonetheless, provide much to challenge and inform serious students of maritime Southeast Asia.

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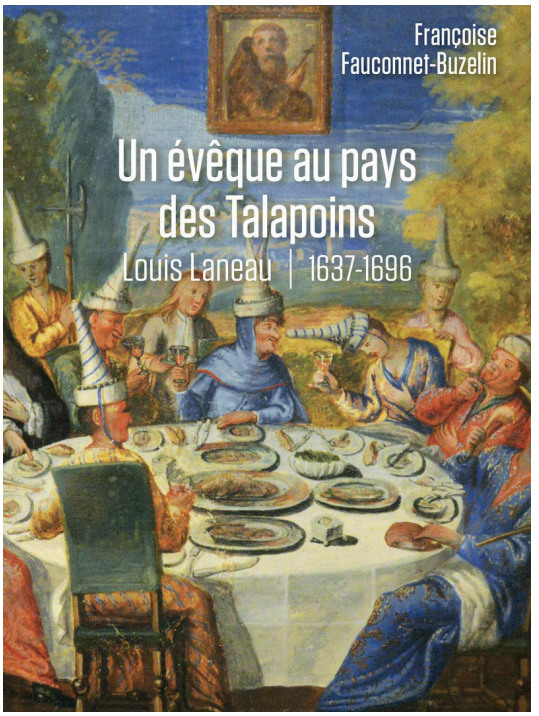
Françoise Fauconnet-Buzelin, *Un évêque au pays des talapoins : Louis Laneau, 1637–1696*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2021, 396 pages, €25,00, ISBN 978-2-204-13846-8 (Hardback)



Ce livre propose une biographie de l'évêque Louis Laneau (1637–1696), premier vicaire apostolique du Siam de 1674 jusqu'à sa mort[1]. L'auteure, Françoise Fauconnet-Buzelin, a déjà consacré d'importantes études aux premières décennies de présence et d'action de la Société des Missions Etrangères de Paris (MEP) en Asie. Mentionnons notamment son ouvrage sur Mgr Pierre Lambert de La Motte, premier vicaire apostolique pour la Cochinchine, dont l'apostolat se déroula principalement à Ayutthaya et qui exerça une influence considérable sur Laneau, son jeune confrère (Fauconnet-Buzelin 2006).

Le traitement chronologique et factuel de la présente biographie offre une synthèse des études accumulées depuis les travaux de E.W. Hutchinson (*Aventuriers au Siam au XVIIe siècle*, 1947) et surtout depuis les années 1985, avec le tricentenaire des relations officielles entre la France et le Siam et les premiers travaux de Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h. L'auteure exhume de nombreux documents d'archives de la Société des Missions Etrangères, tous dignes d'intérêt pour saisir comment les premiers missionnaires français tentaient de comprendre – ou non – et de s'intégrer aux sociétés d'Asie.

F. Fauconnet-Buzelin retrace donc les pérégrinations, obligations et activités de Louis Laneau depuis son engagement pour les missions d'Asie vers 1660 jusqu'à sa mort à Ayutthaya en 1696. Il fit partie de la première génération de missionnaires français accueillie au Siam, au terme d'un long voyage de la France, qu'il quitta en janvier 1662 avec un groupe de compagnons sous

[1] L'église catholique est organisée en paroisses, communautés territoriales elles-mêmes regroupées en diocèses dont le supérieur religieux est l'évêque. Une règle implicite est que les diocèses doivent être dirigés par des évêques issus du pays où ils exercent. Le but que se donnent les missionnaires français est donc de former des clergés autochtones qui pourront finalement diriger les communautés locales. En attendant, les communautés sont confiées à des évêques non-autochtones missionnés par le Pape et appelés vicaires apostoliques, terme qui montre que leur présence ne sera pas permanente. En réalité, ces vicaires apostoliques ont les pouvoirs et le titre (Monseigneur) des évêques mais, toujours pour signifier que leur mission est transitoire, ils reçoivent la charge d'un diocèse lui-même fictif (souvent un diocèse du lointain passé mais qui a été abandonné) : Lambert est ainsi évêque de Bérythe (Beyrouth), Laneau est évêque de Metellopolis (ville disparue de l'actuelle Turquie). Louis Laneau est donc à la fois vicaire apostolique pour le Siam et évêque de Metellopolis.

la direction de l'évêque François Pallu, pour atteindre Mergui en octobre 1663. L'auteure décrit avec précision comment ce jeune homme, plutôt effacé et d'une grande candeur mais travailleur et régulier, sut à la fois faire preuve d'une grande disponibilité face aux diverses tâches que la situation exigeait, et ne pas perdre de vue son propre objectif qui était de convertir les Siamois au catholicisme. Il se concilia ainsi la confiance et le soutien de l'évêque Lambert de la Motte jusqu'à la mort de celui-ci en 1679. Surtout, en 1673 à Ayutthaya, c'est Laneau que les évêques Lambert et Pallu choisirent pour être vicaire apostolique du Siam après que Rome décida d'ériger ce pays en vicariat apostolique.

De 1663 à 1679, Laneau partagea avec ses quelques confrères les joies et difficultés de l'installation. Le bon accueil du roi de Siam, Phra Narai (r. 1656–1688), incita les missionnaires français à de grands projets : faire d'Ayutthaya un centre de repli et de repos en même temps que de distribution des hommes et des ravitaillements pour les différentes missions (Cochinchine, Tonkin, Chine, Siam), créer à Ayutthaya un collège pour accueillir et former des élèves de ces missions. Laneau fut alors désigné pour la mission des Siamois et commença à apprendre la langue siamoise avant de s'intéresser à la religion du pays. Mais les difficultés surgirent vite et de manière inattendue puisque les communautés portugaises et leurs pères religieux refusèrent de reconnaître les évêques envoyés par Rome et non reconnus par le roi du Portugal. Au nom du *padroado* (Patronage) et en ayant parfois recours à l'Inquisition de Goa, ces religieux s'engagèrent dans une sévère résistance aux missionnaires nouveaux venus. Bientôt aussi, ces derniers durent faire face à un manque endémique d'hommes et de moyens, qui menaçait régulièrement la survie du collège. Devenu évêque et privé du soutien de Mgr Lambert après 1679, Laneau vit ses responsabilités augmenter, notamment à partir de 1684 lorsqu'il assuma la supervision générale des missions françaises en Asie. Les difficultés allèrent de pair.

Monseigneur Laneau se trouva ainsi confronté au déroulement inattendu des ambassades franco-siamoises (1685–1688) censées sceller l'amitié des rois Phra Narai et Louis XIV, mais qui s'achevèrent dans la confusion et le drame, en raison des jeux d'ambitions et d'ignorances. Emprisonné à Ayutthaya en 1688, avec quelques missionnaires et avec les élèves du collège, puis tenu en liberté surveillée, il fit l'objet en France d'une terrible entreprise de dénigrement de la part des pères jésuites qui espéraient obtenir la responsabilité des nouvelles missions françaises d'Asie à l'occasion des ambassades. Les mensonges distillés à l'époque contre les prêtres des MEP imprègnent encore très fortement les interprétations historiques de leur rôle en Asie. Quant à Laneau, à l'écart des passions versaillaises et romaines, il fut libéré et quasiment réhabilité par le nouveau roi du Siam, Phra Phetracha (r. 1688–1703), jusqu'à sa mort par épuisement en 1696. Il aura réussi à maintenir un vicariat apostolique au Siam et, malgré d'énormes tourments et efforts, à assurer le maintien d'un

collège général pour toutes les missions à Ayutthaya.

À la lecture du livre, on retient la disponibilité de Laneau : lorsqu'une responsabilité lui est confiée, il n'hésite pas à l'assumer. Surtout, il demeure indéfectiblement attaché à la mission que la « Providence », pense-t-il, lui a confiée : obtenir la conversion des Siamois. C'est ainsi qu'il se laisse entraîner, presque malgré lui, dans ce funeste jeu d'ambassades franco-siamoises qui se termine en catastrophe. Mais cela ne saurait occulter ses autres efforts : mission dans les campagnes, visites des malades ou des prisonniers. En cela, il s'affirma ouvertement disciple du jésuite italien Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656) en Inde, développant toute une réflexion sur la perfection des moines bouddhiques (les *talapoins* pour les Européens de l'époque) et sur la nécessité de s'en inspirer. Il fut ainsi l'un des premiers à tenter de comprendre le bouddhisme siamois et son institution, et le principal inspirateur d'ouvrages majeurs pour la connaissance du Siam de la fin du XVIIe siècle, notamment ceux de Guy Tachard, de Simon de La Loubère et, surtout, de Nicolas Gervaise. Lorsque Mgr Maigrot, le vicaire apostolique de Chine, interdit en 1693 la vénération des ancêtres et la participation au culte de Confucius, Mgr Laneau trouva la mesure dommageable et recommanda la prudence à ce propos.

Le défi de la non-conversion des Siamois ne manqua pas de susciter des interrogations chez celui qui s'était engagé dans leur évangélisation. C'est l'apport principal de l'ouvrage : il met en valeur le travail de réflexion, souvent teinté d'anxiété, de Laneau. Nous prenons donc connaissance de ses textes plus apologétiques – sous forme de *Dialogues* notamment –, ainsi que de ses exhortations apostoliques, et d'un ouvrage qui est une méditation sur le dessein divin pour les humains. Fauconnet-Buzelin insiste sur l'admiration que suscitent ces textes chez les théologiens d'aujourd'hui, mais on aurait aimé plus d'analyse et de confrontation aux pensées occidentales ou bouddhiques de son temps : car ces textes suscitèrent une certaine hostilité au XVIIIe siècle et même de nos jours de la part des Siamois.

Je terminerai par un léger reproche. Bien que l'auteure, en tant qu'historienne quasi officielle des MEP, évite de trop orienter la biographie de Mgr Laneau vers l'hagiographie, elle a tendance à rejeter toute critique de l'évêque. Le destin peu ordinaire de Laneau, son exceptionnelle charité, son refus de se mettre en avant et son refuge dans la Providence peuvent ainsi porter à une excuse trop facile des faiblesses et contradictions du personnage – que j'ai relevés pour ma part dans différents travaux[2].

En conclusion, cet ouvrage contribue à conforter une nouvelle lecture de l'histoire des missions catholiques en Asie, c'est-à-dire une lecture qui ne soit pas asservie aux seuls récits de quelques pères jésuites et de la plupart des universitaires occidentaux à leur suite. Les limites du livre résultent de son projet essentiellement

[2] L'intérêt suscité ces dernières années par la figure de Laneau ne se dément pas. Il a récemment donné lieu à un ouvrage de Simona Somsri Bunabunraksa (2018). On notera aussi, de Laurent Bissara, une étude plus centrée sur la spiritualité et la théologie de l'évêque (2020).

biographique et missionnaire : aussi la société siamoise n'y apparaît guère alors qu'elle est la première concernée.

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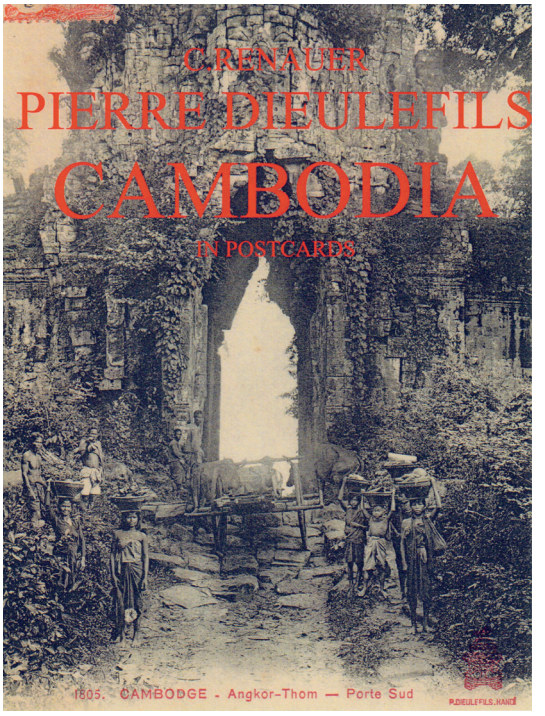
Christof Renauer, *Pierre Dieulefils: Cambodia in Postcards*, Munich: White Elephant Books, 2022, 216 pages, 492 illustrations + maps, €35, ISBN 979-1039608343 (Paperback)



In addition to the lavish publication, *Indo-Chine pittoresque & monumentale. Ruines d'Angkor, Cambodge* (1909), French photographer Pierre Dieulefils (1862–1937) published picture postcards of Cambodia, some of which are very rare today. By their nature, these picture postcards are smaller and less elaborately produced than, for example, the full-page heliotypes in the monumental publication cited above. However, this slim volume is an extremely valuable resource. Unlike other compendia of Cambodian picture postcards, this book is not concerned with whether a serial number or caption was printed in red or black. Rather, it is based on an extraordinary amount of field research, placing each postcard in its precise location and providing comparative, contemporary photographs of the same site with the same view. Based on the previous work by Thierry Vincent (1997), Christof Renauer reproduces here for the first time all 232 of the picture postcards on Cambodia issued by Dieulefils, in their original size, two per page. While the great majority of these were collected by Renauer himself, a few cards were selected from the collection of Thailand-based publisher Diethard Ande.

Renauer, a stone mason by profession who worked over a year at Angkor, begins his volume with a biography of Pierre Dieulefils followed by a brief overview of the history of Cambodia

up to 1905. But the important contribution of this volume is that the view of each postcard is precisely located. Renauer maps where Dieulefils set up his tripod and the direction in which the camera faced so that the viewshed of each postcard becomes precisely evident. This, coupled with Renauer's contemporary photographs of each site from the same vantage point as the original postcard, make these postcards a unique reference to the Cambodia of that time as well as the present. Thus, the description and identification of individual buildings not only goes far beyond the titles given by Dieulefils, but also introduces us to old Phnom Penh with its main sights (e.g., French quarter, Wat Phnom, the Royal Palace & Silver Pagoda), as well as today's view. For instance, and quite importantly, the "then and now" juxtapositions of the "*Rian Reamkerti* frescoes" illustrating the Khmer *Rāmāyaṇa* are particularly thought-provoking, as large areas of these murals have disappeared.

The chapter "Angkor Wat—then and now" is also subject to the same extraordinary research and presentation, resulting in one of the volume's most informative contributions. Using a detailed ground plan of Angkor Wat, Dieulefils's viewpoints are shown and then contrasted with Renauer's photos and Dieulefils's picture postcards. The same process is done for Angkor Thom, the Bayon, the Baphuon, the Phimeanakas, the Elephant Terrace, the Victory Gate, as well as other monuments such as Ta Keo and Bakong.

Further chapters, illustrated with Dieulefils's picture postcards, deal with topics such as "Khmer Music", "Dance Apsaras", "Elephants", "King Sisowath", "Court and Courtesans", and the monuments from Siem Reap to Angkor, to mention just a few. A short chapter is dedicated to the history of the production of the picture postcard in Cambodia using the collotype process, along with their postal stamps, all of which are illustrated. As mentioned above, all these spectacular postcards are reproduced in their actual size, along with each printed French descriptive text and a translation into English and at times also a necessary correction to their identification.

Although limited to 103 numbered copies and despite occasional repetitions of text passages and evident misprints, the book should achieve widespread distribution. The detailed comparisons between Dieulefils's prints and Renauer's corresponding photographs alone make this limited edition highly worthwhile. The book deserves a place in all important Southeast Asian research libraries.

Reference

• Vincent, Thierry. 1997. *Pierre Dieulefils, photographe-éditeur de cartes postales d'Indochine : plus de 4800 références sur le Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchine, Cambodge, Yunnan, Chine*. Gignac-la-Nerthe [Print]: Private Publisher.

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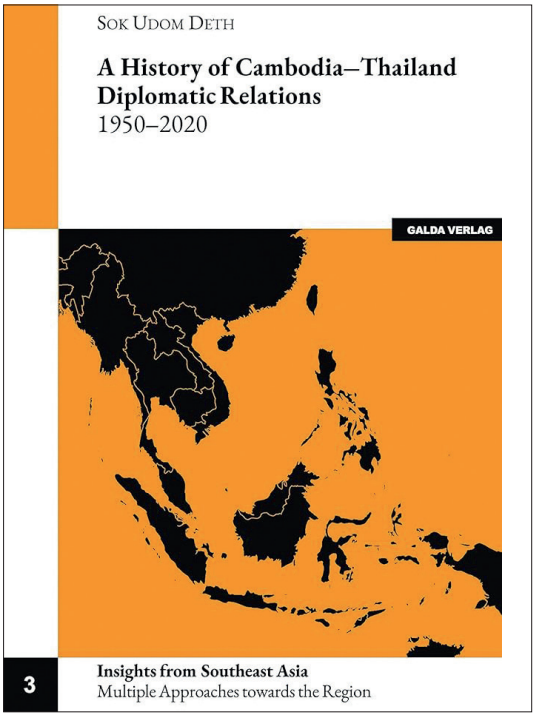
Sok Udom Deth, *A History of Cambodia–Thailand Diplomatic Relations: 1950–2020*, Glienicke: Galda Verlag, 2020, 231 pages, €73, ISBN 978-3962031299 (Paperback)



Sok Udom Deth is Associate Professor of International Relations and Rector of Paragon International University (formerly Zaman University) in Cambodia, as well as a member of the Board of Academic Advisors of Future Forum and a Senior Fellow at the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP). He has done a great service in providing a comprehensive analysis of Cambodian–Thai relations from the end of World War II to the present. The book endorses the view that Cambodian–Thai relations are tied to domestic issues. This is the approach pioneered by Charnvit Kasetsiri, Sothirak Pou, and Pavin Chachavalpongpun in their book, *Preah Vihear: A Guide to the Thai-Cambodian Conflict and Its Solutions* (2013).

The author's book convincingly demonstrates how domestic issues can stir "embedded nationalism" and "historical animosity" and turn relations between neighbors into conflicts. The narrative is gripping and moves at a fast pace. There is hardly a dull moment from beginning to end. As a Thai diplomat for nearly 40 years knowledgeable of the described events, I can testify to the veracity of most of the facts. Reviewing this volume is similar to revisiting old friends and acquaintances, many of whom have passed away.

In my experience from the Thai side, Thai–Cambodian relations were out of the control of people at headquarters. On both sides of the border, issues were generated by local people with power, influence, and interests. When they reach dangerous levels, these issues become political issues in the national capitals. Governments then get involved. The issues are considered at the highest levels and each Ministry of Foreign Affairs is instructed to deal with the problems and resolve them, in other words, to clean up the mess. This pattern repeated itself again and again.

Khao Phra Wihan or Preah Vihear was the exceptional issue. This surely is a valid case of "embedded nationalism" and "historical animosity", but it also responded easily enough to the domestic situation in either country at crucial moments, for the grievance of territorial loss in both countries cannot be denied. The issue was mishandled from the beginning on the Thai side for domestic reasons. In 1959, "Cambodia suggested two possible solutions to the Preah

Vihear problem: the joint administration of the temple by the two countries, or the submission of the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague. The proposal did not receive any concrete response from Thailand" (p. 27). It was a missed opportunity. When the Thai side raised the possibility of the first solution during the first Thaksin government (2001–2005), it was Cambodia's turn to be unresponsive. Since 1962, there has been another ruling in Cambodia's favor at the ICJ. The issue remains on the Thai–Cambodian agenda to this day.

The outlook for Thai–Cambodian relations is fair. Professor Deth's first two Appendices (pp. 195–205) provide useful reminders of work to be done: the survey and demarcation of land boundary, including the area of their overlapping maritime claims to the continental shelf. This should keep the two countries busy for years to come if their neighborly spirit is up to it. Appendix 4, Joint Communique, dated 18 June 2008 (pp. 207–208) on Preah Vihear shows another opportunity sadly missed; due to that lamentable fiasco, I was called upon to be Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand for 39 days from the end of July to the beginning of September 2008. It was too short a time to follow up on what I had been doing before with like-minded Cambodian colleagues and friends. This is how Professor Deth ends his very useful book on p. 191:

> Still, in the long run, enmity between the two countries can be further reduced if peace studies and objective history with a focus on regionalism become the norm in both countries, so that future politicians have no pretext to invoke nationalism to serve domestic interests.

That is what people of goodwill on both sides of the border have been doing and will continue to do in order to prevent manipulation and exploitation of "embedded nationalism" and "historical animosity".

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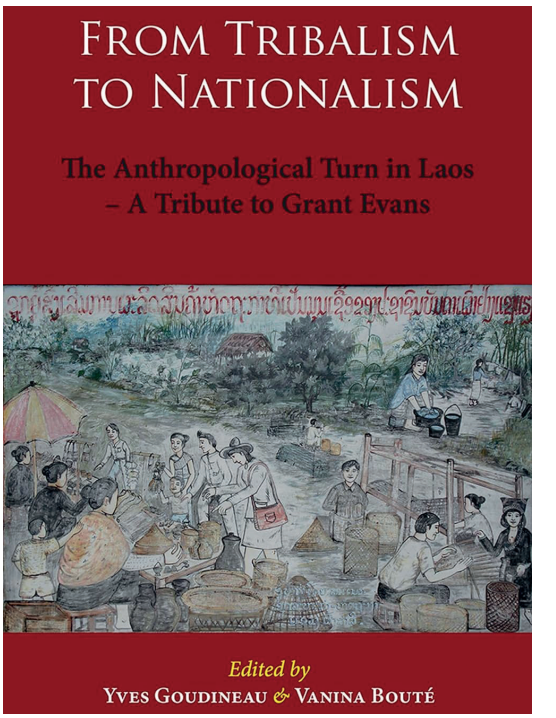
Yves Goudineau & Vanina Bouté, eds, *From Tribalism to Nationalism: The Anthropological Turn in Laos—A Tribute to Grant Evans*, Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2022, 409 pages, ฿950, ISBN 978-8776943035 (Paperback)



From Tribalism to Nationalism: The Anthropological Turn in Laos is the third volume dedicated to the memory of Grant Evans and impressive testimony to his reputation as a scholar (in particular his contribution to Lao studies), and as a generous colleague and friend.[1] This latest volume is edited by Yves Goudineau and Vanina Bouté, professors at the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) and École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS) respectively. The volume comprises an Introduction by the editors and 12 chapters by linguists, anthropologists, and historians.

In the Introduction ("In the Field of Laos", pp. 1–24), Goudineau provides a useful history of early anthropological research in Laos from the work of Karl Izikowitz in the 1930s, Charles Archaimbault and George Condominas in the 1950s, Joel Halpern in the 1960s, and post-1975 research, including that of Grant Evans beginning in the 1980s and regarded as "the first to carry out real field studies" (p. 4). Goudineau endorses Evans' call for in-depth linguistic and cultural research based on extended periods of fieldwork, as does N.J. Enfield in the following brief Chapter 1 ("Language and Culture in Laos: An Agenda for Research", pp. 25–29). Goudineau also credits Evans with pioneering an "anthropological turn" in Lao studies, that is, a more theoretical and critical analysis of Lao society.

In his work, Evans' critical eye was focused on the Lao PDR construction of national identity through Buddhism and Laos as a multi-ethnic state. Evans (1998: 8) argued that the failure of agricultural collectives after 1980 and the utopian vision of creating a "new socialist man" forced the Lao PDR government to search for "new symbols of legitimation". Buddhism came to fill the void, given the historical close relationship between the Buddhist Saṅgha and the state. When the Pathet Lao assumed power in 1975, it did not suppress Buddhism but attempted to "reorganize Buddhism and to bend it to the will of the state" (Evans 1993: 14). According to Patrice Ladwig's later Chapter 4 in the volume under review ("The Genesis and Demarcation of the Religious Field: Monasteries, State Schools and the Secular Sphere in Lao Buddhism", pp. 82–102), one form of state control of Buddhism was to gradually separate religious and secular spheres of education by replacing monks as school teachers with secular teachers, so that Buddhist monks became responsible only for "religious" matters and Buddhism was restricted to a religious "field" (in Pierre Bourdieu's sense).

Boike Rehbein ("Sociolects, Differentiation, and the Integration of Lao", Chapter 2, pp. 30–48) also uses Bourdieu's concept of "field" with reference to the use of language in diverse social spheres or "social cultures" of the royal court, the village, the Buddhist monastery, the market, etc. One dimension of the public sphere is "Thai-ization", related to the media influence of Thai language, especially on the young urban middle class in Laos.

[1] The earlier volumes are Peter Cox & Boike Rehbein, guest editors, *Journal of Lao Studies* 3, 2016, "Special Issue: Devoted to the work of Grant Evans", and Paul T. Cohen & Olivier Évrard, guest editors, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 30(2), 2019, "Special Issue: Grant Evans and Tai Studies: Political Engagement and Intellectual Legacy".

Chapter 3 by the late Grant Evans ("Lao Peasant Studies: Theoretical Review and Perspectives for Anthropology", pp. 49–81), originally written in 2008, relates more to his formative work on the Lao peasantry in *Lao Peasants under Socialism*, 1990. It examines the nature of peasant society in general, and in Laos in particular.

Taking his cue from Alexander Chayanov's demographic model of social differentiation among the Russian peasantry in *Theory of Peasant Economy* (originally published in German in 1923), Evans argues that there are no real long-term inequalities within Lao rural villages. "This is because a key dynamic of the village economy is the domestic cycle of household groups, which means that over time there is a wave-like undulation of family fortunes" (p. 68). He claims that the main poverty differences are between villages, not within villages—a poverty induced by the government policy of resettlement of upland minorities in the lowlands. He was also aware of other changes that were beginning to undermine the natural economy of the Lao peasantry: various forms of commercial farming (including plantations), new forms of technology, road building, etc., prompting him to conclude somewhat wistfully that "we can probably say that Laos has begun its irreversible march towards the end of the peasantry" (p. 65).

However, most of the following contributions (Chapters 7–12) are concerned with issues of ethnicity and ethnic minorities, with an emphasis based on prolonged field research on the fluidity of ethnic identification. These studies provide critiques of the Lao PDR "obsession with classification" (p. 9), influenced by Chinese and Vietnamese precedents, and the essentialist attribution of fixed cultural traits to named ethnic groups. This critical approach is consistent with Evans' earlier study of the process of Tai-ization in relation to the interethnic relationship between the Black Tai and Sing Moon (Ksing Mul) of Huaphanh province (Evans 2000).

Yves Goudineau, in a wide-ranging analysis of the history and ethnic make-up of southern Laos ("The Anthropology of Southern Laos and the Origin of the Kantu Issue", Chapter 6, pp. 131–165) argues that the Kantu (Katu) people have an "emblematic status" in the imagination of the French and Lao of the incomplete "Lao-ization" of the region. The Kantu of the Upper Sekong were noted for their fierce independence, the authenticity of their customs and their large, well-fortified circular villages as well as their backwardness and danger. Notably, despite the devastation caused by the Lao Civil War (in which Kantu fought on the side of the Pathet Lao), Goudineau discovered during fieldwork in the 1990s that up-dated versions of the circular village model were rebuilt, which he claims were an "obvious and visible expression of an ideology that is in competition with—though progressively marginalised by—'Lao-isation'" (p. 165). This marginalization is reflected in the government resettlement of many Kantu villages to the plains and the consequent disappearance of the circular villages.

Village spatial conceptualization was also a significant cultural marker for the Brao ethnic group who inhabit areas further south in Champassak and Attapeu provinces and in northeast Cambodia. This is expounded by Ian

Baird in Chapter 7: "The Case of the Brao: Revisiting Physical Borders and Social Organisation in the Hinterland of Southern Laos and Northeastern Cambodia" (pp. 166–196). Here, Baird highlights the Brao spatial concept of *huntre* which refers to spatial taboos affecting the location of pathways, swidden fields, and physical borders between villages (and protection of communal land rights). However, Baird notes that his research in Pathoumphone district of Champassak province revealed that the concept of *huntre* was no longer relevant to most Brao, a change which he attributes to "Lao-ization". A more striking example of the fluidity of ethnic identification is that of the Brao of Ratanakiri province, in Cambodia, who, in response to Khmer Rouge labelling the Brao as "traitors", adopted the autonym of "Kreung" (p. 180).

The other studies in this volume of ethnic fluidity are from northern Laos, in the provinces of Luang Nam Tha, Houesai (Huay Xay), and Phongsaly. In their study of legends of the origin of Viang Phu Kha ("The Ruins, the 'Barbarians' and the Foreign Princess: Heritage, Orality, and Transethnic Imaginary in Northern Laos", Chapter 8, pp. 197–230), Olivier Évrard and Chiem-sisouraj Chanthapilith relate the legends that comprise a narrative shared by Tai Lue, Khmu, and Samtao derived from alternating phases of depopulation and repopulation. One popular and inclusive legend is that of a beautiful Lue princess who, according to one version, marries a Khmu chief. Another example of cultural sharing is that of the Khmu Khwaen sub-group whose propitiation of "outside" spirits invokes ancestor spirits who are identifiably of Tai Yuan origin. These protective spirits possess a Khmu medium, speak in Lao, and are said to come from Nan in northern Thailand.

Oliver Tappe also addresses the issue of shared culture through the concept of "mimetic appropriation" that characterizes interethnic relations in upland Laos. In "Huaphanh: Revolutionary Heritage and Social Transformation in the 'Birthplace of Lao PDR'", Chapter 11, (pp. 277–301), Tappe compares this process to "asymmetric assimilation", a concept which he attributes to Evans's analysis of interethnic contact between the Ksing Mul and Tai Dam. Mimetic appropriation is exemplified in the case of the Austroasiatic Phong of Huaphanh. The Phong converted to Buddhism in pre-colonial times. They have borrowed aspects of language, material culture, and "socio-political structures" from the Tai/Lao and increasingly call themselves "Lao Phong". However, Tappe argues that Phong cultural borrowings (such as Buddhism and silk weaving) have been "vernacularised" and that "their oral history suggests a creative process of cultural appropriation that aims to strengthen Phong identity" (p. 297).

Likewise, the Rmeet (Lamet) of northern Laos interpret lightning strikes as punishment from aggrieved ancestors, traditionally requiring buffalo sacrifice and demanding taboos for the affected householders. The Lao PDR government has long condemned buffalo sacrifice as superstitious and economically wasteful. According to Guido Sprenger ("The End of Rituals: A Dialogue between Theory and Ethnography in Laos", Chapter 9, pp. 231–255), the Rmeet since the 1970s have not completely abandoned the

lightening ritual but have modified it to comply with Socialist rhetoric (e.g., a pig is sacrificed instead of a buffalo). He concludes that "the impulse to abridge the ritual originated with the state, but the specific form of the abridging was created through the creativity of some Rmeet leaders" (p. 249).

Vanina Bouté (in "Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in Northern Laos", Chapter 10, pp. 256–276) is similarly concerned with ritual changes in response to Pathet Lao attacks on costly sacrifices to spirits, here in the case of the Phu Noi of Phongsaly province. She examines the modified roles of two ritual celebrants under religious reforms imposed by government authorities since the 1960s. The village medium (*chao cham*) conducted rituals for the guardian spirit of the community. She observes that the role of the *chao cham* has become strongly Buddhicized. The other main ritual officiant is the *maphê*, in charge of collective rituals related to agriculture and dangerous spirits that demand animal sacrifices. Bouté concludes that these non-Buddhist officiants have not completely disappeared, but their functions have been depleted and partly assumed by Buddhist monks and *achan* (former monks and lay leaders of the temple) in relation to misfortunes attributed to spirits.

Another contribution by Goudineau ("The Ongoing Invention of Multi-Ethnic Heritage in Laos", Chapter 12, pp. 302–327) concerns the creation of a multi-ethnic national culture which is firmly grounded in Lao majority culture and perpetuates the process of Lao-ization. He highlights the state promotion, since 2009, of "cultural villages" (*ban watthanatham*) as part of the discourse on multi-ethnicity. These selected villages are conscripted to reject irrational beliefs and promote "good customs" and display these in village festivals. The paradox is that the exhibition of ethnic diversity is taking place in the context of "accelerated standardisation" due to social and economic changes, in particular the regrouping of villages caused by government resettlement policies.

Finally, Vatthana Pholsena explores a rather different aspect of Lao-ization in the early establishment of revolutionary bases in southeast Laos ("The Early Years of the Lao Revolution [1945–1949]: Between History, Myth, and Experience", Chapter 5, pp. 103–130). Lao-ization in this context refers to the "mythologisation" in state-sponsored historiography (exemplified in the book *Pavat Khet Thai Lao* [*History of the Thai–Lao Border*], published by Cheuang Sombounkhan et al. in 2004) enhances the status of Lao revolutionary leaders and downplays the role of the Vietnamese.

A word of caution to conclude, most of the chapters presented in this volume in memory of Grant Evans were originally published more than ten years ago. The editorial rationale for this reproduction is the need to reach a wider readership, limited in the past by books or journals difficult to obtain, or publication in French (such as essays found in *Recherches nouvelles sur le Laos*, EFEO, 2008). As such, the editors, to their credit, have made accessible to Lao and foreign scholars a wealth of in-depth ethnographic research that demonstrates an anthropological turning point in Laos towards more critical analysis of social facts.

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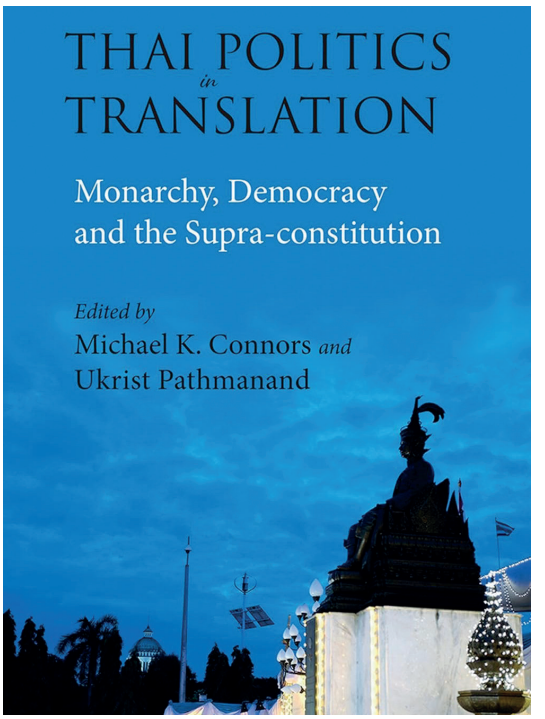
Michael K. Connors & Ukrist Pathmanand, eds, *Thai Politics in Translation: Monarchy, Democracy and the Supra Constitution*, Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2021, 256 pages, €45, ISBN 978-8776942854 (Paperback)



Thai Politics in Translation is particularly welcome for scholars interested in Thailand but who cannot read Thai. This may not be true for almost all historians of Thailand (except those specializing in 17th century Siam for which most sources are in European languages) and many anthropologists, who can read Thai. However, this is true for political scientists, some of whom do not specialize in a single country but prefer to compare political systems of a number of Southeast Asian countries.

The editors are two well-known academics interested in the Thai political landscape. Australian Michael Connors is Associate Professor at Monash University Malaysia. His interests in Thailand began around 1998–1999 when he was a visiting lecturer at Thammasat University in Bangkok. Connors is known for his numerous articles in academic journals and for his book, *Democracy and National Identity in Thailand* (2003). Specializing initially in international relations (degrees from Ramkhamhaeng and Chulalongkorn universities), Professor Ukrist Pathmanand is now a special researcher at the Institute of Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University. He is particularly well known for his volume, co-authored with Duncan McCargo, *The Thaksinization of Thailand* (2005).

The volume under review consists of an Introduction (pp. 1–17) and Chapter 1 (pp. 18–39) written by the two editors, then follow a collection of seven essays by Thai scholars, all published earlier in Thai between 1983 and 2016 as journal

articles, unpublished but widely available reports, book chapters, or short monographs.

While the subtitle of the book should be understood literally—democracy as framed by the Thai monarchy and the supra-Constitution, which means, indirectly, royal power—the Introduction precisely pinpoints the book's intention and scope. It deals specifically about the King Bhumibol era, particularly the last decades of his long reign, from the 1980s to the 2010s, when the King's power exceeded that of all other institutions. I will review each chapter sequentially.

Somchai Preechasilpakul's essay, "The Thai Supra-Constitution" (Chapter 2, pp. 40–63) was originally published in 2007 as a booklet for the Pridi Banomyong Institute. Following the award of Bachelors and Master of Law degrees from Thammasat University, Achan Somchai began his career as lecturer at Chiang Mai University. His chapter introduces the concept of supra-Constitution (อภิรัฐธรรมนูญ; *aphiratthathammanun*). He suggests that the Constitution is not the highest law in governing the Kingdom of Thailand since the phrase "Democracy with the King as Head of State", which is integral to that document, seems to place the King above it.

Chapter 3, "Political Discourse on Thai Democracy", by Nakharin Mektrairat (pp. 64–93) was initially published as a book chapter in 1990 and republished in 2003. Achan Nakharin received a Bachelor's degree from the Faculty of Political Science of Thammasat University, a Master's degree in history at Chulalongkorn University, and a PhD in international studies from Waseda University in Tokyo. He has been a lecturer at the Faculty of Political Science of Thammasat University, and a dean of the same Faculty from 2004 to 2009. In this chapter, he first presents the "traditionalist school of thought" proposed by kings Mongkut (r. 1850–1868), Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910), Vajiravudh (r. 1910–1925), and Prajadhipok (r. 1925–1935), and then developed by some princes and other members of the royalty (Prince Damrong, Prince Wan, MR Seni and MR Kukrit Pramoj, etc.), as well as some academics unrelated to royalty such as Chai-Anan Samudavanija and Kramol Thongthammachart. This "traditionalist school of thought" evolved into the "Thai-style democracy" theory, promoted as the non-participation of the people in the governing process. Achan Nakharin then presents Thai representatives of the "Western school of thought" on democracy, starting with Pridi Banomyong and Kularb Saipradit, followed by Seksan Prasertkul, Puey Ungpakorn, Saneh Chamarik, and Kasian Tejapira. He questions both of these approaches the same way: Is democracy a universal and immutable concept, or is it adaptable depending on the cultural context? And, when it is modified, is democracy still "power by the people" or just "power for the people"?

The late Kramol Thongthammachart first published his "National Ideology and the Development of the Thai Nation" (Chapter 4, pp. 94–106) in 1983 in a book distributed by The Office of the Prime Minister. Achan Kramol (1935–2017) received a Bachelor's degree in political science from Chulalongkorn University, and another degree in Law from Thammasat University, before obtaining a Master degree in government studies, and a PhD in government and foreign affairs in the US. Besides a

career at the Faculty of Political Science of Chulalongkorn University, he has had governmental functions, including a ministerial position from 1983 to 1986 and was appointed President of the Thai Constitutional Court from 2003 to 2005. Unsurprisingly, his national ideology can be subsumed as loyalty toward the three fundamental Thai institutions: the Nation, the Religion, and the Monarchy. Achan Kramol uses the expression *udomkan trai phak* (อุดมการณ์ไตรภักดิ์; "the ideology of the three loyalties"), forged by Professor Chai-Anan Samudavanija, as the foundation for his chapter.

"Thai-style Democracy: Concept and Meaning" by Chalermkiat Phiu-nuan (Chapter 5, pp. 107–142) was first published in 1992 in a book about the Thai Military. Achan Chalermkiat was a lecturer at the Department of Philosophy at Thammasat University. In this chapter, he wrote a well-balanced study on Thai military thought, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s. The editors indicate that he had close connections with the democratic soldiers' clique, a group of young military officers influential during General Prem Tinsulanonda's Premiership (1980–1988).

Chapter 6, "Civilising the State: State, Civil Society and Politics in Thailand", by Pasuk Phongpaichit (pp. 143–164) is the only essay originally published in English, in 1999 in Amsterdam. Educated in Australia and the UK, Achan Pasuk is a well-known Thai academic, particularly for the many books her and her English husband, Dr Chris Baker, wrote or translated in English, on the history, politics, economy, and ancient literature of the Kingdom of Siam. Published before the "Thaksin phenomenon" that was to be followed later by two *coups d'État* and more than a decade of political power confiscated by the generals, this chapter is brilliant but relatively outdated; it corresponds to a very special period when many scholars thought the military would definitely stay out of politics.

Pramuan Rujanaseri's book, of which extracts are published here under the title "Royal Power" (Chapter 7, pp. 165–186), originally published in 2005, is probably the best known of the texts republished in this collection, but also the least scholarly written. Pramuan Rujanaseri is not an academic but a civil servant in the Thai Ministry of Interior and a politician. Elected as a Member of Parliament for the Thai Rak Thai Party, he held the post of Vice-Minister of Interior from 2002 to 2004. When first published, his book was a great event. The late King Bhumibol revealed that he read and appreciated it very much. Because the content of this monograph benefited the royalist side, Pramuan became viewed as a quasi-renegade of his Party.

"Historical Legacy and the Emergence of Judicialisation in the Thai State" by Saichon Sattayanurak (Chapter 8, pp. 187–216) was originally published in 2016 in *Warasan Nitti-sangkhomsat mahawitthayalai chiang mai* [วารสารนิติสังคมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่; CMU Journal of Law and Social Science]. Achan Saichon, a lecturer at Chulalongkorn University and later at Chiang Mai University, is one of the most prolific and appreciated Thai historians of these last decades. She explains that the (Sino–Thai) middle class is more interested today in protection by the King than by any form of Western-style democracy.

She writes that this middle class and the judiciary share similar social and political values. That appears a little odd when we know the tradition of corruption among Thai judges (p. 191). In addition, it is peculiar to maintain that—under Thaksin's premiership (2001–2006)—uneducated villagers were bought and deceived by politicians when, in fact, that was an even more common practice before the political advent of Thaksin Shinawatra. Rather, we now know that poor villagers and town-dwellers simply voted for Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai Party because of his "populist" policies that effectively improved their daily lives.

For a better contextualization, the editors in notes or in the Introduction should have given additional and updated information about the contents of all of these chapters and extracts. For example, Achan Chai-Anan is undoubtedly the Thai academic most often mentioned in the volume. Therefore, some data on his political life should have been given to appreciate better his opinions. He was twice nominated as a senator (1992–1997) and selected as a judge at the Thai Constitutional Court (1998–2000). He was very close to Sondhi Limthongkul, the press mogul who contributed to destabilize the Kingdom, opening the way for the 2014 military *coup*. In October of the same year, Chai-Anan was one of 250 personalities selected by the military as members of the National Reform Assembly. He cannot be considered a completely neutral scholar, at least for this period.

Quite often, these essays see the middle class as a major actor during these last decades of Thai history. This pseudo concept of "middle class" looks scientific, but is never clearly defined. It was extensively used to describe the 1992 mobs against General Suchinda Kraprayun. These mobs were also popularly designated as *mop mue thue* (ม็อบมือถือ; mobile phone mobs), because eyewitnesses reported many protesters holding mobile phones, quite rare and expensive items some 30 years ago. Back in 1979 already, two young French philosophers wrote, "Nobody presents himself as *bourgeois*: the universal class became middle class" (Bruckner & Finkelkraut 1979: 200; my translation). However, in 2018, a Crédit Suisse report estimated the Thai "middle class" at only 3.7% of the population, that is, less than 2.6 million people (Anonymous 2018).[1]

Since they usually belong to this small (and elitist), urban Sino–Thai "middle class", many academics of the King Bhumibol era were suspicious about the broad concept of democracy since the poorly-educated, Thai lower-class (96% of the population according to the same Crédit Suisse report) usually voted for corrupt politicians, inevitably leading to a parliamentary dictatorship.

Overall, the quality of the translations from Thai into English seems acceptable for this collection of essays, but I did not systematically compare the original with their translation. I did find, however, some inaccuracies in the English text. I will just mention one in this review. While Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikachorn are correctly given the grade of Field Marshall in the

[1] In contrast, a Thai advertising agency estimated the local middle class at 72% of the population in 2015, but it seems that only Bangkok had been considered in this survey (Anonymous 2015).

text and index, Phibun Songkhram is sometimes called General. In fact, Phibun was never a full general. On 1 April 1939, he received the grade of Major General (พลตรี; *phon tri*). Less than two years later, on 28 July 1941, after his success in the so-called Indochina War with colonial France, he was directly promoted to the highest grade of Field Marshal (จอมพล; *chomphon*).

Another difficulty with this publication is that several essays mention the same concepts or the same persons but with differing spelling or orthographies. A central concept is that of *anekkachonnikonsamosonsommot* (เอนกชนนิกรสโมสรสมมติ), also known as *aneknikonsamosonsommot* (เอนกนิกรสโมสรสมมติ), or *mahachonnikonsamosonsommut* (มหาชนนิกรสโมสรสมมุติ), meaning, approximatively, "accepted by an assembly of a large number of persons". This concept is supposed to validate the theory that, in ancient times, the population legitimately chose the King of Siam. The bibliography provided at the end exhibits several issues, suggesting that individuals not proficient in the Thai language assembled it. A few names have been arranged in the list according to their nobility title (e.g., หลวง; *luang*), royal title (e.g., กรมหมื่น; *krommin*), or directly as Prince, e.g., for Dhani Nivat. On the other hand, Sulak Sivaraksa always signs his books and articles as "S. Sivaraksa". Boonmee is also given as Bunmi (p. 232). Kularb Saipraidit usually wrote his first name in English Kularb instead of Kulab (p. 224). In Japanese, the family name should be given first, so it should be Murashima Eiji rather than Eiji Murashima (p. 220). European and Chinese authors are appropriately cited, as are Thai names (first name listed first), but some Thai family names differ from the owner's preference, for example, Arphaphirom, Arpornsuwan, and so on. Finally, it would have been helpful to clarify for the general readers that "Kromamun Bidayalah Brdihyakorn" is none other than Prince Dhani Nivat, and that Naradhip Bongsprabanh is simply known as Prince Wan in English.

There are also occasional errors in the Romanization of Thai words, such as *kabot* and not *khabot* for กบฏ (pp. 144, 240), according to the Royal Thai General System of Transcription (RTGS) of the Royal Society of Thailand. The name of the first "Prime Minister" in Thai modern history is usually given as *Phraya* Manopakon Nitthithada rather than Monopakorn Nithithada (pp. 197, 242). The editors and the translators seem to have chosen to freely adapt the official system (RTGS), possibly to facilitate the pronunciation by English-speaking readers, for example, using the letter "j" for จ instead of "ch", "ar" for -า instead of "a", "or" for -อ instead of "o", etc. They should have explained their choice in a technical note at the beginning or in the Introduction.

Despite a few nitpicking issues that may frustrate scholars, the collection of essays successfully accomplishes its overarching goals by introducing the writing tendencies of Thai political scientists over the last four decades to a broader audience, particularly non-Thai specialists. Although contributors frequently provide valuable insights into the reign of King Bhumibol (1946–2016), it is essential to recognize that this era is now a part of history. Therefore, future discussions should

pivot towards exploring the current reign of King Vajiralongkorn (2016–present) and delve into the contemporary positioning and roles of key actors such as the military, judiciary, middle class, intellectuals, and others.

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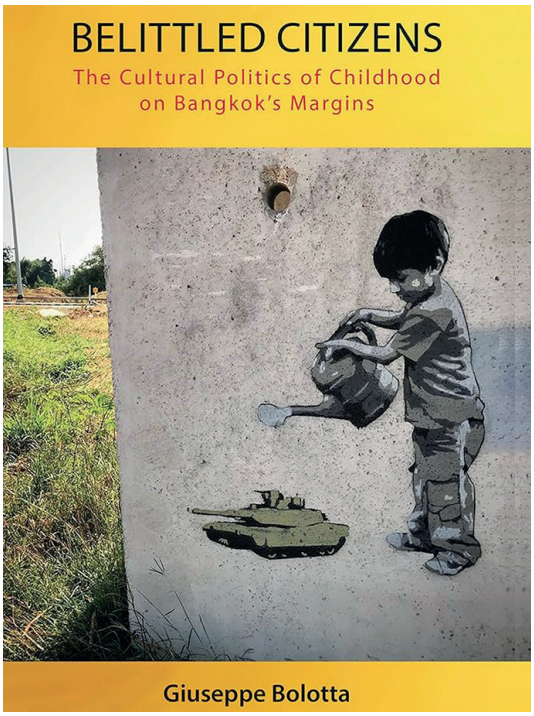
Giuseppe Bolotta, *Belittled Citizens: The Cultural Politics of Childhood on Bangkok's Margins*, Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2021, 252 pages, ฿850, ISBN 978-8776943011 (Paperback)



Giuseppe Bolotta, an Italian anthropologist with extensive fieldwork experience on Bangkok slum children, provides a critical exploration of Thai cultural politics and its impact on the formation of self in childhood. The book is a revised compilation of findings from his PhD fieldwork conducted between 2010 and 2015, complemented by an additional four years of ethnographic research during his postdoctoral fellowship at the National University of Singapore.

Comprising six chapters organized into two parts, the book addresses two key themes. Firstly, it delves into the institutional socialization and construction of the childhood experiences of slum children through various social spaces, including Thai schools, Catholic organizations, international NGOs, and Thai Buddhism. Bolotta terms these institutions collectively as "the cultural technologies of childhood" (p. 5), highlighting their role in shaping and perpetuating an unequal social

structure in Thailand. Secondly, the author explores how slum children develop their sense of self amid the influence of multiple social spaces and cultural contexts.

In the initial section of the book, Bolotta illuminates how the childhood and self-identity of slum children are shaped by both national and international perspectives. On the national scale, Thai school teachers perceive slum children as insufficiently Thai, undisciplined, and lacking in self-awareness and mindfulness. The correction for these perceived deficiencies involves continuous training by Theravada Buddhist monks, focusing on meditation and other Buddhist practices. The author underscores the significance placed on moral development, particularly in cultivating gratitude (ความกตัญญู; *khwam katanyu*) towards parents and benefactors.

Despite variations in the specifics of children's self-construction, both Thai schools and monasteries share a common orientation grounded in a hierarchical social structure, characterized by the concepts of "big people" (ผู้ใหญ่; *phu yai*) and "small people" (ผู้น้อย; *phu noi*). Public schools instill in slum children the recognition of themselves as "small people", inferior to figures such as the King, their parents, monks, and teachers who hold the position of "big people" (p. 23). This hierarchy dictates that "small people" must display respect, obedience, and gratitude to "big people" due to their younger age or lower social status. Similarly, the author's survey of two monasteries, Wat Saphansung (วัดสะพานสูง) and Wat Suan Kaeo (วัดสวนแก้ว) in Bangkok, reveals the socialization of poor children and some orphans within the same stratified social structure of "big people" and "small people", with the highest emphasis on children showing gratitude and reverence to adults, including the King, monks, and parents.

Remarkably, the process of children's socialization extends beyond traditional realms such as schooling and Buddhist activities, encompassing military activities as well. This occurs within the classroom, gradually instilled through discipline and the three pillars of Thai national ideology, namely Nation, Religion, and Monarchy. The public school, regarded as a national institution, the temple as a religious institution, and the King as a monarchical institution, collectively reinforce this ideology, particularly gaining momentum after the Siamese Revolution of 1932 and further solidified during the government of Phibul Songkhram (1938–1944, 1948–1957) and Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat (1959–1963). Sarit Thanarat amalgamated military governance with the reinstatement of the monarchy at the pinnacle of the new Thai social structure.

On the international front, Catholic missionary organizations and non-governmental organizations approach slum children from a standpoint of morality and humanitarianism. Parallel to Thai schools and temples, the Catholic missionary organization contributes to shaping the self-identity of slum children. While Catholicism has not extensively converted Thais to Christianity, its historical alignment with the monarchy has influenced the secular development of the Thai modern state across various domains like the school system, art, architecture, medicine, and printing techniques. The author

sheds light on two activist missionaries, Father Nicola, founder of the Saint Jacob's Center, and Sister Serafina, an Italian nurse and missionary of the House of the Little Ones. They reinterpret slum children distinctively from normative Catholicism, portraying them not as bearing negative *karma* or intrinsic sin, as defined by Thai Buddhism or Thai Catholicism, but rather as the marginalized "last" (the poor) within an unequal socio-economic structure. The structural sin of slum children, according to this perspective, should dissipate or find liberation through religious and humanitarian frameworks, epitomized by being viewed as "God's most beloved children" (p. 77).

Built on the same humanitarian ideology, Western non-governmental organizations (NGOs) perceive Thai slum children as innocent victims in need of protection from adverse environments like drug trafficking, illiteracy, and child labor. Consequently, vulnerable slum children transcend their status as mere victims, gaining inward symbolic capital as they strive and empower themselves for improved opportunities and well-being.

In the book's second segment, the author elucidates that the prevailing models of childhood and citizenship propagated by the four aforementioned social organizations fail to shape distinct self-identities for slum children. Notably, these children do not fully conform to the various selves constructed by diverse social agencies. Their expressions of identity range from compliant adherence to Thai cultural politics to reactions against their socially inferior positions, occasionally manifesting in deviant behaviors like breaking school rules or forming gangs. However, it is crucial to note that juvenile delinquency is not a universal characteristic of all slum children; some harbor aspirations of becoming Thai officials, akin to their non-slum counterparts. The notion of being "belittled citizens", as emphasized by the book's cover photo, underscores their diminished subject position determined by the three pillars of Thai social structure, further influenced by the military and additional factors from the international context.

In my perspective, Giuseppe Bolotta's book gains additional insight when considered alongside recent work by Sirima Thongsawang, Boike Rehbein, and Supang Chantavanich (2020). These scholars, employing Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, synthesize their fieldwork to elucidate the development of seven habitus types in Thailand, shaped by dual hierarchical social structures: the *sakdina* (ศักดินา) pre-Capitalist and the Capitalist. By engaging with Bolotta's research, readers can grasp the broader landscape of Thai social morphology that both structures and perpetuates the disparity between "big" and "small" people—a fundamental theme woven throughout this book.

In conclusion, Giuseppe Bolotta's insightful exploration of the intricate dynamics shaping the self-identities of Thai slum children presents a compelling narrative that transcends traditional perspectives. Through meticulous research and nuanced analysis, Bolotta unveils the complex interplay between nationalized and internationalized influences, shedding light on the multifaceted journey of these children in navigating societal expectations. The

book not only challenges prevailing models of childhood and citizenship but also offers a poignant reflection on the resilience and agency demonstrated by slum children within an unequal socio-economic structure. Bolotta's work not only contributes to our understanding of Thai social morphology but also prompts broader discussions on the universal themes of identity, agency, and societal structures. In its entirety, this book stands as a noteworthy and thought-provoking addition to the scholarly discourse on childhood studies and socio-cultural dynamics.

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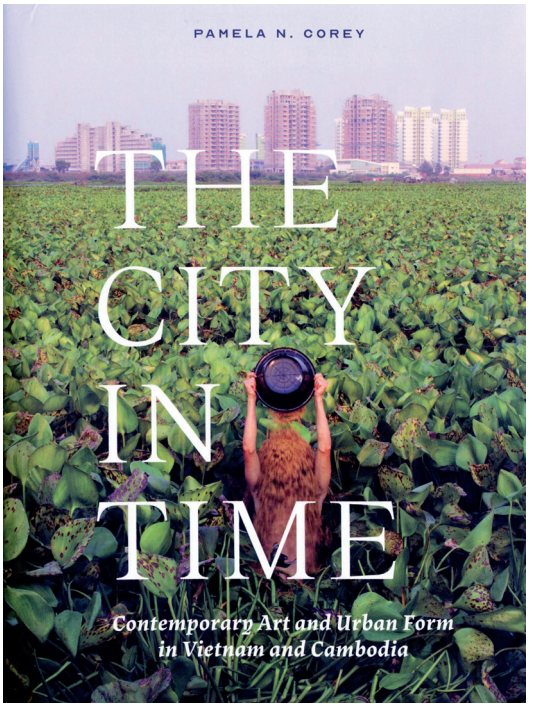
Pamela N. Corey, *The City in Time: Contemporary Art and Urban Form in Vietnam and Cambodia*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021, 240 pages, US$65, ISBN 978-0295749235 (Hardback)



In *The City in Time*, Pamela Corey's approach embeds theoretical insights into empirical analyses rather than present these separately and then to reflexively position the works using a range of interpretations. She wishes to avoid the singular narratives of historic rupture (p. 4) and to examine "how these artists individually and collectively developed critical and influential practices derived through experiential material and affective relationships with urban form" (p. 11). She considers how urban form—by which she probably means "the reflexive form of the city"—served as a catalyst for contemporary art because, "The city shapes artistic practices while art simultaneously consolidates the city as image" (p. 8).

Clearly, Corey wishes, and by-and-large succeeds, in separating the forms deployed by contemporary artists from the traumatic and tragic gaps, which the recent history of these two countries produced. Some contemporary artists have intentionally excavated archival

materials which instantiate those gaps—such as Dinh Q. Lè's use of old wartime Vietnamese photographs seen at *documenta* 13 in 2012, or of Vandy Ratana's images of vestigial bomb craters now filled as ponds seen at *Asia-Pacific Triennale* 6 in 2009. They mark their works as habitual to a diasporic view of recent history subjects from which contemporary art should be allowed to escape. Corey wants to avoid this imposition of an external interpretation forced by the diasporic perceptions of the *émigré* communities who left Vietnam and Cambodia after the wars. Their demands are as anathema to Corey as those of international NGOs. Her view is that history or the diasporic identity (p. 11) are just perspectives from which the generation of contemporary art can be seen; more important are the reaction of artists to their local, urban environment which provides their formal and formative discourse, whether they directly survived or have indirect experience of the recent horrors. As Corey notes:

> [...] these art works, though topically rooted in the legacies of war, urban form and present-day experience of urban sites and spaces have been crucial to their [these artists'] development, whether in terms of shaping artistic method, medium, or as a dialogical means of counter expression (p. 11).
>
> The city forms a residue and urban legacy onto which collective memory and national aspiration are mapped (p. 16).

Whatever the viewer's differences in interpretive mapping, there is no doubt that Corey valuably describes many actual works, which become clear via her analyses. This is true with her interpretation of a work by Brian Doan *Thù Dûc* (2009), which figures a young woman wearing a T-shirt with the star from a Vietnamese flag.

> [The artist is quoted] "Ho Chi Minh is next to her, but communism is no longer in her". This entanglement of affects deployed through the use of symbol, materiality, and composition is a strategy historically shared—with varying degrees of subtlety—by artists across global contexts commenting on the post-socialist condition. Many of these works reproduce symbols as multivalent and spatiotemporally layered, imparting both a critical stance but also a sense of affective haunting due to feelings of generational belonging to the pre- and the post- of socialism as a historic era and an ideological project (p. 28).

Of course, here a serious problem arises. Many of the artists chosen, whether they return to Vietnam or Cambodia, actually lived a diasporic childhood usually in the USA and studied in American art schools. Thus, many works, using local realia or references for their subjects, are easily seen as examples of this or that art school direction or art world formal discourse in the USA. Without a very penetrating and historically extensive examination

of how art in Vietnam and Cambodia was produced and conceived before these artists' return and how it was integrated or refused integration after the transfer of their works to Phnom Penh or Ho Chi Minh City, we are looking at a top-down, vertical external transfer. This sits ill with the artistic autonomy premised for the artists' creativity after their return.

A slightly different problematic arises with Corey's later extremely persuasive interpretation of the fate of a painting on a building called the White Building. A large painting some ten meters high of a woman seamstress was painted on the side of the building. Corey provides us with a rich description of how the work was sited and painted by a visiting artist from California, but then whitewashed with a statement, paraphrased by an Anglophone journalist, as inappropriate since it was "unworthy of such amplified public view, in a manner that did not speak to Khmer artistic tradition" (p. 139). Earlier, Corey argued for a positive use of enhanced scale where:

> [...] national urban forms are established as rooted in a post-colonial, internationalist past, yet the encroaching diffusion of these "local" forms promised by neoliberal development is to be interrupted by individual and collective voices on the ground (p. 137).

> Scale thus enables an ordering of the world as "the global" increasingly presses on us, while leveraged as a potent term that unveils its application by hegemonic apparatuses to exercise relations of power. This seemingly top-down process nonetheless finds fuller reification through acts of social reproduction, consumption, and contestation. In this instance[,] the notion of jumping scales often focuses on collective activism as well as mediation and reproduction of scale through individual acts of agency, largely in the urban area (p. 138).

Corey usefully cites several recent texts which examine "scale" and the notion of "jumped scales" in her endnotes (nn. 5–12, p. 195), but could have helped the reader understand better if the context of development studies in which these terms arose had been explained. Other terms were appropriated from financial operations, such as "leverage", defined online as "the use of debt (borrowed funds) to amplify returns from an investment or project" (see: investopedia.com/terms/l/leverage.asp). This term could have been detailed rather than abruptly used as a technical descriptor. The reader would have been better prepared for their use if the author had more clearly and separately adumbrated them before their application to art creation, production, and reception. Their undefined embedding is a consequence of Coreys' approach.

In Chapter 2, Corey looks at art and the urban order and at artists' spatial interventions in Ho Chi Minh City. Many of the works "attempt to interpellate a historical consciousness constructed through and yet against the spectre of socialism" (p. 61). In an illuminating comparison, this chapter notes the

absence of "de-ideologisation" found in contemporary Chinese art after the Cultural Revolution (p. 62), and notes that there are less enactments of public performance in Vietnam as compared with China or Cambodia. For Corey the artist Tuan Andrew Nguyen's works for *Proposal for a Vietnamese Landscape* "are composed as though to be read, to be decoded through a semi-directed visual exploration of forms" (p. 71). Only at this point does Corey mention the French colonial art school and its successors because the legibility—for critical purposes—of propaganda art, like the manipulation of modern product images in commercial advertising, requires an image discourse known to both artist and public.

Public space becomes a transitory or intermittent reference in a kind of visual diary confronting the time of urban change with the actual conditions under which life is lived. The "disoriented sense of time deliberately directs the viewer towards the real circumstances in which such artistic statements are necessary and more penetrating questions need to be asked" (p. 82).

Space had to be re-constituted by the artist since Phnom Penh urban space was subject to a sense of prolonged crisis around the turn of the 21st century. In Chapter 3, in a mini summary of many parts of her book, Corey notes:

> [...] urban transformation increasingly rendered the hollowness of the social contract between citizen and state, [and] steered a number of artists toward a documentary orientation in their creative practices, multiplying the forms through which the desire to address and record the exigencies of the present could be realized (p. 97).

Artists need independence from the many forms of intervention or state interposition, which can affect their works. This can be provided by increasing use of photography and video. Artists could then be:

> [...] autonomous from the studio, from the curatorial or NGO didacticism, from the necessity of academic training, and [photography] as a medium [...] could evade quick judgements based on the dating of artistic styles invited by work in painting or sculpture (pp. 105–106).

Photography allows separation from the art object with its public space controls provided by the museum or the state cultural apparatus and entry into private space, which can constitute "an alternative route of protest for the artist" (p. 119). These views were expressed by the artist and photographer Vandy Rattana:

> [Corey quoting Vandy] "I have a conflict with the art object—I've opposed it for a long time, resisting this abstract work which doesn't talk. I have to admit I don't understand work I see in the big museum—they don't say anything about the world, the universe, life—it's too arrogant in a way. I'm looking to have a conversation in another way" (pp. 122–123).

Vandy Rattana did a public photographic portrait of the exceptionally rare survivor of the Tuol Sleng execution center in Phnom Penh, the painter and photographer Vann Nath, asking the viewer to interrogate the image, free of narrative grounding.

> Neither interested in the illumination of "truth" nor in the larger notion of documentary exposure, the artist instead hails the viewer to both question and share the experience of meaning making (p. 126).

Vandy Rattana composed his earlier images into a filmic trilogy Monologue, based on his photographic investigation of bomb crater ponds. Here the dilemmas of the artist are made clear by direct quotation.

> [Corey quoting Vandy] "When I encountered this landscape, it was too immediate for me; I became hopeless, a bit lost, because this graveyard has become a rice field again, of course, as it was. People cultivate rice on top of people's remains. This was the moment I started to write my poem, perhaps to console myself, to negotiate with such absurdity. It was also the moment I accepted the existence of this absurdity" (p. 131).

The last Chapter 4 examines "Jumping Scales" as a theoretical metaphor for the way, as mentioned earlier, the postcolonial landscape is performed in Phnom Penh. Corey is, in effect, arguing the interpenetration, that is the intermediality of photography and performance. To do so she mobilizes part of the extensive repertory of Euro-American media theory which argues for:

> "[a] temporary conjunction of text and context" in the precise combination of image, site, and object that ultimately overwhelms the space of encounter, whether on the street or in the gallery (p. 155).

Corey further argues in the context of Cambodia:

> [...] a similar effect was achieved through artworks—often constituted through a dialectical affinity between photography and performance—that positioned the author of the image within the pictorial field, typically constituted by identifiable spaces of the city, many of which are now transformed beyond recognition (p. 156).

A hint at the basic intent behind this interpenetration follows:

> [...] repetitions of self-immersion, [...] documentation rather than liveness was the priority, with the series' efficacy located in the interdependency between two mediums. Here the notion that the art of photography is itself an irreproducible event parallels understandings of performance's ontological constitution as ephemerally inscribed through a conjunction of site, action, audience, and temporality that [...] removes it from the economy of reproduction (p. 158).

Whether this is feasible without the functioning of a certain type of inculcated audience remains to be ascertained. Perhaps Pamela Corey will elsewhere discuss the kinds of spectator and spectatorship which have developed in Cambodia (and Vietnam) to allow this art to function properly, free from the demands of reproduction, the spectators easily absorbed into the rhetoric of the developmental state.

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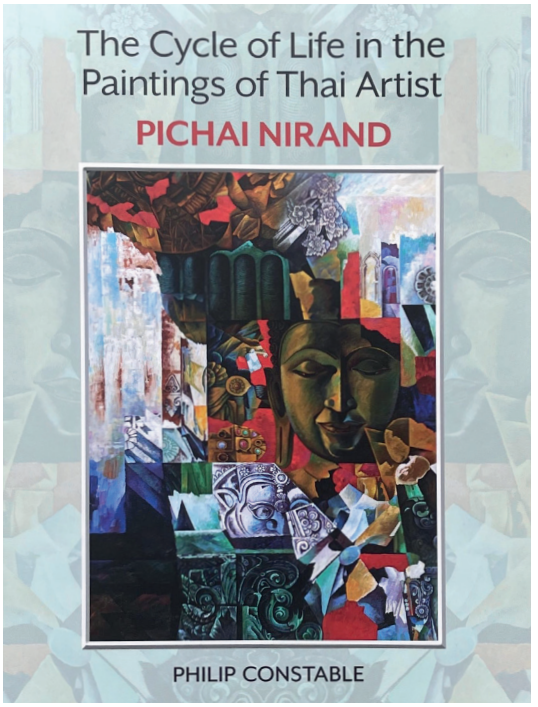
Philip Constable, *The Cycle of Life in the Paintings of Thai Artist Pichai Nirand*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2020, 166 pages, ฿750, ISBN 978-6162151552 (Paperback)



The Cycle of Life in the Paintings of Thai Artist Pichai Nirand is a monograph on the modern Thai artist Pichai Nirand (พิชัย นิรันต์; b. 1936). The volume, written and compiled by Philip Constable, senior lecturer in the history of South and Southeast Asia at the University of Central Lancashire in the United Kingdom, is a rare find. Pichai was a student of Silpa Bhirasri (ศิลป์ พีระศรี; born Corrado Feroci; 1892–1962), an Italian sculptor who migrated to Siam and founded Silpakorn University in 1943. Pichai earned multiple accolades, including medals from a highly esteemed National Exhibition, and was honored with the prestigious National Artist of Thailand award in 2003. However, he is hardly known outside Thailand. Constable's book is an excellent examination of artistic practice by a modern Thai artist by grounding Pichai within the context of Thai studies. In my view, the book sets out to achieve two primary objectives. Firstly, Constable endeavors to position Pichai as a prominent figure among the modern Thai masters of the 1960s–70s, skillfully harmonizing traditional elements with an international outlook. Secondly, the author strives to delineate Nirand's artistic approach from neotraditionalism, a burgeoning artistic movement in Thailand that held sway during the 1980s. Nonetheless, the volume would have greatly benefitted from engaging with the discourse on modernity in Western art as well as connecting with traditional art from which Pichai's work is derived.

Following the first objective, the author establishes two key traits in Pichai's artistic practice: "traditional spirit" and "afflux of intellectual and

artistic ideas". Silpa strongly believed that Thai artists should showcase their artistic excellence not through "traditional art" but by embracing "traditional spirit". This was achieved by disregarding the stylistic approach of Western modern art, focusing on the "abstract quality" that conveys the essence of Thai "traditional spirit" (p. 4). Thus, Silpa's teaching was designed to allow students to transcend the essence of Western modern art, often associated, in Thai eyes, with styles.

Constable applies the concept of "traditional spirit" to analyze Pichai's artistic journey, which started with surrealism in the 1960s and transitioned into abstract symbolism during the 1970s. This concept proves instrumental in elucidating the sustained essence in Pichai's artistic practice. It empowers viewers to delve deeply into the artwork, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of its essence without being confined to a formal analytical approach.

Constable argues that Pichai successfully manifests this traditional spirit through the utilization of Buddhist concepts and the subsequent application of their symbolism. Chapter 3, titled "A Geology of Knowledge: A Circle of Life", serves as a strong example of traditional spirit. Although Pichai's early works are not well-documented, *The Circle of Life* (1963; p. 24 fig. 5) is the only artwork from the 1960s in the book. The painting showcases the characteristics of Pichai's early works, applying the Buddhist world view of *saṁsāra*, depicted as a circle of fossilized remains that Pichai observed in a pond in Kanchanaburi province. The same chapter suggests that the artist revisited the fossil form intermittently throughout his life (pp. 23–33). In my personal view, this concept opens the door to examining Pichai's work from an environmental perspective, a theme that extends beyond the current book's scope.

The second prominent trait running throughout the book is the "afflux of intellectual and artistic ideas", a concept Constable borrowed from Silpa's writings. Constable asserts that this trait is more "international" when compared to "traditional spirit" (p. 11). The author makes an effort to position Pichai Nirand alongside his contemporaries, including Thawan Duchanee (ถวัลย์ ดัชนี; 1939–2014) and Pratuang Emjaroen (ประเทือง เอมเจริญ; 1935–2022), who played significant roles in the development of modern art during the 1970s. Pratuang, amidst the political turbulence of 1970s Thailand, skillfully blended surrealist style with a realist perspective, positioning artists as catalysts for socio-political transformation. His art resonated with themes of collectivism and the struggle against social injustice. Constable asserts on pp. 6–7 that Pichai shared a common aspiration with Pratuang, both being members of the Dhamma group (กลุ่มธรรม; est. 1970). The book faces the formidable task of demonstrating that Pichai's artistic expression is on par with Pratuang's in delivering poignant social commentary to society. This challenge is particularly daunting given that Buddhism, the overarching theme of Pichai's work, is already well-established and extensivelyexplored.

Pichai's figurative realism of the 1960s and early 1970s transitioned into a more ambivalent symbolic abstraction by the

decade's end. Chapter 4, titled "The Buddhapada: Lord Buddha's Footprint", delves into a significant shift in Pichai's artistic practice (pp. 34–44). The artworks, namely *Lord's Buddha Footprint*(*s*) (1979a, p. 35, fig. 12, and 1979b, p. 39, fig. 13), exemplify Pichai's retreat from the social realm to the supramundane.[1] However, this chapter falls short by omitting an iconographic analysis and failing to demonstrate the relationships between these symbols and the realm of "traditional art" from which they were borrowed. In essence, a more comprehensive understanding could be achieved by interpreting the artworks in association with knowledge of Thai art from pre-modern times. This approach would bridge pre-modern symbols with the modern, transforming them into a form of social commentary.

The second objective of the book is to defend Pichai's artistic practice against the emergence of neo-traditionalism in the 1980s, led by figures like Chalermchai Kositpipat (เฉลิมชัย โฆษิตพิพัฒน์; b. 1955) and Panya Vijinthanasarn (ปัญญา วิจินธนสาร; b. 1956). Constable argues that Pichai differs from "neo-conservative" artists because he employs tradition as spirit rather than simply adopting traditional stylistic forms (p. 13). The author highlights that "Pichai Nirand has offered both alternative stylistic expressions and continued to explore themes related to Thai urban commercialization, the transformation of Thai cultural values, Southeast Asian iconography, and the evolving nature of Thai national identity" (pp. 14–15). I find Constable's argument somewhat problematic, as it appears that, to him, Pichai's style remains a crucial element in artistic expression. Moreover, if neo-traditionalism stems from politician and statesman Prem Tinsulanonda's reintroduction of "Nation, Religion, and Monarchy" as the prevailing ideology of the era, it raises questions about whether this shift might have influenced Pichai's adoption of Buddhist symbolism during the same period. Constable, however, fails to provide convincing evidence that Pichai maintained his engagement with the socio-political struggles of society beyond the 1970s. Chapter 7, titled "The Buddhapada: Artistic Template for a Changing Society", discusses Pichai's involvement with the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej's interpretation of the *Mahājanakajātaka* as a means of "restoring balance and order through following Buddhist moral virtues of perseverance, moderation, and sufficiency" during a time of rapid economic growth that eventually led to a massive economic collapse a few years later (pp. 73–76). To this reviewer's mind, Pichai's work in *The Story of Mahajanaka* (1995) stands out because he wholeheartedly embraced figuration, making his ideological stance evident

[1] We wish to bring to the attention of readers a recent controversy reported in Thai news. Pichai Nirand currently faces allegations of fraud. It is claimed that he borrowed an artwork showcased in the book, namely *Lord's Buddha Footprint* (1979b), which he had previously sold to a private collector. Subsequently, he is alleged to have sold the same artwork again, this time to the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture (OCAC), Thai Ministry of Culture. The disputed artwork is now in the national collection. While this matter has not yet escalated to a court case, the private collector has lodged a complaint with the Committee on Corruption Prevention and Suppression. For further details, refer to: https://prachatai.com/journal/2023/12/107320 (accessed 7 January 2024).

despite benefitting to some extent from the burgeoning art market prior to the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

There is no doubt that Philip Constable successfully covers a wide range of works that Pichai Nirand developed throughout his life. While the book may not necessarily place Pichai among his peers, it does illustrate the challenges faced by Thai artists in navigating between traditionalism and internationalism. Artists may not adhere to Silpa Bhirasri's rejection of style as an essence as rigidly as previous scholarship has argued (pp. 4–6). In Pichai's case, surrealism may have been a shell, but it is a shell he meticulously maintains. It is unfortunate that he has shifted towards the traditional pole since the 1980s, relinquishing international tendencies in intellectual and artistic ideas to conform to the power of the state. The return to Buddhist symbolism thus requires knowledge of Buddhist philosophy to decode and Constable adeptly provides an exquisite reading of it. The challenge of Pichai's transition lies in remaining relevant internationally as the world becomes more global. How long can the "spirit" endure?

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