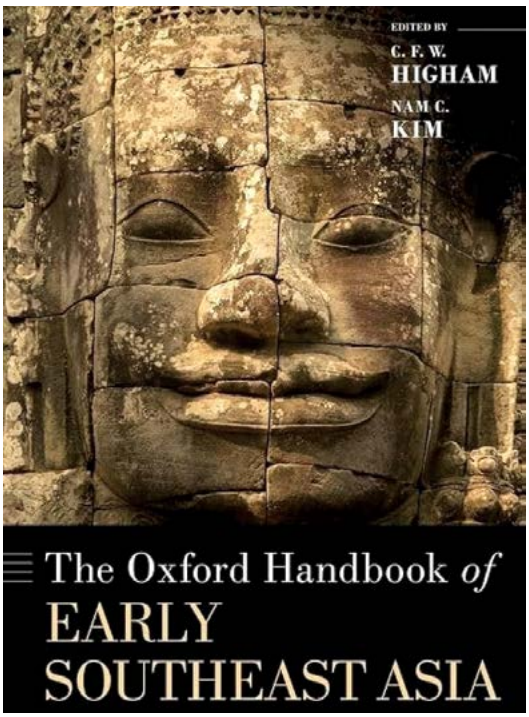
Charles F.W. Higham & Nam C. Kim, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Early Southeast Asia*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2022, 902 pages, £157.50, ISBN 978-0199355358 (Hardback)



Southeast Asia is an archeologically rich region, with a long and continuous record of human occupation comparable to that of other major regions worldwide. This makes it an important area for archeological and historical research. Recent discoveries, such as early *Homo sapiens* remains in Laos dating back more than 50,000 years (Freidline et al. 2023) and, in Indonesia, the world's oldest figurative rock art (Oktaviana et al. 2024), have garnered significant attention from scholars as well as the general public. These recent findings challenge earlier narratives and underscore that Southeast Asia is not an archeological or historical backwater, but a key region for understanding human evolution and cultural development. Although a variety of academic journals and monographs in English and regional languages address Southeast Asian archeology, comprehensive handbooks remain scarce. A notable exception is *The Handbook of East and Southeast Asian Archeology* (Habu et al. 2017). The *Oxford Handbook of Early Southeast Asia* fills a critical gap, offering an exhaustive examination of the region's prehistory and early history while demonstrating Southeast Asia's importance in a global context.

This ambitious volume comprises 902 pages divided into 38 chapters, each written by leading scholars. It covers a wide range of themes, including subsistence strategies, settlement patterns, social and political organization, technology, language, and symbolic behavior. The chapters are structured chronologically, spanning the Paleolithic period through the early historic era, including key polities such as Dvāravatī and Śrīvijaya. The editors categorize the chapters into four broad sections: (1) the Paleolithic and Mesolithic, (2) the Neolithic, (3) the Metal Age, and (4) the early historic period, when urban centers, states, and kingdoms emerged. Each chapter reflects the expertise of its contributors, offering detailed case studies and interpretations from across the region.

While the chapters are meticulously structured, the technical nature of the content and the specialized terminology may make the book challenging for general readers or those unfamiliar with archeology and related disciplines. The chapters vary in scope, focus, and

https://doi.org/10.69486/113.1.2025.14 © The Siam Society Under Royal Patronage

thematic emphasis, making it difficult to synthesize their findings without a strong grounding in the subject. However, the inclusion of diverse illustrations—maps, photographs, line drawings, tables, and charts—enhances accessibility and enriches the reading experience. Most chapters are well-illustrated, though the type and quantity of visuals vary. For instance, Chapter 13 on language families includes only maps, while Chapter 15 integrates maps, photographs, and line drawings. All photographs are black and white, which, while clear, may limit their impact when compared to color images.

One notable aspect of the volume is its geographical emphasis. Of the 38 chapters, 27 focus on Mainland Southeast Asia (MSEA), reflecting the editors' research expertise in Thailand and Vietnam. Archeological data from these countries are featured, while Laos and Malaysia are conspicuously absent. Two chapters (Chapters 7 and 26) explore southern and southwestern China, regions culturally linked to Southeast Asia. These inclusions are justified, but the lack of balanced coverage of Island Southeast Asia (ISEA) raises questions about the comprehensiveness of the volume.

The chapters follow a generally chronological sequence. The book opens with discussions on *Homo erectus* and early *Homo sapiens*, described as "anatomically modern humans", from the terminal Paleolithic (ca. 70,000–25,000 years ago). The first five chapters examine early subsistence strategies, lifeways, and lithic technologies. Chapters 6 and 7 focus on later hunter-gatherers and the so-called "Hoabinhian culture", spanning the terminal Pleistocene to the Holocene (ca. 25,000 BP–1200 CE). The Hoabinhian is a particularly contentious topic, with Chapter 7 emphasizing its definitional ambiguities and the need for further research.

Chapters 8 to 17 address Neolithic farming societies, offering detailed studies from MSEA, with the exception of Chapter 16, which focuses on ISEA. These chapters provide crucial insights into early agriculture, mortuary traditions, migration patterns, symbolic practices, and identity formation. The Neolithic legacy is carried forward in the chapters on the Metal Age (Chapters 17–26), which examine the technological and social developments of the Bronze and Iron Ages. However, these chapters concentrate almost exclusively on MSEA, leaving unanswered questions about the Metal Age in ISEA and its role in broader regional developments.

Chapters 27 to 35 focus on the emergence of urban centers, states, and kingdoms, covering both MSEA and ISEA. Chapter 36 provides an overview of Philippine prehistory, adopting a holistic approach that spans multiple periods and cultures rather than focusing on a specific timeframe. Chapter 37 shifts the focus to maritime archeology, introducing methodologies and findings that expand the scope of the volume. The final chapter (Chapter 38) addresses cultural heritage management, a departure from the archeological and historical focus of the preceding chapters. While its inclusion might seem incongruous, it serves as a timely reminder of the importance of preserving Southeast Asia's rich archeological record.

Despite its strengths, the volume's imbalance in regional coverage is notable. The predominance of MSEA reflects broader trends in Southeast Asian archeology, where countries such as Thailand and Vietnam have traditionally received more scholarly attention and funding. The omission of dedicated chapters on Laos and Malaysia, as well as the limited discussion of ISEA during the Metal Age, highlights areas for future research. Additionally, while the chronological organization of the chapters provides a clear structure, the diversity of topics and case studies may challenge readers seeking a cohesive narrative.

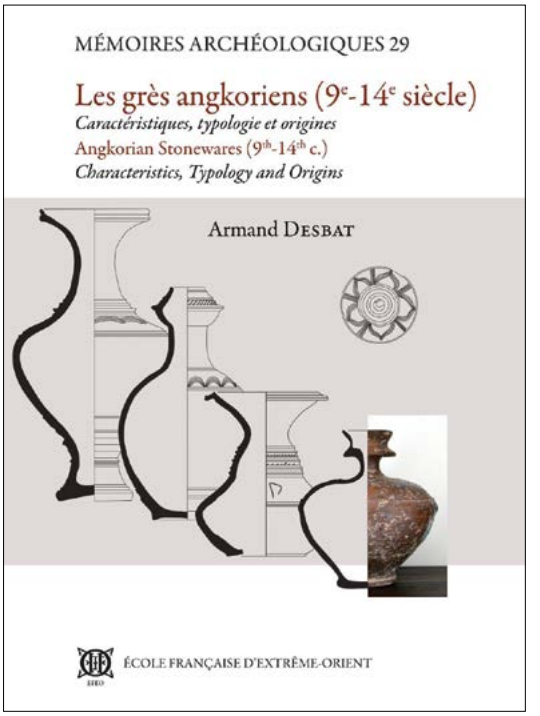
Overall, *The Oxford Handbook of Early Southeast Asia* remains a valuable resource for scholars, students, and specialists in archeology, history, and related disciplines. Its comprehensive coverage and detailed analyses make it an important publication that will remain a standard reference for years to come. Although new discoveries will undoubtedly reshape our understanding of the region, this volume provides a robust foundation for future research and underscores Southeast Asia's pivotal role in global human history.

Thanik Lertcharnrit
Silpakorn University (Retired)
thanik@su.ac.th

References

• Freidline, Sarah E. et al. 2023. Early Presence of *Homo Sapiens* in Southeast Asia by 86–68 KYR at Tam Pà Ling, Northern Laos. *Nature Communications* 14, 3193. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-023-38715-y.
• Habu, Junko et al., eds. 2017. *Handbook of East and Southeast Asian Archeology*. New York: Springer.
• Oktaviana, Adhi Agus et al. 2024. Narrative Cave Art in Indonesia by 51,200 Years Ago. *Nature* 631: 814–818. https://doi.org/10.10 38/s41586-024-07541-7.

Armand Desbat, *Les grès angkoriens (9e–14e siècle) : caractéristiques, typologie et origines/Angkorian Stonewares (9th–14th c.): Characteristics, Typology and Origins*, Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2023, 372 pages, 122 plates, 52 figures, €40, ISBN 978-2855394282 (Paperback)



After several decades, the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) returned to Cambodia in 1990 to resume recording and preserving cultural heritage, principally of the Angkorian Khmer (9th–14th c.) remains. Ironically, the Khmer Rouge reign forestalled the excesses of rapid development that, in adjacent regions of mainland Southeast Asia, proved inimical to the preservation of monuments and historical sites. After the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge, the development of Cambodian cultural and archeological heritage became a focus of several international teams meant to enhance local economies and foster local training and collaboration (Darith et al. 2008; Evans et al. 2013). Part of this renewed focus has been on better understanding ancient Angkorian Khmer landscapes, monuments, and material culture.

The volume under review represents the culmination of work on one prominent line of evidence, Angkorian Khmer glazed and unglazed stoneware—a ceramic defined by kiln firing to the point of extensive fusion, typically at ~1100–1200° C. where all but the most refractory minerals (i.e., quartz) have been absorbed into the fabric. Angkorian Khmer ceramics in general—and stonewares in particular—are notable for a wide variety of highly idiosyncratic types. They have a constrained distribution that closely follows the political footprint of the Angkorian Khmer; most, if not all, of the major central and regional production centers in the form of actual kiln complexes have been identified. The chronological prominence and demise of Khmer stoneware types has been reconstructed from excavated contexts.

The author, Armand Desbat, with extensive expertise of archeological ceramic analysis in Mediterranean and European contexts, is based at a major center for archeological ceramic analysis in France—the Lyon branch of the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS). As a lead researcher on a decade-long effort sponsored by the EFEO/CNRS to characterize Angkorian ceramics, Desbat brings this background to structure the content of the present work. His goal is to present a typology of Khmer ceramics that makes use of

the large volume of ceramics recovered from excavated contexts as well as the strong links to production sites to study the patterned distribution of types and establish a workable relative chronology. While several previous attempts (Groslier 1921; Rachna et al. 2020) have been made to produce a typology of Angkorian Khmer ceramics, the aim of the present work is to provide a systematic classification based on the current extensive database of types that allows "improved typology of Khmer stoneware through a design *readily amendable to expansion and chronological clarification*" (p. 338; my emphasis).

The organization of the book following Desbat's earlier scheme is chronological, with the earliest green glazed white wares from the Kulen Ranges adjacent to Angkor, followed by wares from Buriram production centers in Thailand, brown glazed stoneware from the southern production center of Choeung Ek, south of Phnom Penh, and finally brown glazed stoneware from the last Angkorian Khmer production center, Torp Chey, east of Angkor.

Each section is introduced by a summary of technical specifications, decoration, and chronology followed by the ceramic typology for that production center illustrated with scaled standard archeological cross-section drawings of each type. Technical specifications relate to observable (by eye) characteristics that range from color photographs of cross-sections of fabrics, to glaze finishes, as well as commentary on forming techniques (e.g., coiled, wire cut, kiln furniture). Descriptions of decoration are more perfunctory but well supported by illustrations, while chronology summarizes the state of knowledge about the assigned chronological range for a production center. The typological repertoire is parsed among nine major classes (100–900) from bowls to miscellaneous, with a proposed production center prefix (e.g., Kulen = K) and within each identification of variant forms (e.g., class K[ulen], 400—flask and bottle—type K404 and variants a–d). A total of 326 class/variants are identified and illustrated with sources for the type and variant. Each is given a provenance, a source—whether excavation or survey—and author, linked to a relatively comprehensive reference list provided at the end of the book and a date range.

If there is any weakness in the design of this taxonomic framework it is in the potential for circularity where a reference type is sourced from a consumption site rather than production context and its origin inferred in relation to assumed attributes of a specific production site. However, as recent compositional work has demonstrated (Grave et al. 2021), clear differences can be identified between the major Angkorian Khmer production centers, suggesting a complementary role for compositional analysis.

Overall, the production quality and scholarship of this work makes it a worthy addition to the growing body of literature on Angkorian Khmer material culture. The highly specialized focus makes it more suited to field practitioners than a general audience. Nonetheless, it offers an excellent case study in the formation of an archeological typological approach that is designed to be expandable to incorporate identification of

new types or chronological revisions. The author notes that this is not an end in itself but a necessary foundational tool for future research "including the organization of production, exchange and the geographic distribution of the different production centres" (p. 339).

I believe this work will provide an excellent basis for conversion into an electronic expert system that is queryable where the specialized nature of the material can be made "field friendly"—encouraging the inclusion of current and future Cambodian practitioners.

Peter Grave
University of New England
pgrave@une.edu.au

References

• Darith, Ea et al. 2008. New Data on Khmer Kiln Sites. In *Interpreting Southeast Asia's Past: Monument, Image, and Text. Selected Papers from the 10th International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists, Volume 2*, ed. by Elisabeth A. Bacus et al., 275–285. Singapore: NUS Press.

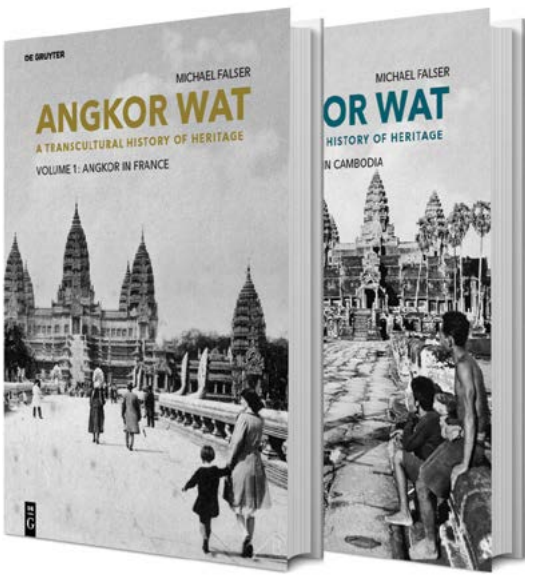
• Evans, Damian H. et al. 2013. Uncovering Archaeological Landscapes at Angkor Using Lidar. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110(31): 12595–12600.

• Grave, Peter et al. 2021. Angkorian Khmer Stoneware: Production and Provenance. *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 40(B): 103231.

• Groslier, George. 1921. *Recherches sur les Cambodgiens d'après les textes et les monuments depuis les premiers siècles de notre ère ; ouvrage illustré de 200 photographies et de 1153 dessins et plans inédits de l'auteur (voyages et missions au Cambodge de 1909 à 1914 et de 1917 à 1920)*. Paris: A. Challamel.

• Rachna, Chhay et al. 2020. Guide to Understanding Khmer Stoneware Characteristics, Angkor, Cambodia. In *EurASEAA14 Volume II Material Culture and Heritage. Papers from the Fourteenth International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists*, ed. by Helen Lewis, 53–62. Oxford: Archaeopress.

Michael Falser, *Angkor Wat—A Transcultural History of Heritage. Volume 1: Angkor in France; Volume 2: Angkor in Cambodia*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020, 1,150 pages, €172.95, ISBN 978-3110335729 (Hardback)



This two-volume publication on Angkor Wat by Michael Falser spans an impressive 1,150 pages, featuring around 1,400 high-quality color and black-and-white images, presented in hardcover with a visually compelling design. The first volume begins with a 53-page general introduction, followed by 12 chapters spread across the two volumes. Both volumes conclude with findings, epilogues, and supplementary plate sections.

The first volume, *Angkor in France: From Plaster Casts to Exhibition Pavilions* (Chapters 1–8), focuses on the period between 1866 and 1937. It begins with the early expeditions to Angkor led by Louis Delaporte to collect plaster casts, tracing their evolving displays in France during universal and colonial exhibitions. The author examines how architectural reinterpretations and replicas of Khmer temples played a significant role in France's cultural appropriation of Angkor, predating the formal return of the Siem Reap region to Cambodia under French colonial control in 1907.

The depth of Falser's analysis is enriched by digressions and essays that situate Angkor's architectural representations within broader cultural and political contexts. Noteworthy examples include discussions on the classification systems of universal exhibitions (1867 and 1878), an epistemological exploration of Edmé François Jomard's contributions (pp. 116–117), and essays on projects such as Théodore Villard and Charles Cotard's globe model (pp. 189–190) and the Eiffel Tower's symbolism (pp. 192–193). These insights offer a picture of the mindset of the time for contextualizing the role of architectural reconstructions in French colonial propaganda. The richly illustrated book vividly conveys the hubris of these reconstructions and the atmosphere of the exhibitions.

Chapter 3 offers an exploration of the production and exhibition of plaster casts in 19th-century France, connecting the practices of Alexandre Lenoir and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc with those of institutions such as Berlin's Völkerkundemuseum and London's South Kensington Museum. Falser situates the plaster-cast production and exhibition within a pan-European competition among colonial powers, underscoring how these reproductions reflect scientific rivalries.

The first volume's epilogue presents two case studies. The first explores cultural claims to Angkor as expressed through King Ang Duong's coins in Cambodia and the model of Angkor Wat in King Mongkut's royal temple in Siam. The second examines the replication of Angkor Wat in Bihar, India, during the 2010s. A 81-page plate section complements the in-text illustrations, further expanding the gathering of visual material of archival materials, maps, and photographs.

The second volume, *Angkor in Cambodia: From Jungle Find to Global Icon* (Chapters 9–12), shifts focus to the period from 1910 to 1993, following a brief discussion of early maps of the site. Chapter 9 delves into the École française d'Extrême-Orient's (EFEO) management and conservation efforts in Angkor Park from 1908 to 1973, drawing on EFEO publications, archival materials, and other archive materials housed in France's Archives nationales d'outre-mer.

Chapters 10 and 11 analyze the mobilization of Angkor as a cultural heritage site and its appropriation within political discourses during the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* era (សង្គមរាស្ត្រនិយម; lit. "People's Socialist Community"), the Khmer Republic, and Democratic Kampuchea. Falser's research draws on an extensive array of publications, archives, and photographs, offering a remarkable reconstruction of this complex period. The final Chapter 12 examines strategies from 1987 to 1993 to inscribe Angkor on the UNESCO World Heritage List, based on research in UNESCO archives.

As in the first volume, the epilogue presents case studies—here examining development projects in Angkor. Falser critiques the site's transformation into a "World (Af)fair", highlighting its commodification as a global tourist destination. A concluding 118-page plate section further enriches the volume with diverse visual materials, followed by a bibliography and indexes of names, institutions, and places.

The structure of the publication, split between France and Cambodia, creates a mirroring effect that links events, projects, and political decisions related to Angkor across time and space. The restitution of Siem Reap province to Cambodia under French colonial rule provides the backdrop for the first volume, while the second volume's discussion rests on the idea of a perpetuation of the seminal formulation and representation of Angkor plaster casts and exploratory works by French in the 20th century. Cross-cutting themes, such as the mapping of Angkor, create connections between the volumes, even as their focus and chronology differ. Falser's recurring use of Michel Foucault's concept of *heterotopia* serves as a unifying theoretical thread throughout the analysis (see Vol. 1, pp. 46–53).

Despite the rich visual appeal, these volumes are no mere coffee-table books of photographs on Angkor. Instead, Falser aims to demonstrate how Angkor's heritage was shaped by colonial practices, including the translation of its architecture into plaster casts in France and the conservation and management efforts in Cambodia. He extends this analysis to contemporary UNESCO policies, tracing the site's political and cultural value across the 20th century.

Falser situates his work within postcolonial studies, engaging with scholars such as Penny Edwards and Pierre Singaravélou in the introduction of each volume. His methodological approach—outlined in the first volume's general Introduction—emphasizes the colonial, postcolonial, and global trajectories that shaped the modern concept of cultural heritage (Vol. 1, p. 5). This innovative perspective positions the publication as a landmark in the field of the postcolonial historiography of Angkor Wat.

As such, these volumes are not an encyclopedia of Angkor Wat. Instead, they occupy a methodological space at the intersection of material history, historiography, and transcultural analysis. Within this broad framework, Falser makes selective choices about the themes and elements he presents and Angkor Wat occasionally recedes into the background in favor of broader reflections on Angkor or discussions of other temples.

While the publication's specialized focus may appeal primarily to scholars, non-specialist readers can also appreciate its extensive visual documentation, which includes photographs, archival materials, book covers, maps, and institutional websites. These diverse sources offer a broad view of the materials available for studying Angkor.

That said, a chronological timeline would have been a helpful addition, particularly for readers unfamiliar with the site's complex history. The text's frequent temporal shifts can make navigation challenging and a clear chronology would have provided useful context.

Falser's strong authorial position, perceptible in the chapters' titles, occasionally leads to curious statements. For example, the EFEO archives are described as "hidden" (Vol. 2, p. 323) or "not accessible" (Vol. 2, p. 4), even though Falser accessed them extensively. A substantial portion of the Conservation d'Angkor's archival records has been released online after this publication,[1] further undermining this characterization.

As other reviewers have noted (Forest 2020; Chemburkar 2021: 21; Lavy 2022: 4), the perspective of the Khmer people on Angkor's heritage is largely absent from the analysis. Falser acknowledges this omission, explaining in the first volume's introduction that his position as a Western observer limits his ability to develop this perspective (Vol. 1, p. 9). Still, certain chapters, such as those examining King Norodom Sihanouk's use of Angkorian history in 1960s architecture (Vol. 2, pp. 189–196) and political discourses during the Khmer Republic and Democratic Kampuchea (Chapter 11), provide valuable glimpses of Angkor's significance in Khmer heritage. These insights, however, are often framed within the broader narrative of colonial influence, which risks oversimplifying the Cambodian perspective. The epilogue in the first volume, discussing Ang Duong's coins, offers a rare but significant acknowledgment of Angkor's pre-colonial cultural significance (Vol. 1, pp. 407–408).

Some errors and outdated interpretations also appear, particularly in discussions of Angkorian history. For

[1] Available in EFEO's Banyan digital library: https://banyan.efeo.fr/.

example, the introduction to Angkor Wat (Vol. 1, pp. 11–18) perpetuates inaccuracies regarding the temple's name and origins.

As Paul Lavy has observed, typos are frequent, especially in proper nouns. Examples include "Hok Tourn" instead of "Mok Tourn" (Vol. 2, p. 107) and "Service des Eaux et Forêtes" instead of "Service des Eaux et Forêts" (Vol. 2, p. 127). While understandable in a work of this scale, these errors detract from the otherwise meticulous presentation.

Falser's publication reflects over a decade of research, much of it conducted within Heidelberg's Cluster of Excellence *Asia and Europe in a Global Context* (see Vol. 1, Introduction, 1.2). The first volume builds on his earlier work on plaster casts, such as his contributions to the 2013 catalog *Angkor, naissance d'un mythe – Louis Delaporte et le Cambodge*. The second volume expands on themes from Falser's 2015 edited volume, *Cultural Heritage as Civilizing Mission: From Decay to Recovery,* which emerged from conference proceedings.

In summary, this monumental publication represents a *tour de force* in the historiography of Angkor, tracing the transcultural entanglements of Angkor Wat's heritage from colonial France to contemporary Cambodia. While its focus and Eurocentric perspective leave gaps for future investigation, its extensive use of archival and visual materials establish it as a reference and an important milestone in the study of Asian cultural heritage.

Sophie Biard
Institut d'Asie Orientale
(CNRS-UMR 5062)
sophie.biard@ens-lyon.fr

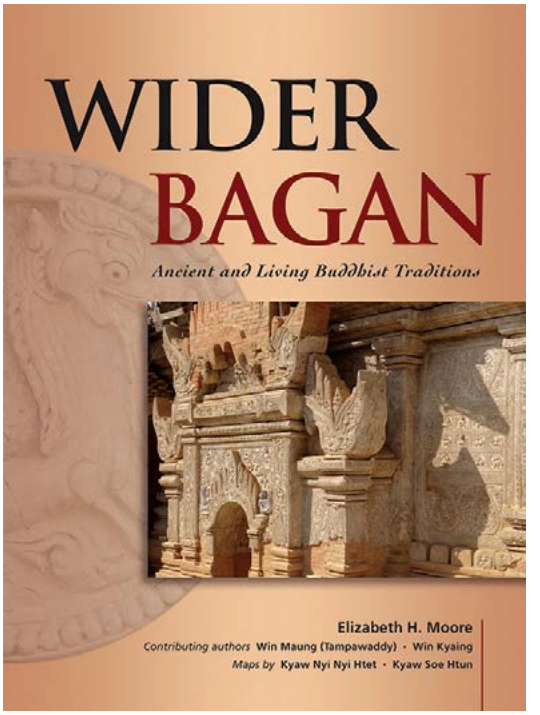
References

• Chemburkar, Swati. 2021. Heritage, History and Heterotopia at Angkor Wat. *Journal of Art Historiography* 25. https://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/2021/06/28/swati-chemburkar-on-heritage-history-and-heterotopia-at-angkor-wat/.

• Forest, Alain, 2020. Michael Falser, *Angkor Wat—A Transcultural History of Heritage. Volume 1: Angkor in France. From Plaster Casts to Exhibition Pavilions. Volume 2: Angkor in Cambodia. From Jungle Find to Global Icon*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019. *Francia Recensio 4.* https://doi.org/10.11588/frrec.2020.4.77507.

• Lavy, Paul. 2022. Angkor Wat: A History. *H-Asia*: https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=55261.

Elizabeth H. Moore, *Wider Bagan: Ancient and Living Buddhist Traditions*, Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2023, 456 pages, $SGD 40, ISBN 978-9814951197 (Paperback)



When you have been working in a field of study for over 30 years and on reading *Wider Bagan* you say to yourself, almost every few pages, "oh, I didn't know that", you can be certain that valuable research has been done. The 11th to 13th century urban site of Bagan, a cluster of more than 3,000 Buddhist buildings plus a walled administrative/royal center, located on the bank of the Ayeyarwady River (a convenient transport link) in upper Myanmar, has been well served with literature. A scholarly library on Bagan will already contain *Old Burma–Early Pagan* by Gordon H. Luce (1969), the *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan* by Pierre Pichard (1992–2001), *The Buddhist Murals of Pagan* by Claudine Bautze-Picron (2003), and perhaps the four volume Burmese language *Inventory Record of Conservation of Monuments at Bagan* (ပုဂံရှေးဟောင်းဘုရားပုထိုးများ ပြန်လည် ပြုပြင်ထိန်းသိမ်းမှုမှတ်တမ်း) published by the Department of Archaeology in Myanmar (1999–2003). These volumes will sit on the shelf beside more historically focused studies such as *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma* by Michael Aung-Thwin (1985), *Pagan; Stadt und Staat* by Tilman Frasch (1996), and *Ancient Pagan: Buddhist Plain of Merit* by Donald Stadtner (2005).

Now, in *Wider Bagan*, the late Elizabeth Moore has gone beyond what we might call the conventional focus on the city. The result is a study in several parts: a detailed inventory, location by location, across the ancient kingdom, of architecture, population, traditions, culture, and religious behavior. At times, the occasional romantic fallacy is gently put to rest. We learn, for example, that brick "forts" across Old Burma, which have often been seen as part of a system of military posts, bravely defending the kingdom, may at times have had the more prosaic but administratively more useful function of tax collection.

This study selects key attributes of Bagan culture: water management, walls, temples, inscriptions, and images. It considers the relationship between these aspects of material culture and the varied population groups that made up what we usually call the Bagan kingdom. But the key word here is "wider". Bagan is seen within the broad area of all of modern Myanmar. The attributes are studied in detail, with particular emphasis on the way they relate to the settlement-friendly river

valleys of Myanmar in which Bagan remnants have been recorded.

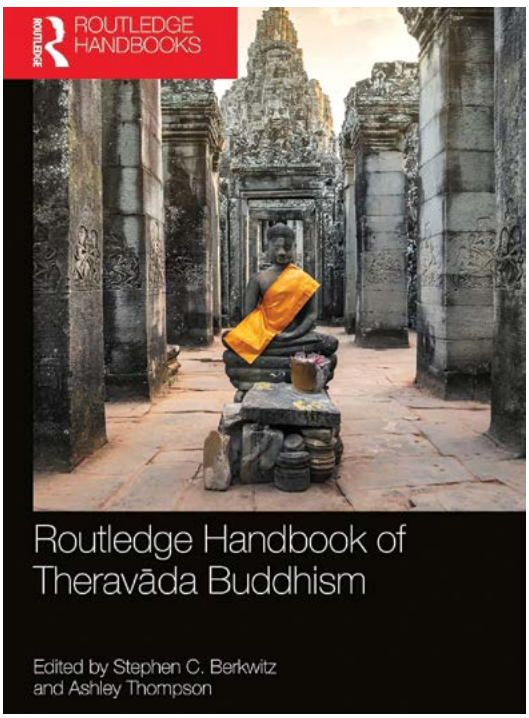
A novel aspect of *Wider Bagan* is the inclusion of a gazetteer of these valleys (174–323), highlighting "a diversity that enabled the capital and the lands beyond to expand and survive". Evidence is presented which suggests something of an independent trajectory of the periphery in relation to the capital.

This book contains 456 pages of densely packed data, well illustrated with photographs and more than 40 maps. While *Wider Bagan* is a truly impressive collection of information and analysis, it cheerfully acknowledges gaps that still exist and points to further research prospects. Thus this opus, really, becomes the go-to volume for research not just on the turn-of-the-first-millennium culture of Myanmar, but also on the material and Buddhist culture of the Southeast Asian region in the same period. A convenient feature of the publication is its availability in a searchable digital version. This makes data instantly accessible to the scholar at their office desk or on a laptop in the field.

Wider Bagan was the last major publication from Elizabeth Moore before her death in January 2024. It was not at all unusual for her to work with Burmese collaborators, in this instance Tampawaddy Win Maung and Win Kyaing, with cartographers Kyaw Nyi Nyi Htet and Kyaw Soe Htun. *Wider Bagan* is a fine legacy, as well as a vital addition to the library of the scholar of Myanmar and its neighbors in mainland Southeast Asia.

Bob Hudson
The University of Sydney
bob.hudson@sydney.edu.au

Stephen C. Berkwitz & Ashley Thompson, eds, *Routledge Handbook of Theravāda Buddhism*, London: Routledge Press, 2022, 394 pages, £172, ISBN 978-1138493933 (Hardback)



As with most edited volumes, this substantial contribution to the field of Theravada studies is difficult to review. With essays from 23 well-chosen scholars and coverage of a vast range of subjects, it is impossible to offer an in-depth analysis within the confines of a short review. However, I must state from the outset that this book belongs on the shelves of every serious student and scholar in the field. Moreover, it serves as a useful companion volume for undergraduates as an introduction to South and Southeast Asian Buddhist studies, especially when paired with a reliable historical study. It reflects current trends in Theravada studies and points to potential directions for future research.

The editors, Stephen Berkwitz and Ashley Thompson, are highly respected and qualified scholars representing two distinct subfields: Berkwitz specializes in Sri Lankan and South Asian religious history, while Thompson focuses on art history and Cambodian studies. Their diverse training enriches the volume, drawing on a broad array of scholarly methods and colleagues without rendering the work incoherent. In the Introduction (pp. 1–11), the editors aptly discuss the contested nature of the term "Theravāda" and the reasons for this contestation. While this topic has been heavily explored over the past twenty years, I am glad they avoided excessive repetition, as it has been well addressed by others such as Steven Collins (1990), Peter Skilling et al. (2012), and Kate Crosby (2014). More importantly, they underscore the advancement of Theravada Buddhist studies beyond the confines of the Pali Canon. Chapter 1 on "Theravāda" by Sven Bretfeld (pp. 15–42) and Chapter 2 on "Pāli" by Alastair Gornall (pp. 43–57) are both excellent in this regard. But these works demonstrate that understanding Buddhist ritual procedures, legal traditions, ethical reflections, and institutional distinctions requires close attention to commentarial texts, handbooks, and vernacular guides, which have played a pivotal role in shaping these practices across various kingdoms and nation-states in South and Southeast Asia over time.

The volume also highlights the diverse media through which these traditions—one can even speak of a

single tradition—have been transmitted. These include textual forms (palm-leaf, ivory, gold, bark, and mulberry paper manuscripts, as well as stone and metal inscriptions) and artistic expressions (murals, reliefs, statues, banners, illuminated texts, and more). The editors' decisions regarding which subjects to include or exclude and how to organize the volume are, however, somewhat controversial and may mislead readers. The editors do not describe their rationale for emphasizing certain subjects while others are omitted entirely. To their credit, the editors acknowledge this issue and cannot be held entirely responsible.

To offer some insider perspective, I must confess that I am part of the problem. I was invited to contribute to this volume but, due to my own tight schedule, and for personal reasons, had to withdraw my chapter on "Ornament" after completing the first draft. I suspect that other contributors may have withdrawn for similar (or more noble) reasons. This is an inherent challenge, for even the most well-intentioned editors must contend with the complex career, research, temporal, and family constraints of their contributors. All editors try to be comprehensive in volumes like this, but there are many factors outside of their control.

As a result, readers may find certain contributions quite narrow in focus while some topics are conspicuously absent. For example, the volume includes a chapter on the "Mons" (Chapter 23 by Patrick McCormick, pp. 355–366), a significant literary, historical, and artistic ethnic group that once played a dominant role in the regional history of mainland Southeast Asia. However, there are no chapters on the Pyu, Shan, Tai Lue, Arakanese, Malay, or other regional groups, and no dedicated chapters on the Lao or Khmer. Similarly, while there is a chapter on "funerals" (Chapter 13 by Katherine Bowie, pp. 194–206), none are on ordination, protection and magic, prognostication, or marriage. Topics such as "repetition" are explored (Chapter 9 by Christoph Emmrich, pp. 140–155), but not music, comedy, or theatrical performance. Chapters on "circulation" (Chapter 3 by Anne Blackburn, pp. 58–69), "tradition" (Chapter 6 by Nirmala Salgado, pp. 99–112), "Canons" (Chapter 14 by Peter Skilling, pp. 209–226), "*vaṃsa*" (Chapter 16 by Stephen Berkwitz, pp. 243–256) are present, but no specific focus on commentaries, handbooks, murals, manuscripts, or modern electronic media. There is one chapter on the *Abhidhamma* (Chapter 15 by Rupert Gethin, pp. 227–242), but none on the *Vinaya*—although there is a chapter on "discipline" (Chapter 12 by Tomas Borchert, pp. 182–192)—or *sutta*s. I am not suggesting that all these other chapters be included, but that the decisions of what to include and what to leave out remain frustrating.

To be fair, certain topics, such as commentaries, are addressed indirectly in the two chapters on "bilingualism" (Chapter 18 by Trent Walker, pp. 271–284), and "Canons" (Skilling, cited above), both excellent. The chapter on "deities" (Chapter 22 by John Clifford Holt, pp. 343–354) touches on protection, while chapters on "visual narratives" (Chapter 19 by Samerchai Poonsuwan, pp. 287–304), "icons" (Chapter 20 by

Ashley Thompson, pp. 305–326), and "affect" (Chapter 21 by Chairat Polmuk, pp. 327–342) explore various aesthetic modes of teaching. The chapter on "discipline" (Borchert, cited above) examines the creative ways in which the *Vinaya* has evolved in specific Theravada communities.

Each chapter is written by a highly qualified scholar, thoroughly cited, and professionally edited. Despite the wide range of styles, writing is surprisingly coherent, crisp, and clear. It is both accessible and thought-provoking. I particularly appreciated not only the diversity of the chapters but also the inclusion of more traditional foundational topics such as "statecraft" (Chapter 4 by Patrice Ladwig, pp. 70–82), "reform" (Chapter 5 by Anne Hansen & Anthony Lovenheim Irwin, pp. 83–98), "meditation" (Chapter 8 by Pyi Phyo Kyaw & Kate Crosby, pp. 127–139), and "laity" (Chapter 11 by Asanga Tilakaratne, pp. 170–181). The chapter on "filial piety" (Chapter 10 by Gregory Kourilsky, pp. 56–169), in particular, is a subject often overlooked in studies of Theravada Buddhism and is a refreshing addition. While foundational, these chapters are anything but conventional, showcasing exciting new research and developments in the field.

Interestingly, while the two chapters on "merit" might seem redundant, the approaches they take are markedly different, reflecting the centrality of merit in Theravada ethics, ritual, diplomacy, and economics. For example, Juliane Schober's chapter on merit (Chapter 7, pp. 115–126), focusing on Burma (Myanmar), is theoretically informed by Steven Collins, Patrice Ladwig, Marcel Mauss, and James Laidlaw, and includes an insightful section on merit and institution building. Meanwhile, Rita Langer's chapter (Chapter 17, pp. 257–270) examines Sri Lanka, exploring textual justifications and instructions for making merit in Sinhala and Pali texts such as the *Kāvyaśēkharaya* and the *Saddhamopāyana*, tracing these themes to contemporary guides for making merit. Both chapters are detailed and illuminating.

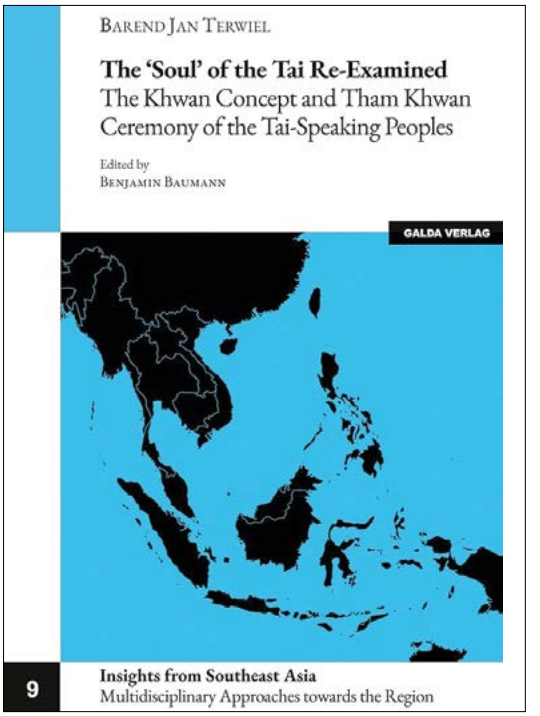
In conclusion, the *Routledge Handbook of Theravāda Buddhism* stands as essential reading and reference for scholars and enthusiasts alike, offering both a broad overview of the field and nuanced insights into its most pressing research questions.

Justin Thomas McDaniel
University of Pennsylvania
jmcdan@sas.upenn.edu

References

• Collins, Steven. 1990. The Very Idea of the Pali Canon. *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 15: 89–126.
• Crosby, Kate. 2014. *Theravāda Buddhism: Continuity, Diversity, and Identity*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.
• Skilling, Peter et al., eds. 2012. *How Theravāda is Theravāda? Exploring Buddhist Identities*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

Barend Jan Terwiel, *The 'Soul' of the Tai Re-Examined: The Khwan Concept and Tham Khwan Ceremony of the Tai-Speaking Peoples*, ed. by Benjamin Baumann, Glienicke: Galda Verlag, 2023, 274 pages, €32.99, ISBN 978-3962032982 (Paperback)



Barend Jan (Baas) Terwiel's latest book, *The "Soul" of the Tai Re-Examined: The Khwan Concept and the Tham Khwan Ceremony of the Tai-Speaking Peoples*, edited by Benjamin Baumann, is an ambitious and deeply insightful work that revisits the concept of *khwan* among Tai-speaking peoples. Spanning Southeast Asia, southern China, and northeastern India, *khwan* is central to the spiritual lives of these groups, whether they have adopted Buddhism or not. Terwiel's definition of *khwan* as an "element of vitality" or "quantity of life-force" (p. 105) forms the foundation for his exploration of the concept's variability across different Tai communities. The book draws upon his decades of fieldwork and scholarship, presenting a re-evaluation of his earlier publications while integrating new reflections.

Tai populations conceptualize humans as endowed with multiple "souls" or "vital spirits" (Th., ขวัญ, *khwan*; L., ຂວນ, *khwan*), each associated with specific body parts such as the head, chest, feet, or ears. The number of *khwan* varies widely across groups: 32 for the Burmese Shan, Northern Thai (*Yuon*), and Lao, 62 for the Tai Lue, 80 for the Tai Dam (Black Tai), Tai Khao (White Tai), and Tai Nuea, and as many as 120 among the Tai Daeng (Red Tai). In some groups, even non-human entities such as buffalo, rice, musical instruments, and, remarkably, pick-up trucks, are believed to possess *khwan* (pp. 238–241). Some neighboring groups have a similar principle—such as the Khmers, who identify 19 *preah lueng* (Kh., ព្រះលើង្គ), or vital essences, within the human body. This diversity underscores the fluidity of *khwan* as a concept, its manifestations influenced by local traditions and social contexts.

A fundamental characteristic of *khwan* is its autonomy. Unlike an individual's fixed soul in Western or other religious frameworks, *khwan* can leave and return to its host's body at will, often in response to fear or trauma. Illness or misfortune is frequently attributed to the loss of *khwan*, and the complete disappearance of *khwan* signifies death. To address such disruptions, Tai communities perform rituals to "call the souls back" (Th., ทำขวัญ, *tham khwan*; L., ສູ່ຂວນ, *su khwan*). These ceremonies, led by lay masters rather than monks, serve to reintegrate the *khwan* into the

body of the afflicted individual. They are also performed during major life events—marriage, monastic ordination, travel, or house construction—to ensure the individual's readiness to face upcoming challenges. Despite their widespread practice in Buddhist societies, *tham khwan or su khwan* ceremonies are typically classified as non-Buddhist in scholarship. However, as Terwiel demonstrates, Tai populations often blur the boundaries between Buddhist and non-Buddhist practices, challenging such rigid categorizations.

The book comprises 13 chapters of varying lengths, each chapter either revisiting Terwiel's earlier work or presenting new insights. The first chapter introduces the *khwan* concept, while the concluding chapter synthesizes the findings. The intervening chapters feature excerpts from Terwiel's publications between 1975 and 1995, complemented by his retrospective commentary. This format, guided by editor Benjamin Baumann, allows for a unique combination of ethnographic detail, critical reflection, and autobiographical narrative. Although Baumann's editorial contributions are often valuable, the lack of clear bibliographical references for the excerpts is a notable oversight, leaving readers to piece together their origins.

Chapter 2 (pp. 7–22) includes three excerpts from Terwiel's seminal work *Monks and Magic* (1975), detailing *tham khwan* rituals associated with birth, ordination, and the erection of a house's main pillar (Th., เสาเอก; L., ເສົາເອກ, *sao ek*). These vivid descriptions illuminate the integration of *khwan* rituals into everyday life. Chapter 3 (pp. 23–28) explores the writings of the Thai scholar Phraya Anuman Rajadhon (1888–1969) on *khwan*, integrating them with interviews Terwiel conducted with him in 1969. Chapter 4 (pp. 29–31), the shortest chapter, offers a brief but evocative account of Terwiel's experiences in a Ratchaburi household after his monastic stay, highlighting how *khwan* is referenced in daily interactions.

The longest chapter, Chapter 5 (pp. 33–84), provides a comparative analysis of funeral rites among various Tai and neighboring groups, tracing the journey of the deceased from body preparation to burial or cremation. This chapter showcases Terwiel's meticulous ethnographic approach, offering a rich tapestry of practices that reveal both shared traditions and local adaptations. Chapters 6 (pp. 85–94) and 7 (pp. 95–112) shift the focus to Tai populations in Assam, northeastern India. The former adopts an autobiographical tone, recounting Terwiel's 1978 fieldwork among Tai Ahom, Khamti, and other groups, while the latter examines therapeutic rituals aimed at restoring lost *khwan*.

Chapter 8 (pp. 113–146) stands out for its comparative breadth, examining *khwan* concepts across Tai-speaking groups in Thailand, Laos, India, Vietnam, Myanmar, and southern China, as well as among non-Tai populations like the Khmer, Burmese, and Hmong. A summary table at the chapter's end effectively distills the similarities and differences in these traditions. Chapter 9 (pp. 147–164) revisits funeral rites among Assam's Tai populations, with a particular focus on the interplay between Buddhist and non-Buddhist elements. This chapter

emphasizes the dynamic intermingling of belief systems, illustrating how Buddhism has influenced *khwan* rituals —and reciprocally—without entirely subsuming them.

Chapter 10 (pp. 165–177) features an annotated translation of a text used in *tham khwan* or *su khwan* ceremonies among Tai Phakey (or Tai Phake) communities in Assam. This chapter exemplifies Terwiel's interdisciplinary approach, bridging anthropology, religious studies, and textual analysis. Chapter 11 (pp. 178–200) explores mythological tales shared by Tai and neighboring groups about the origins of rice cultivation, linking these narratives to Buddhist literature such as the *Aggañña*sutta and the *Lokapaññatti*. These connections highlight the deep integration of Buddhist and local cosmologies.

Chapter 12 (pp. 221–231) examines a calendric table used by Tai groups in Vietnam and Assam to track the location of the *khwan* within the body, clearly within a hemerological framework based on the lunar calendar. Terwiel suggests that these calendars were personalized for individuals, though it is more likely that they served as personal handbooks for astrologers. This chapter also touches on the influence of Chinese Taoist culture on Tai traditions, an area ripe for further exploration.

Each chapter begins with the author's classic introduction, offering insights into the circumstances surrounding the initiation and conduct of his research. The editor selects key excerpts from texts previously published by Terwiel, which are then followed by critical commentary from the author himself. Each chapter concludes with a general summary that synthesizes the material and addresses the central questions of the overarching issue. This editorial structure lends originality to the work, along with epistemological reflections, and provides an autobiographical touch that enhances the reading experience. However, at times, readers may feel a sense of disorientation, as they learn in Terwiel's commentary that earlier hypotheses or methodologies have been reassessed—such as when the distinctive traits previously outlined for various *tham* or *su khwan* are later recognized as simply variants of a single ritual (p. 144). Consequently, the data must be reconsidered in light of the author's updated reflections. Additionally, the format leads to some repetition, with similar ethnographic descriptions and analyses appearing in multiple chapters. For example, the funeral rites of the Tai of Assam are discussed in both chapters 5 and 9 and the inconsistency in the number of *khwan* across different Tai groups (and even among informants within the same group) is highlighted several times (pp. 4, 105, 118, 132–133, etc). Furthermore, discussing the rituals practiced by the Lao in northeastern Thailand (p. 119) and in Lao PDR (p. 120) results in redundancy, as these populations are culturally similar, separated only by the Mekong River. Despite these editorial choices, readers are likely to enjoy revisiting these fascinating pages, even if they are decades old, while discovering Terwiel's new reflections and updated conclusions. In this regard, the book adds value to existing studies on the *khwan*.

A key achievement of Terwiel's work is his identification of the precise influence Buddhism has had on the concepts and rituals related to the *khwan* and vice versa. He provides numerous examples of the symbiosis—or intermingling—between Buddhist ideas and those he classifies as part of "archaic Tai culture" or "pre-Buddhist Tai culture", ultimately favoring the latter term (p. 34). Rituals for "calling back the souls", performed during funerals or before ordination ceremonies to become a Buddhist monk (p. 15), are illustrative of this synthesis. Terwiel notes the presence of wooden poles commemorating the dead among White Tai and Black Tai, two non-Buddhist populations. These are presumably associated with beliefs that certain *khwan* of the dead ascend to heaven by climbing these poles, taking the parasol, or riding a winged horse (p. 67). This observation helps explain the presence of flagpoles and banners near the monasteries of Buddhist Tai populations, where their role is to transfer merit to the deceased (p. 69). This intermingling between Buddhist teachings and *khwan* rituals is also evident in the Tai Phakey text analyzed by Terwiel in Chapter 10, which recalls the vital spirits using Pali verses from Canonical scriptures (p. 167). Even myths that initially appear specific to Tai and neighboring cultures, like the legend of primordial rice, are shown to have roots in Buddhist literature, notably the *Aggaññasutta*, and are further developed in local Pali texts like the *Lokapaññatti* and the *Traibhūmikathā* (pp. 201–204). These connections, paradoxically, challenge the book's assertion, made in its introduction, that "*khwans* were not absorbed into Buddhist thought" (p. xxvi).

Another notable contribution of Terwiel's work demonstrates that elements from different traditions are not in opposition but are complementary or even compatible. For example, the belief in the plurality of *khwan*—some of which are thought to return to heaven, others to reincarnate as ancestors or in a new body—does not necessarily conflict with the Buddhist notion of "non-self" (P., *anatta*). Some Buddhist Tai groups, such as the Siamese and Lao, readily equate *khwan* with *viññāṇa* (consciousness). We might also note that the belief in the possibility of "sending" or "dedicating" (P., *uddisa*) merit (P., *puññakusala*) to the deceased is not, as Terwiel seems to suggest, a remnant of "original Tai tradition", but rather a common practice among Buddhist communities across Asia. Furthermore, Terwiel identifies that some Tai groups, such as the Shan of Burma, Lao, and Yuon, count 32 *khwan* for each individual because this number corresponds to the list of "thirty-two [bodily] constituents" (P., *dvatiṃsākāra*) in the Canonical texts of Sinhalese Buddhism (p. 132). For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that Lao and Yuon beliefs attribute part of the *khwan* to the father and the rest to the mother, aligning with local Buddhist teachings on the transmission of bodily elements (Th., คุณ; L., ຄຸນ, *khun*; P., *guṇa*) from each parent to the child.[1]

Such correspondence with "bodily constituents" opens a discussion on the nature of *khwan*, particularly whether

[1] On this, see Kourilsky 2015: 45–50.

they are intrinsic to an individual or simply "inhabit" the body. This ontological question is left unexplored, along with other complex issues, such as the relationships between notions like *viññāṇa* (consciousness), *phi* (ghost), and *khwan* in Buddhist Tai societies.

Given the rich exploration of Buddhism's influence on *khwan* rituals, it is surprising that Terwiel's attempt to reconstruct "pre-Buddhist Tai culture" does not rely more heavily on the distinction between Buddhist and non-Buddhist Tai groups. For instance, in discussing funeral rites, it might have been more insightful to compare Tai groups in southern China, unaffected by Indian influences, with those that migrated to mainland Southeast Asia and integrated with "Indianized" Mon–Khmer populations (p. 143). Only in Chapter 8's commentary (p. 144) does Terwiel explain his methodological choice, revealing that, due to a lack of evidence from places such as Guizhou, Guangxi, and Guangdong, he initially assumed Tai groups in southern China were unaware of the *khwan* concept. Terwiel admits that this assumption was later proven incorrect.[2] This realization exemplifies the occasional disorientation caused by Terwiel's revisions. Ultimately, he concludes, quite rightly, that although certain ritual elements may have Khmer origins, the preoccupation with "vital elements" in Tai funeral rites is likely a Tai contribution (p. 143).

Despite these minor reservations, *The 'Soul' of the Tai Re-Examined* is indispensable for understanding the concept of *khwan*, which is central to all Tai-speaking populations. This book represents the most comprehensive, well-documented, and up-to-date study on the subject, offering valuable insights for specialists and students of Southeast Asian anthropology, particularly those interested in the rigorous, multidisciplinary methods of one of the foremost experts on Tai culture.

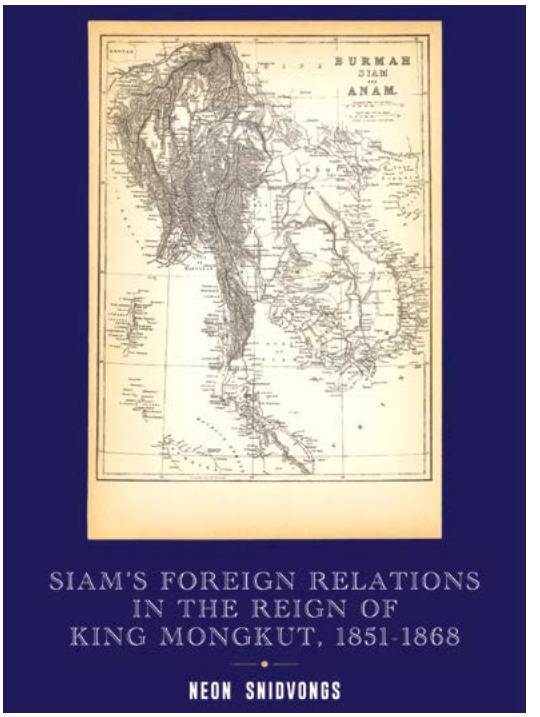
Gregory Kourilsky, EFEO
gregory.kourilsky@efeo.net

References

• Berlie, Jean. 1991. Les Dai de Chine. *Péninsule* 22(1), 131 p.
• Cauquelin, Josiane. 1997. Au pays des Buyi, une ethnie du berceau thaï, province du Guizhou, Chine. *Cahiers de Péninsule* 4, 138 p.
• Holm, David. 2004. *Recalling Lost Souls. The Baeu Rodo Scriptures, Tai Cosmogonic Texts from Guangxi in Southern China*. Bangkok: White Lotus.
• Kourilsky, Gregory. 2015. *La place des ascendants familiaux dans le bouddhisme des Lao*. PhD Dissertation. Paris: EPHE.

[2] See Holm 2004. This information can also be found in earlier French studies, such as Berlie 1991, and Cauquelin 1997.

Neon Snidvongs, *Siam's Foreign Relations in the Reign of King Mongkut, 1851–1868* (วิเทศสัมพันธ์ของสยามในรัชสมัยพระบาทสมเด็จพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว ค.ศ. 1851–1868), Bangkok: International Studies Center, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023, 832 pages, Open Access, ISBN 978-6163411327 (E-Book)



Siam's Foreign Relations in the Reign of King Mongkut, 1851–1868 is a delightful and insightful examination of Siamese interactions with Great Britain and France during the height of the colonial era. The author, Thanpuying Neon Snidvongs (1930–2021), was a well-known Thai historian who received her higher education in Great Britain. The book under review is based on her doctoral thesis (*The Development of Siam's Relations with Britain and France in the Reign of King Mongkut, 1851–1868*), presented at SOAS–University of London in 1960. Special mention should be made from the outset of the extensive and "awe-inspiring" 75 pages of notes and 27-page bibliography. The research undertaken decades ago by Dr Neon warrants recognition and, now that it is widely available through open access, should serve as a valuable resource for future scholars.[1]

The study offers a refreshing perspective on a period often overlooked in Western historiography. Western historians have traditionally shown little interest in King Mongkut's (Rama IV, r. 1851–1868) life and achievements, as his reign tends to be overshadowed by that of his son, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r. 1868–1910), who is credited with modernizing and reforming the Siamese state. Dr Neon's work, however, argues that King Mongkut's reign laid the crucial groundwork for his son's achievements, influencing every aspect of King Chulalongkorn's rule.

Dr Neon thus skillfully brings to light the often-overlooked contributions of King Mongkut both before and after his ascension to the throne in 1851. For example, she highlights his pivotal role during the reign of his predecessor, King Rama III (r. 1824–1851). Unlike previous Siamese kings, King Mongkut had a unique advantage—during his 27 years as a Buddhist monk prior to becoming a monarch, he traveled extensively throughout the kingdom. These journeys gave him an intimate knowledge of Siam's geography and its people, greatly benefiting him when he later assumed the throne. Dr Neon highlights how this experience set King Mongkut apart,

[1] The e-book is available for free download on the International Studies Center website of the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs: https://isc.mfa.go.th, under Publications > Books.

providing him with insight and understanding to navigate the challenges of governing a country under the growing threat of Western colonialism.

The author also addresses the role of the powerful Bunnag family in Siamese state affairs during King Mongkut's reign. While acknowledging the influence of this prominent clan, she argues that King Mongkut shared power with the Bunnags, working alongside them to administer the kingdom. Importantly, when it came to negotiations with Western powers, it was King Mongkut who took the lead, often making decisive decisions that protected Siam's sovereignty.

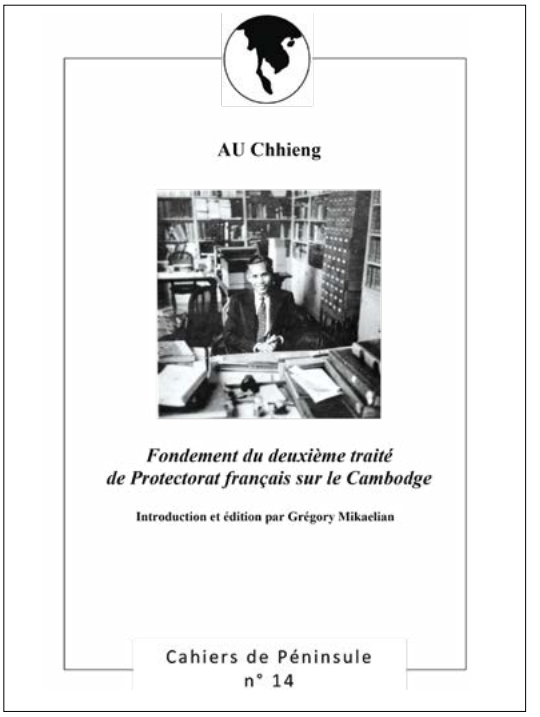
The book offers a detailed analysis of how King Mongkut skillfully countered the British and French colonial ambitions, particularly their designs on Siam's tributary states. Dr Neon sheds light on the King's bold move to end Siamese centuries-old tradition of sending tribute to the Chinese emperor. After the Bowring Treaty of 1855, King Mongkut recognized that continuing this practice could lead to misunderstandings with European powers, who might misinterpret Siam's status as subordinate to China. His decision to terminate the tribute reflected a strategic shift in Siam's foreign policy, one that redefined the kingdom's relationships in the context of a rapidly changing global order.

Another fascinating aspect of Dr Neon's analysis is her exploration of King Mongkut's linguistic prowess, highlighting his early involvement in foreign relations. She emphasizes that he was the first Asian monarch who could communicate directly with British diplomats and other Western envoys without an interpreter, a remarkable achievement for the time. His fluency in English and other languages helped bridge cultural divides and foster more direct and personal relationships between Siam and Western powers.

In conclusion, Dr Neon's book presents a thorough and engaging account of King Mongkut's reign, a pivotal period in Siam's political history. Her nuanced portrayal of this transformative era challenges the conventional view of King Mongkut as merely a precursor to King Chulalongkorn, instead stressing his own significant contributions to Siam's survival and adaptation during the age of imperialism. Those interested in this critical period of Siamese history will find *Siam's Foreign Relations in the Reign of King Mongkut* an indispensable and rewarding read.

Sunait Chutintaranond
Chulalongkorn University (*Emeritus*)
sunait.c@chula.ac.th

Au Chhieng, *Fondement du deuxième traité de Protectorat français sur le Cambodge,* introduction et édition par Grégory Mikaelian, Paris: Association Péninsule [*Cahiers de Péninsule* 14], 2023, 356 pages, €32.50, ISBN 978-235214532 (Paperback)



Grégory Mikaelian here offers two remarkable texts. The volume begins with a fascinating hundred-page biography of Au Chhieng (1908–1992), the first Cambodian Orientalist, written by Mikaelian. This is followed by Au Chhieng's law thesis, which had disappeared after its rejection and pulping in 1941. For this volume, the thesis has been re-typed and expanded with discreet and welcome notes; the book also includes a set of photographs.

Mikaelian became interested in Au Chhieng while researching exceptional Cambodians who migrated to France at the beginning of the 20th century. This work paralleled his work on Khmer texts from the Cambodian middle period. He had already published the life story of Areno Iukanthor, son of Prince Yukanthor (1860–1934). Mikaelian's deep knowledge of Cambodian history and social order allows him to put his subjects' lives into perspective.

Au Chhieng is best known to Cambodian specialists for his catalog of Khmer manuscripts held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF). A few researchers, including Mikaelian, encountered the rare writings of this great scholar during seminars given by one of his students, the late Saveros Pou, also known as Saveros Lewitz or Saveros Lewitz-Pou (1929–2020). Few knew that Au Chhieng, the Orientalist scholar, had once hoped for a legal or administrative career.

Through extensive research in archives and numerous exchanges and interviews with Au Chhieng's family and scholars who knew him, both in France and Cambodia, Mikaelian has pieced together the life of this discreet yet exceptional individual. Born in 1908 in Battambang into a family of dignitaries close to the Aphayvong family, Au Chhieng was part of the local aristocracy. Destined for a career in the Cambodian royal administration, he studied in Battambang at the monastery, then at the residential school, then in Phnom Penh at the Collège Sisowath, and finally at the Hanoi School of Pedagogy in 1926. He returned to Phnom Penh when Pali and Sanskrit studies were booming and, noted for his seriousness and great erudition, was sent to France in 1931 to pursue his education. He became the first Cambodian to hold a bachelor's

degree in literature, supporting himself with a scholarship and petty jobs such as teaching Khmer and classifying Khmer manuscripts at the National library. He married a young French schoolteacher, which hindered his upward social mobility in Cambodia. Meanwhile, he began a doctoral thesis at the University of Paris in international law under Louis Le Fur (1870–1943), focusing on the Convention imposed on King Norodom (r. 1860–1904) by the Governor of Cochinchina, Charles Thomson, in 1884. Au Chhieng's thesis, presented in 1941, argued the illegality of the Convention, thus questioning the legitimacy of the French Protectorate over Cambodia. Because it questioned its legitimacy, the thesis was rejected and all but two copies were pulped, shattering the spirit and career hopes of the brilliant young man. Mikaelian shows how this trauma radically changed his life path.

Au Chhieng then turned to Khmer studies. He began another doctoral thesis at the University of Paris on Old Khmer, which he never completed, while continuing to teach Khmer and launching a seminar on "Indo–Khmer philology" at the École pratique des hautes études (EPHE). Until his retirement in France in the early 1970s, Au Chhieng contented himself with small contracts at the CNRS, never adhering to the academic rules that would have secured him a proper academic career. His published work, in addition to that contained in the volume under review, is characterized by its quality and paucity, including a catalog of the Khmer collection at the BnF, a single contribution to a collective work, and 13 articles. His extreme erudition, his "truly fascinating vision [...] of Khmer inscriptions" according to George Groslier (quoted by Mikaelian, p. 102), and his extraordinary capacity for work should have earned him academic honors. We owe him the concept of "khmerology". However, by not completing his second thesis, not publishing his holistic dictionary of Old Khmer (the manuscript of which is now lost), and alienating the great master of the time, George Cœdès (1886–1969), he remained an outsider to academia. He trained only a handful of students, including Saveros Pou, who in turn trained a new generation of Khmerologists, among them Grégory Mikaelian.

Mikaelian's biography of Au Chhieng is a striking read. In addition to the career of the Franco-Cambodian scholar, it draws the reader into the maze of family alliances among the elites of Battambang, the burgeoning intellectual and political life of Cambodians in France after World War II, and the narrow-minded world of Parisian academia in the 1950s and 1960s. To explain Au Chhieng's choices, Mikaelian suggests several possible explanations, from the posture of the *gru khmaer* (គ្រូខ្មែរ) to the trauma of the rejection of hiš first thesis in 1941. The great appeal of Au Chhieng to his biographer is evident. Both scholars share a disdain for academic mundanities, a deep interest in the Khmer language, a huge work capacity, and a determination to master their subject before publishing. It took Mikaelian nearly 15 years to complete this biography.

Following Au Chhieng's biography, the second text in this volume, the law thesis—which was rejected and of which

only two copies were saved, is equally compelling. Written with a subtle pen, the thesis looks back at the circumstances surrounding the imposition of the Thomson Convention in 1884, proposes a legal study of the agreement, and examines its consequences. In the Introduction, Au Chhieng refers to the 1884 agreement as a "second Protectorate treaty" and explores whether it can be considered a "coup d'État" (p. 186). The first part, "Les faits [the Facts]", is probably the most comprehensive study to date of the events by which Thomson, Governor of Cochinchina, forced King Norodom to sign an agreement placing the entire administration of the kingdom in French hands. Au Chhieng used well-known sources: accounts by colonialists, the press in France and Indochina, minutes of parliamentary debates, letters from Norodom, and correspondence from the Governor of Cochinchina published in the press. He did not, however, have access to the archives of the Ministry of Colonies. He wisely used the public sources to piece together the facts within their context, particularly the political debates surrounding the attacks on Jules Ferry's colonial policy. He also provided a valuable oral account of the events circulating among Cambodian dignitaries at the time. Unfortunately, Au Chhieng considered it "fallacious" to use a "copy of the full text" (p. 199) of this account, of which we have only a French summary. This text provides a unique testimony of the Court's perception of Thomson's *coup de force*. Au Chhieng's intellectual integrity and perfect command of both French and Khmer suggest the text is close to the original. It shows the origin of the expression used to describe the French as "titans with iron hands and silver eyes", *asura ṭai ṭaek bhnaek prak'* (អសុរៈដៃដែកភ្នែកប្រាក់).

Cambodian and French sources unambiguously show that Thomson used force to impose the treaty on King Norodom. It is unfortunate that Au Chhieng did not delve deeper into the Cambodian perspective. Apart from Louis Col de Monteiro (1859–1923), the king's interpreter, the names of the Khmer protagonists, particularly the ministers, remain unknown. Au Chhieng's study of the insurrection following the treaty's signing is less convincing. Access to archives would have revealed that, contrary to most public sources, order was not restored after the King's public intervention in 1886 and that unrest continued until 1888.

In the second part of the thesis, "Le droit [the Law]", Au Chhieng offers a legal analysis of the Convention. The strongest part examines King Norodom's capacity to act on behalf of Cambodia and Cambodia's legal capacity as a Protectorate country to invoke international law. Au Chhieng presents an interesting study of the two versions of the 1863 Protectorate treaty in French and Khmer. "The suzerainty of France over Cambodia" appears only in the French version. Au Chhieng repeatedly refers to his strongest argument: the use of violence to secure the 1884 Convention, rendering it null and void.

The subsequent analysis is less convincing. Some arguments appear specious, such as when Au Chhieng considers the king a French civil servant because he received regalia from French

authorities and was allocated a fixed civil list (p. 319). Au Chhieng provides only a partial internal study of the Convention's text (Preamble, articles 1, 2, 3, 10, and 11). Readers of his doctoral thesis might have expected a complete study of the text.

Two articles of the Convention are particularly noteworthy for historians. They posed legal problems, making their application impossible. Article 8 abolished slavery, but the term slave in French (*esclave*) refers to a different legal status than *dāsakar* (ទាសករ) in Khmer. Article 9 sought to establish private property, stating that "the soil of the kingdom, until now the exclusive property of the crown, shall cease to be inalienable". While traditionally the Khmer king was master of the land and water, private land ownership already existed. Gregor Müller (2006) has shown that this article, as well as the following article 10, aimed primarily at seizing Cambodia's land for France and the French. A scholar of Au Chhieng's caliber, familiar with Khmer codes in the original text, should have addressed these elements. A legal study of the Convention's text, drawing on Cambodian law and not just European international law, would have been fascinating, though it is unclear whether it would have been palatable to a 1941 jury.

In the first chapters of the third part, "Equité [Fairness]", Au Chhieng continues his critique of the 1884 Convention, examining its internal structure and delivering a thorough legal indictment of colonization. He concludes by arguing that while the 1884 Convention was illegal, France's civilizing mission legitimized it *a posteriori*. His love for French literature and pride in Khmer civilization are evident.

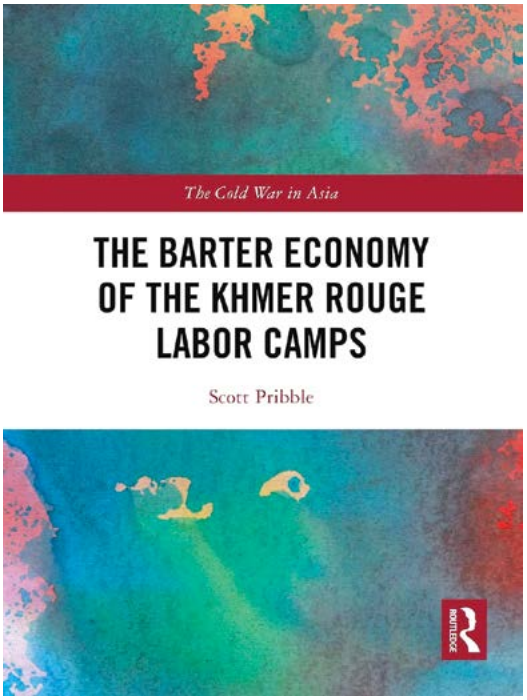
Though published more than 80 years after it was written, Au Chhieng's work, skillfully edited by Grégory Mikaelian, is a welcome contribution to the study of Cambodia under colonial rule and the epistemology of Khmer studies.

Mathieu Guérin, INALCO
mathieu.guerin@inalco.fr

Reference

• Müller, Gregor. 2006. *Colonial Cambodia's "Bad Frenchmen": The Rise of French Rule and the Life of Thomas Caraman, 1840–87*. London: Routledge.

Scott Pribble, *The Barter Economy of the Khmer Rouge Labor Camps*, London: Routledge, 2024, 174 pages, £116, ISBN 978-1032387017 (Hardback)



The title alone made me want to read this book. A welcome addition to the literature on the Khmer Rouge (KR) and Democratic Kampuchea (DK), it presents a yeoman effort to document a fascinating and impossibly unlikely phenomenon: how Cambodians engaged in unofficial economic exchange in an environment where such activity was punishable (and often punished) by death. Rather than rely on a somewhat unexciting rational choice explanation—the immediacy of starvation overwhelming the most stoic risk-aversion (although this must be, and is, part of the explanation)—Pribble's argument is more interdisciplinary, combining economic trade-offs, historical societal roles, Khmer culture, and variation in the fungibility of tradable items to provide a lens into a phenomenon that the existing literature only mentions—tantalizingly—in passing, but leaves unexplored. By engaging existing work and by drawing on archival and new interview data, Pribble constructs a world that is at once familiar and at the same time novel and intriguing.

The stakes could not have been higher: "[T]he abolition of money had cancelled at a stroke all our financial assets [...] we had lost everything that was dear to us, and almost everything that would ensure our survival" (p. 38). This goes beyond life and death and extends into the very question of self: "When the [KR] abolished property rights and appropriated the peasants' gold and land, they also took a piece of the villagers' identity and disrupted their way of life" (p. 20). How did Cambodians cope with such an existential crisis?

Pribble defines barter as "any non-monetary exchange of goods or services" and the market as "any space where individuals signaled to each other that they wished to negotiate a trade" (p. 4). He writes that "the barter economy was the riskiest way to obtain food because trade was dependent on the discretion of two or more individuals in a totalitarian surveillance state", and yet it saved "a significant number of lives". Indeed, it seems to have been fairly widespread: "despite the regime's constant Marxian propaganda and indoctrination tactics, basic forms of market capitalism, including a demand for nonessential products, persisted in labor camps throughout the era" (pp. 7–8):

> The meager rations provided by the Khmer Rouge at the labor

> camps were not enough to sustain life for four years. An extra handful of rice, a dead rat, or a tablet of tetracycline kept loved ones alive. Bartering for these goods involved delicate and skillful negotiations that required trust, discretion, and the respect of villagers from the privileged class to keep these transactions hidden from *Angkar* [the state]. Relationships had to be developed and a deep understanding of the value of commodities had to be constantly reassessed to calculate supply and demand. Those with the skill and daring to collect enough food prolonged their lives until the Khmer Rouge was forced from power in January 1979 (p. 14).

These underground markets revolved around commodities for consumption ("tangible goods that were usually traded once and then consumed within a short period of time") such as medicine, meats, and other foods; commodities for exchange (nonessential goods without immediate benefit that could be traded repeatedly)—gold, jewelry, watches, or clothing; or some combination of the two. Not surprisingly, quoting Haing Ngor, rice was "the perfect medium of exchange". It was intrinsically and immediately valuable but could be stored for future consumption or exchange. Another key tradable good was gold ("as a symbol of future prosperity") "because traders believed that it would always hold value in the Khmer consciousness" (p. 62). Although it was not measured as precisely as rice (the unit of measurement for which was the ubiquitous *Carnation* evaporated milk can), gold was a relatively familiar commodity. "Secondary currencies included clothing, salt, sugar, medicine, tobacco, meats, and various other products and services" (p. 74). Indeed, the universe of tradable goods was greater than one might initially think:

> Khmers bartered for rides on ox carts and boats. They traded food and gold for assistance with the burial of family members and chores around the camps. While the Cambodian riel was worthless, individuals who had stashed away American dollars were able to barter for goods in some camps, depending upon the perceived value and demand. Gemstones and (non-gold) precious metals served as secondary currencies in various camps. Some of the more daring villagers traded for practical items like fishing nets so that they could sneak off and attempt to catch their own food. Khmers bartered household goods such as cooking pots, kerosene, cooking oil, MSG (monosodium glutamate), dishes, blankets, pillows, and even radios. Several villagers reported trading for bicycles and thatch for their roofs. Khmers exchanged food such as crickets, corn, mushrooms, and rice wine (pp. 80–81).

In addition to the foregoing, there are other illuminating insights scattered throughout. For example, some of the Base People (rural dwellers in KR-controlled areas at the time of the revolution) had a strong sense that the DK era would be temporary, that the regime would eventually fall, raising all sorts of questions about short- and long-term gains from trade. Another is that the April 17 People (former urban and rural dwellers forced into labor camps) were in an almost impossibly vulnerable, subordinate position where a "crucial skill involved the identification of safe and trustworthy trading partners" with whom engagement was quite literally, on multiple levels, a life and death decision. These decisions were based on such intangibles as "an ability to interpret body language or tone of voice [that] might help them avoid individuals that disliked city folk or were loyal to the regime". And yet, they were able to negotiate, sometimes quite effectively: "The ability to extract the maximum amount of value from each exchange became a source of pride among villagers, especially the April 17 people" (p. 64). It speaks to the power of human agency and will even under the most horrific conditions.

The book is organized into chapters on historical traditions, currency types, and schema through which to explore this underground economy—Sino–Khmers, Base- vs April 17 People, women vs men, and cadre preferences (including their preferred contraband—wristwatches and the 1970s kitsch of "lighter chains").

A major contribution of the study is a set of new interviews with surviving Base people. This demographic is almost completely unrepresented in the personal memoirs that make up much of what we know about the day-to-day lives of people under the yoke of the Khmer Rouge. Pribble interviewed over fifty "Base people [...] individuals from this social class were intentionally sought out to add divergent perspectives to the research". This is a major addition to our store of knowledge: "opinions of the Base people were crucial to this study, as they were often portrayed in the memoirs as hostile to April 17 people or tacitly supportive of the Khmer Rouge" (p. 6). He finds the matrix of social relationships far more complex than conventional wisdom suggests, and thus they "supplement and challenge the homogeneous perspectives of [...] [published] memoirs" (p. 7).

Inevitably shortcomings occur. The first has to do with organization of the material itself. This is a slim volume that looks at a phenomenon on which there is almost no surviving data apart from that mentioned above. As a result, there are instances of "padding" that help contextualize the material, but which sometimes stray a bit. The literature review is an example of this, as is the discussion of ethnic Chinese in Cambodia (although the primer on currency in Marxist theory in Chapter 2 is quite good). There are also instances of repetition, although, frankly, less than one might expect. Each chapter has its own endnotes, but they also contain their own bibliography, which I found a bit jarring, especially as sometimes they take up almost as many pages as the chapters themselves (Chapter 6, "Perils and Punishments" is five-and-a-half pages long; the notes and bibli-

ography for the chapter, three pages). In other instances, the discussions do not quite congeal. The analysis on different KR intellectuals' views on currency matters never really gels. As a result, the discussion on the printing and import of DK currency from China feels incomplete. "For most of 1975, the leadership appeared to change their minds on the subject [of the abolition of currency] regularly" (p. 35). What accounts for this back-and-forth? There is also the omission of any discussion of the KR currencies issued in the early 1990s. These remain enigmatic fragments of post-DK history that have somehow defied explanation or even description when it comes to how, when, and why they were issued and circulated.

This volume also represents something of a missed opportunity. The author does a nice job of pushing back against a monolithic view of Democratic Kampuchea ("lack of consistency in Democratic Kampuchea was in some ways a hallmark of the regime", p. 66). Without softening the horrific dimensions of Khmer Rouge rule, Pribble presents example after example of variation along the lines of how draconian versus how (relatively) flexible local cadres were about things such as wearing jewelry, turning a blind eye to barter trade, allowing limited travel outside the cooperative, and so on. In addition, he points to examples of more systematic variation, that is, between the sexes: women were better negotiators, less likely to be punished (and physically searched), and given greater latitude in physically straying from the camps, than were men. Given these multiple dimensions of variation within the lives of Cambodians during this period, the book might have benefited from engaging Michael Vickery's critique of what he labeled the "Standard Total View" (Vickery 1984 is not even cited). It would have provided more of a grounding for some of the vivid but, as a result, impressionistic variations documented therein.

There are a few other minor quibbles. I am not quite on board with the widespread use of the term "camps". They suggest a different mode of organization than one in which all of society is communalized as was the case in DK. The discussion on the Angkorian economy is good but it misses one of the crucial insights from newly-discovered coinage from the Funan era, a mode of currency exchange that had disappeared by the Angkor period.

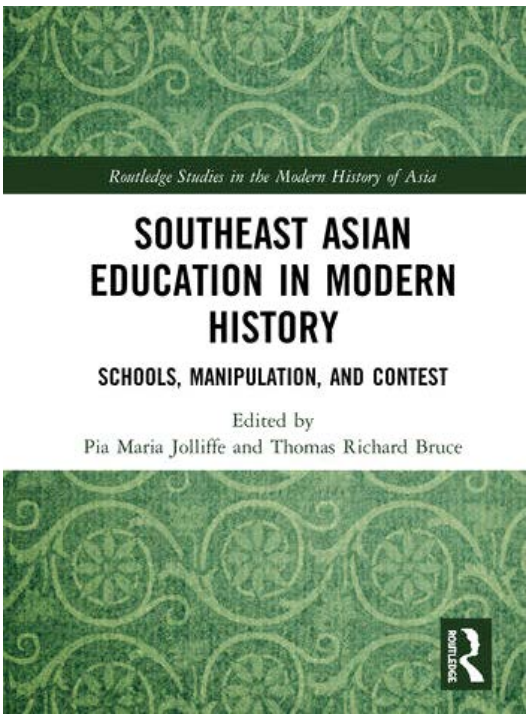
All this having been said, these are largely subjective criticisms that one may embrace or reject without negating that Pribble has provided an important advancement in our knowledge of KR rule as well as valuable insights on how we might reimagine some of the assumptions of DK that hitherto seemed ironclad. In doing so, he provides a valuable link to this brief but unimaginably brutal time and place, fleshes out a fascinating socioeconomic phenomenon, and compels us to update our priors.

Andrew Mertha
Johns Hopkins University
amertha1@jhu.edu

Reference

• Vickery, Michael. 1984. *Cambodia 1975–1982*. Boston: South End Press.

Pia Maria Jolliffe & Thomas Richard Bruce, eds, *Southeast Asian Education in Modern History: Schools, Manipulation, and Contest*, New York: Routledge, 2019, 216 pages, £108, ISBN 978-1138063181 (Hardback)



In the opening of *Southeast Asian Education in Modern History*, the editors describe the volume as "a collection of micro-historical studies" focusing on the evolution of educational policies and practices from the emergence of modern education in the 19th century to the end of the 20th century (p. 1). They provide a well-rounded historical context of Southeast Asia, offering readers a broad framework for understanding the region's diverse educational landscapes. While the temptation to skip between chapters may be strong, reading the book in its entirety offers a more cohesive insight into the overarching themes and the intricate relationships between education, identity, and political power in the region.

The book consists of 12 chapters, beginning with Myanmar[1] and concluding with the Philippines, each offering a unique perspective on Southeast Asian education. Five chapters focus on Thailand,[2] two on Vietnam, and one each on Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. However, the editors note that Laos, Cambodia, and East Timor (Timor-Leste) are not represented (p. 10). In the Introduction's final paragraph, the editors summarize the "central themes" of the book, which culminate in "an educational history characterized by manipulation and contest" (p. 9). These themes are explored across the chapters, from Myanmar to the Philippines.

The first chapter, "Myanmar Identity and the Shifting Value of the Classical Past: A Case Study of King Kyansittha in Burmese History Textbooks, 1829–2017" by Rosalie Metro, examines how ideologies of ethnic and national identity have evolved under different political regimes, from monarchy to military dictatorship (p. 14). Metro's analysis of history textbooks provides a detailed look at the ideological manipulation of education in Myanmar, shedding light on the process by which national identity was cultivated and contested.

In Chapter 2, Pia Maria Jolliffe's "The Legend of the 'Lost Book' and the Value of Education among the Karen People in Myanmar and Thailand" focuses on the Karen people's search for their "lost

[1] Another recent book by Lall (2020) is dedicated exclusively to education in Myanmar.

[2] See also Penpisoot et al. (2021) for a recent work on higher education in Thailand.

book", which symbolizes their quest for identity. The chapter explores the relationship between education, religious conversion, and nationalism, illustrating how education served as a tool for both assimilation and resistance.

In Chapter 3, Natanaree Posrithong's "The Modernisation of Female Education and the Emergence of Class Conflict between Literate Groups of Women in Siam 1870–1910" discusses the role of Christian missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, in modernizing Thai education by establishing schools for both boys and girls. These efforts challenged the traditional elite to establish their own institutions. While this could have led to a contest, the schools initially catered to different social classes before eventually merging.

The theme of national identity continues in Chapter 4, "Thailand's Early Adult Education in Textbooks: Inclusion, Exclusion, and Literacy, 1940–1944" by Wasitthee Chaiyakan, which explores an aspect of nation-building during the Second World War. This chapter is quite engaging. In the sub-section on "Race and Culture", Wasitthee describes the differentiation in costumes of Thailand's neighboring races, including a Japanese woman in a kimono. Remarkably, Thai people were depicted by a man in a suit and tie. The implication went beyond race, as Thais were defined by their modernity (or civilized status), in stark contrast to their neighbors, including, somewhat ironically, the Japanese (p. 61). In the sub-section "Historical Narrative Regarding a Great King", there is only a brief, ten-line summary of Thai history, featuring King Khun Ramkhamhaeng of Sukhothai, where "All the Thais were happy and content" (p. 63). The period of 1940–1944 coincided with the era of Rathaniyom (รัฐนิยม) or State Conventions, the first of which demanded that citizens refer to the nation and its people as "Thailand, the Thai Nation, and the Thais" (p. 64). While four textbooks were part of the Early Adult Education Program published in 1941, only the first two have been found; it is hoped that Achan Wasitthee will one day uncover the remaining volumes.

Chapter 5, "Contesting 'Chinese' Education: Schooling in the Kuomintang Chinese Diaspora in Northern Thailand, 1975–2015, by Aranya Siriphon & Sunantha Yamthap, is a remarkable contribution to a lesser-known aspect of contemporary history. After the KMT army retreated from southern China to northern Thailand in 1949, some were repatriated to Taiwan in the 1950s, while others chose to settle in the northern mountains. This chapter examines the contest for their hearts and minds between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China, the latter leveraging its well-funded cultural institutions. The positive outcome of this rivalry is the resilience of the Chinese migrants, who ultimately developed a "Kuomintang–Thai identity" (p. 70). Many of them are now Thai citizens.

In Chapter 6, "Vocational Education, Shoemaking, and the Emergence of a National Economy in Thailand 1895–1973", Thomas Richard Bruce examines the development of vocational education. Who would have thought that economic history could be explored through the lens of the shoemaking industry in modern Thailand? This chapter is a *tour de force*, particularly

when combined with the history of vocational education, which began with the founding of the School for the Cultivation of Artisans (เพาะช่าง; *pho chang*) in 1912—a school that continues to thrive today.

Moving to Vietnam, Chapter 7 by Marta Lopatkowa, titled "Vân quốc ngữ: Teaching Modernity through Classics: Women's Education in Colonial Vietnam", highlights another central theme of this book: the struggle against cultural alienation brought about by colonialism.

In Chapter 8, "Tinkering Your Way to Prosperity: Technical Education, Auto-mechanics, and Entrepreneurship in Late-Colonial Vietnam", Erich Dewald examines how colonial educational policies were adapted to local needs and economic contexts. This chapter should be read in conjunction with the above Chapter 6 by Bruce.

Chapter 9 by Elsa Lafaye de Micheaux, "Despite Education: Malaysian Nationhood and Economic Development 1874–1970", Chapter 10 by Theophilus Kwek, "Full Colour Illustrations: Presentations of Race in Singapore's History Textbooks, 1965–2000", and Chapter 11 by Kevin W. Fogg, "State and Islamic Education Growing into Each Other in Indonesia", are unified in their exploration of the central theme of searching for national identity and nationhood through state management, or manipulation, of education, race, and religion. Success or failure is not the primary concern; what is more interesting is the effort to mitigate these challenges.

The final chapter, "American Education in the Philippines and Filipino Values" by Jeremiah A. Lasquety-Reyes, examines the legacy of American colonial education in the Philippines. While the Karen search for their "lost book" to complete their identity (Chapter 2), Filipinos strive to encapsulate their "values" in *kapwa*, "an inner self shared with others" (p. 200).

Throughout the book, the theme of the search for national identity through education is evident, as is the manipulation of education for political purposes. Whether through the efforts of colonial powers or post-colonial states, education has been used as both a tool for control and a means of resistance. The chapters provide a rich and diverse look at the ways in which education has been intertwined with the political, cultural, and social dynamics of Southeast Asia, offering valuable insights into the region's history and development.

The five chapters on Thai education are particularly notable for their depth and insight, reflecting the co-editors' extensive research in the country. The contributions are original and filled with previously unknown details. For example, Jolliffe recounts how many Karen found their "lost book" in the Bible and were converted to Christianity, thus providing the roots of Karen nationalism today. Natanaree provides useful information about the missionary-run school for girls, Wang Lang (วังหลัง), which evolved into Wattana School, now located just behind the headquarters of The Siam Society. This development provided the stimulus for Queen Saovabha (1864–1919) to found Sunanthalai School, attended by one of my great-aunts, Khunying Sin Suphansombat, from 1894 to 1900 (p. 47). Sunanthalai School evolved into Rajini School, where I attended the

first three grades of primary school. I have only a couple of quibbles here: on page 40, King Chulalongkorn's reign began in 1868, not 1878; on page 41, the Ayutthaya period started in the 14th, not the 15th century.

Overall, *Southeast Asian Education in Modern History* is a highly informative and engaging volume that offers valuable perspectives on the complex relationship between education and identity in Southeast Asia. The editors and contributors have produced a book that will be an invaluable resource for scholars and students of Southeast Asian history and education.

Tej Bunnag
Thai Red Cross Society
tej@redcross.or.th

References

• Lall, Marie. 2020. *Myanmar's Education Reforms: A Pathway to Social Justice?* London: UCL Press.

• Penpisoot Kwan Maitrarat et al. 2021. *The History of Higher Education in Thailand: Confronting Challenges*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.