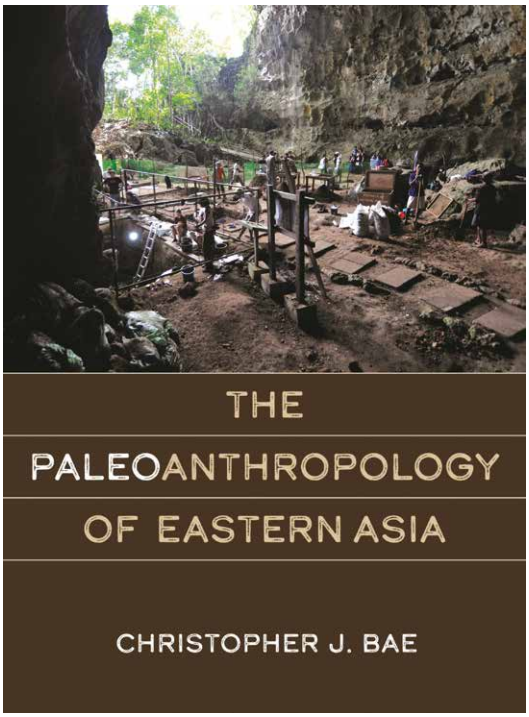
Christopher J. Bae, *The Paleoanthropology of Eastern Asia*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2024, 274 pages, US$80, ISBN 978–0824897659 (Paperback)



Southeast Asia has long been recognized as a key region for the study of human evolution. It was home to a remarkable diversity of early hominins and continues to support living great and lesser apes, including orangutans and gibbons. Over the past few decades, numerous fossils and artifacts associated with Middle and Late Pleistocene humans have been discovered throughout Southeast Asia, significantly expanding our knowledge of the region's prehistoric past. These discoveries have further reinforced Southeast Asia's importance for understanding human evolution, cultural development, and the emergence of early human societies within a broader global context. *The Paleoanthropology of Eastern Asia* therefore appears at a particularly opportune moment, offering a timely synthesis of this rapidly growing body of archeological and paleoanthropological evidence. Although the title does not explicitly suggest substantial coverage of Thailand or Southeast Asia, the book frequently refers to Southeast Asia as an integral part of "Eastern Asia". This broad geographic framework is well justified, as Southeast Asia provides an essential foundation for understanding human evolution in East Asia.

The volume is authored by Christopher Bae from the University of Hawai'i, a leading scholar in the field of paleoanthropology—the study of human evolution—who has conducted extensive research in East Asia, particularly in mainland China, in collaboration with local colleagues. It represents the culmination of the author's long-term research in the region, presented from a broad comparative and global perspective.

The book comprises seven chapters: The first two introduce the history of paleoanthropological research in East Asia and its environmental setting. The four subsequent chapters constitute the core of the volume. They present a comprehensive synthesis of the evidence for early humans in East Asia while also incorporating important discoveries from Southeast Asia. These chapters trace the evolutionary record from the earliest hominins, particularly *Homo erectus*, to early *Homo sapiens*, spanning approximately 2.4 million to 15,000 years ago. The final chapter outlines the author's conclusions and offers recommendations and directions for future paleoanthropological research in East and Southeast Asia.

In Chapter 1 (pp. 1–21), Bae provides an informative, little-recognized overview of the history of paleoanthropo-

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logical research in East and Southeast Asia. Such a detailed historical account is rarely presented in general textbooks on human evolution. The chapter encourages readers to consider Asia—particularly East and Southeast Asia—as with Africa an important center of human evolution. Significantly, the author gives due credit to the pioneering contributions of paleoanthropologists working in Southeast Asia, a theme that recurs throughout the volume.

Chapter 2 (pp. 22–41) examines the region's environmental setting, emphasizing the rich and diverse landscapes that provided favorable conditions for human adaptation and evolution. Although these two introductory chapters are relatively brief—together comprising fewer than 40 pages, including illustrations and tables—they are informative and effective in establishing the broader context for the discussions that follow.

The long and complex story of human evolution in East and Southeast Asia begins in Chapter 3, "Early Arrivals to Eastern Asia: Who, What, Where?" (~2.4 Ma–~0.4 Million Years Ago) (pp. 42–94), providing a detailed and well-illustrated account of early human migration, adaptation, and dispersal. The author presents an excellent reassessment of long-standing theories in light of new fossil and archeological evidence. He focuses on the various species of early hominins within the genus *Homo* that predated the emergence of *Homo sapiens*. Thus he convincingly demonstrates that Southeast Asia was a major center of human evolution and played a crucial role in revealing the remarkable diversity of the genus *Homo*, including several species that have so far been identified nowhere else in the world.

Chapter 4, "The 'Muddle in the Middle'" (pp. 95–131), continues the narrative of human biological evolution by examining the transition from Middle to Late Pleistocene (ca. 400,000–100,000 BP). The discussion focuses on the effects of climatic and environmental change, the extinction of several *Homo* species, and the emergence of archaic *Homo sapiens*. The author presents a substantial body of fossil evidence attributed to anatomically modern humans (AMHs) or closely related members of the genus *Homo*, most of which comes from mainland China, with additional important finds from Vietnam and Laos. Several of these fossils were recovered in well-documented archeological contexts, allowing for more secure interpretations of the biological and cultural developments that occurred during this period. It should be noted, however, that the fossil record consists primarily of fragmentary cranial remains, while the associated cultural evidence—such as stone tools and other material remains—is relatively limited. As a result, reconstructions of the behavior and lifeways of these populations remain tentative. This may simply reflect the nature of the available evidence rather than a shortcoming of the author's analysis, as comparatively little material culture has survived from this period. Consequently, the chapter necessarily engages with a number of ongoing debates and competing interpretations, making it one of the more thought-provoking sections of the book.

Chapter 5, "Modern Human Origins" (pp. 132–182), presents a fuller picture of cultural innovation and human behavior during the Late Pleistocene (ca. 100,000–30,000 BP), when *Homo*

sapiens, or anatomically modern humans, became the predominant human species. This richer narrative is made possible by a more complete fossil record, better-preserved skeletal remains, a wider distribution of archeological sites, more reliable dating techniques, and increasingly diverse lines of archeological and scientific evidence. Of particular interest is the prominence of sites and fossil discoveries from Southeast Asia, including important finds from Vietnam, Laos, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Many of these sites have been investigated through systematic excavations, yielding well-documented evidence that significantly enhances our understanding of early modern humans in the region. The varied environments of Southeast Asia—including inland, coastal, and island settings—also offered abundant natural resources well suited to foraging lifeways throughout the Late Pleistocene. Despite this growing body of evidence, the considerable biological diversity and complexity of early human populations in East and Southeast Asia continue to make definitive conclusions about their evolutionary relationships difficult. As a result, the chapter engages with a number of competing interpretations and ongoing debates. One conclusion, however, is strongly supported by the archeological evidence: the emergence of expressive behavior during this period, as demonstrated by personal ornaments, rock art, and other expressions of symbolic culture.

Chapter 6, "The Appearance of Modern Human Foragers" (pp. 183–207), brings the volume's narrative on human evolution in East and Southeast Asia to its conclusion. It examines the fossil record of Terminal Pleistocene populations (ca. 30,000–15,000 BP), drawing on discoveries from across Asia, from Mongolia to Thailand. Since the publication of this volume, however, additional human remains from this period have been uncovered in Thailand, including a *circa* 30,000 BP skeleton excavated by archeologists from the Thai Fine Arts Department at a cave site in Prachuap Khiri Khan province (Kanniga 2569). Although these discoveries postdate the book and therefore could not have been included, they further underscore the continuing importance of Southeast Asia for paleoanthropological research. The chapter maintains a strong focus on lithic technology, highlighting increasing variation and innovation in stone tool production, particularly the development of blade technologies. However, discussion of the growing evidence for symbolic behavior during the Terminal Pleistocene would have complemented the focus on technological developments. Practices such as rock art production, formal burial, and the manufacture and use of personal ornaments became increasingly widespread during this period.

Bae raises several thought-provoking questions concerning current issues in paleoanthropology in the brief conclusion (Chapter 7, pp. 208–212). These include the taxonomic classification of various hominin species, the relationship between stone tool technologies and specific human groups, and the long-standing debate surrounding the Movius Line. The author acknowledges that these questions remain unresolved and will require further discoveries and research before more definitive conclusions can be reached.

Overall, this is a well-written, well-organized, and thoroughly researched volume. It incorporates the latest scholarship, is supported by an extensive bibliography, and offers abundant material for further reflection. The numerous illustrations—including high-quality color and black-and-white photographs, maps, tables, and charts—greatly enhance the material's presentation and accessibility. Each chapter is supplemented with informative boxed essays that provide additional context on key topics. The book successfully combines the characteristics of a scholarly monograph, a textbook, and a reference work. Although it is primarily intended for graduate students and specialists in paleoanthropology, it will also be of considerable interest to researchers in related disciplines, including archeology, anthropology, history, human biology, and bioarcheology.

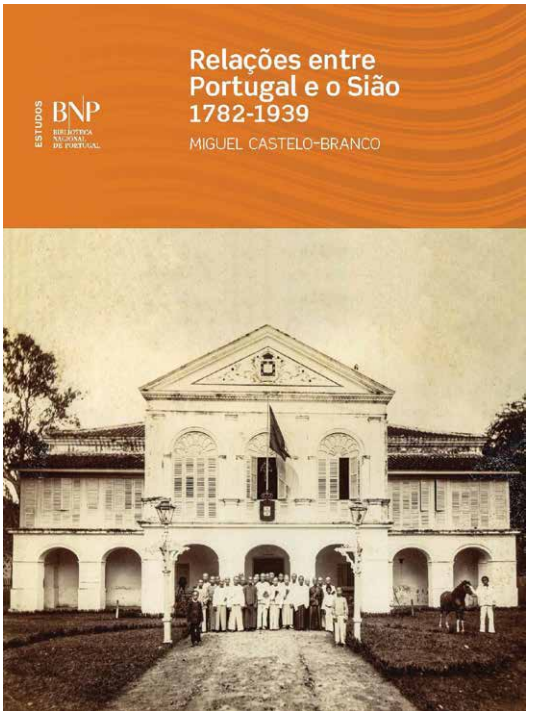
In sum, *The Paleoanthropology of Eastern Asia* is a significant contribution to the study of human evolution in East and Southeast Asia. It provides a comprehensive and up-to-date synthesis of the available evidence and underscores the growing importance of Southeast Asia in paleoanthropological research. This volume will serve as a valuable reference for students and scholars for years to come.

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Miguel Castelo-Branco, *Relações entre Portugal e o Sião 1782-1939*, Lisboa : Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, 2022, 558 pages, €18, ISBN 978–9725657089 (Hardback)



De la prise de Malacca en 1511 à la rétrocession de Macao à la Chine en 1999, le Portugal a durablement marqué de son empreinte l'histoire de l'Asie. C'est à travers une somme encyclopédique rédigée en portugais que Miguel Castelo-Branco nous invite à redécouvrir cette longue présence portugaise et à en reconsidérer les multiples dimensions. Avec le latin, le français, l'anglais et plusieurs langues asiatiques — notamment le malais, le chinois et le thaï — le portugais demeure l'une des langues

essentielles pour tout historien de l'Asie du Sud-Est souhaitant accéder directement aux sources et aux archives.

Le titre de l'ouvrage, *Les relations entre le Portugal et le Siam, 1782–1939* (notre traduction), apparaît quelque peu réducteur au regard de l'ampleur du propos. Si la relation luso–siamoise constitue bien le cœur de l'étude, l'auteur élargit en effet son analyse à l'ensemble de la présence portugaise en Asie, en accordant une attention particulière à l'axe Goa–Malacca (1511–1641) and Macao. Afin de mettre en évidence la singularité de l'expérience portugaise, il la replace constamment dans le contexte plus large de la présence des autres puissances occidentales en Asie : néerlandaise, britannique, française et américaine.

De même, la chronologie dépasse largement les limites suggérées par le titre. L'auteur revient longuement sur la période antérieure d'Ayutthaya (XVIe–XVIIIe siècles) ; ainsi que sur la période de Thonburi (1767–1782), marquée notamment par l'installation du quartier portugais de Santa Cruz sur la rive occidentale du Chao Phraya. Il poursuit également son analyse au-delà de 1939, en abordant la période de la Guerre froide et la place du Portugal dans les recompositions géopolitiques internationales.

Le choix des dates 1782–1939 renvoie à la période allant de la fondation de Rattanakosin/Bangkok comme capitale de la dynastie Chakri (1782) jusqu'au changement de nom du Siam en Thaïlande. Au-delà de 1939, il convient donc de parler de relations luso–thaïlandaises plutôt que de relations luso–siamoises.

Dans son introduction (pp. 13–24), Castelo-Branco présente le réseau de lieux et de personnes-ressources qui a nourri ses recherches, ainsi que la longue relation personnelle qu'il entretient avec son sujet d'étude, notamment à la suite d'un séjour de trois ans (2007–2010) à Bangkok, à l'occasion de l'organisation des commémorations du 500e anniversaire des relations luso–siamoises. Il explique ensuite comment, entre les conférences qu'il a données à la Siam Society de Bangkok et les expositions qu'il a organisées à la Bibliothèque nationale du Portugal à Lisbonne, sa réflexion a évolué et a donné lieu à une dizaine de publications avant d'aboutir au présent ouvrage.

Ce qui frappe d'abord à la lecture, c'est l'ampleur de la documentation réunie. La bibliographie finale recense plus de 500 références en plusieurs langues. À celles-ci s'ajoutent de nombreuses autres références citées dans le corps du texte ou en notes de bas de page, sans être reprises dans la bibliographie finale. Certains chapitres, comme celui consacré aux relations diplomatiques au XVIIe siècle, proposent une synthèse de travaux déjà publiés. D'autres, notamment celui portant sur les relations diplomatiques luso–siamoises au XIXe siècle, s'appuient sur un dépouillement approfondi d'archives diplomatiques et de correspondances. À cela s'ajoute une iconographie de grande qualité : l'ouvrage est illustré de 88 figures, dont un grand nombre étaient jusqu'ici inédites ou très peu accessibles.

L'auteur a choisi de diviser son ouvrage en deux parties. La première,

d'environ 150 pages, adopte une approche institutionnelle et anthropologique. La seconde, qui s'étend sur quelque 330 pages, suit une organisation plus historique et chronologique, centrée sur les relations diplomatiques luso–siamoises. La première partie est conçue comme un prolégomène, destiné à aider le lecteur à mieux appréhender les spécificités culturelles et politiques de l'Asie du Sud-Est.

La première partie (pp. 27–177) est consacrée aux notions de territoire et de frontière. L'auteur rappelle qu'avant l'arrivée des Européens, les guerres avaient rarement pour objectif l'agrandissement territorial ; elles visaient avant tout le contrôle des populations. Il s'agissait de campagnes militaires ou de razzias destinées à s'emparer d'objets de prestige et à capturer le plus grand nombre possible de prisonniers, dont la main-d'œuvre servile était ensuite transférée sur le territoire du vainqueur. Ces conflits avaient également pour fonction de réaffirmer l'autorité du souverain et les liens d'allégeance qui structuraient les rapports politiques.

L'auteur accorde une place importante à la notion de *maṇḍala*, entendue comme une représentation symbolique de l'espace politique organisée autour du souverain. Il propose ensuite un panorama des principaux groupes ethniques de la Péninsule indochinoise et retrace les différentes étapes de la formation des États qui la composent aujourd'hui, un processus qu'il inscrit dans le contexte de l'hégémonie exercée par l'Empire chinois, hégémonie prédominante jusqu'aux guerres de l'Opium.

En reprenant le concept grec de *politeia*, l'auteur s'efforce de définir une « politie siamoise ». Il décrit les fondements de la royauté, qu'il s'agisse du *devarāja*, incarnation de Viṣṇu, du *cakravartin* ou *dhammarāja*, protecteur de la Saṅgha, ou encore de la figure du monarque en tant que souverain absolu. Il met toutefois également en évidence les limites du pouvoir royal, en examinant notamment les mécanismes de succession, le système de la double monarchie et l'organisation des principaux ministères (Kalahom, Mahatthai, Phra Khlang, Phraya Yomarat, Krom Na et Krom Wang) confiés aux grandes familles aristocratiques. Il décrit ensuite les différents statuts sociaux et les possibilités de mobilité dans l'ancien Siam, la place du clergé bouddhique, ainsi que le système de la *sakdina* (ศักดินา), fondé sur une hiérarchie de droits liés à la terre. Il distingue le statut des *phrai* (ไพร่), hommes libres mais astreints à la corvée royale, de celui des esclaves, souvent réduits en servitude pour dettes et attachés à un seigneur, tout en examinant la place particulière accordée aux étrangers.

Un autre sous-chapitre particulièrement intéressant (pp. 111–177) est consacré à « l'Empire invisible » (*o Império invisível*). Sous cette appellation, l'auteur propose une synthèse de plusieurs travaux consacrés à la diaspora portugaise en Asie. Il montre que l'appartenance à cette diaspora pouvait s'exprimer de diverses manières : par la revendication d'un ancêtre *barbudo*, par l'attachement à l'Église catholique, par la résidence dans un *bandel* (quartier portugais), par la pratique du portugais et la connaissance d'autres langues, par l'exercice de fonctions militaires ou d'interprètes au service des États d'accueil, par les alliances matrimoniales entre commu-

nautés portugaises établies dans différents pays, ainsi que par le métissage et une intégration généralement pacifique aux sociétés locales. Il souligne enfin le rôle de la transmission des patronymes portugais, avant de rappeler qu'une loi thaïlandaise de 1939 imposa à tous les enfants nés en Thaïlande l'attribution d'un patronyme thaï.

Cette spécificité du colonialisme portugais, souvent présentée comme reposant sur le métissage et comme plus respectueuse de l'altérité culturelle que les autres formes de colonialisme européen, demeure un sujet de débat parmi les historiens. Les Portugais ne disposaient ni de la puissance militaire ni des ressources économiques et commerciales nécessaires pour s'imposer durablement en Asie du Sud-Est. Tout au long de l'ouvrage, l'auteur met en avant les relations personnelles et équilibrées entretenues entre les familles royales portugaise et siamoise, la revendication par la Couronne portugaise de son autorité sur les communautés catholiques dans le cadre du *Padroado*, ainsi que la bonne intégration des Portugais dans les sociétés d'accueil.

Dans la seconde partie (pp. 183–517), l'auteur adopte une trame chronologique. Il revient d'abord sur l'expansion maritime du Portugal sous la dynastie d'Aviz (1385–1580), lors de laquelle les explorations menées sous l'impulsion de l'Infant Henri le Navigateur, avec le soutien du duc de Bourgogne, aboutit au premier voyage de Vasco de Gama vers l'Inde (1497–1499) et à l'ouverture d'une route maritime vers l'océan Indien et les îles aux épices. Le Portugal fut la première puissance européenne à établir des relations diplomatiques avec Ayutthaya, dès 1511, et à y envoyer en 1566 des missionnaires catholiques dominicains dans le cadre du *Padroado*. Les Hollandais et les Anglais suivirent quelques décennies plus tard.

Les Portugais fondèrent un établissement permanent à Macao en 1557, qui devint leur principal point d'appui en Extrême-Orient. Celui-ci acquit une importance accrue lorsque le Japon limita fortement ses échanges avec l'étranger durant la période du *sakoku* (1639–1854) et après la chute de la dynastie Ming en 1644, qui marqua une profonde recomposition des équilibres politiques en Chine. Contrairement aux Anglais, aux Hollandais, aux Danois, aux Français ou encore aux Suédois, les Portugais ne créèrent jamais de compagnie privilégiée des Indes orientales comparable à celles de leurs rivaux européens.

Pendant la période de l'union des couronnes ibériques (1580–1640), la politique étrangère portugaise est alignée sur les intérêts de la monarchie espagnole, ce qui entraîne notamment la participation du Portugal à l'Invincible Armada en 1588. Les possessions portugaises au Brésil et en Afrique sont alors menacées par les autres puissances européennes, en particulier les Provinces-Unies et l'Angleterre. Les efforts déployés pour préserver les positions portugaises dans l'Atlantique Sud se font progressivement au détriment de la présence portugaise dans l'océan Indien et en Extrême-Orient.

La restauration de la monarchie portugaise avec la dynastie des Bragance en 1640 inaugure un changement majeur d'orientation diplomatique, marqué par un rapprochement avec l'Angleterre.

Le mariage en 1662 de Catherine de Bragance, fille du roi Jean IV de Portugal, avec Charles II d'Angleterre marque le début de cette alliance, tandis que plusieurs possessions portugaises passent sous contrôle anglais, notamment Bombay, cédée à la Couronne britannique à l'occasion de ce mariage.

Sous le règne de Louis XIV (1643–1715), les rivalités entre puissances catholiques européennes se manifestent également dans le domaine missionnaire. Les Missions étrangères de Paris (MEP), fondées en 1663, cherchent à imposer leur influence en Asie et à obtenir la nomination d'un évêque français indépendant de la hiérarchie portugaise, au détriment notamment des Jésuites relevant du *Padroado*. Le roi Narai et son ministre Constantin Phaulkon jouent de ces rivalités entre Européens pour servir les intérêts diplomatiques du Siam. La première ambassade siamoise envoyée en Europe en 1684, qui fit naufrage au large du Cap de Bonne-Espérance, avait auparavant fait escale à Goa et devait poursuivre son voyage jusqu'à Lisbonne avant de rejoindre Versailles. Lors de l'expulsion des Français du Siam en 1688–1689, les missionnaires portugais demeurèrent en place ; il en fut de même après l'expulsion de l'évêque français sous le règne de Taksin.

Au XVIIIe siècle, la suppression de la Compagnie de Jésus, décrétée au Portugal en 1759 par le marquis de Pombal, eut d'importantes conséquences sur les réseaux missionnaires portugais en Asie et contribua au déclin progressif du *Padroado*. Au milieu du XIXe siècle, l'influence catholique au Siam fut également concurrencée par l'arrivée de missionnaires protestants, britanniques et américains.

Le Portugal demeure l'allié de l'Angleterre pendant la guerre de Sept Ans (1756–1763). Durant les guerres napoléoniennes (1803–1815), la monarchie portugaise, transférée au Brésil en 1807, reste également étroitement associée aux intérêts britanniques. Les Britanniques occupent alors plusieurs possessions ultramarines françaises et hollandaises, tandis que la marine portugaise continue d'assurer une présence maritime dans l'océan Indien et en Asie du Sud-Est. Sous les règnes du roi Taksin et du roi Rama I, des négociations sont engagées en vue d'un traité commercial entre le Siam et le Portugal. Les Siamois recherchent principalement un approvisionnement en armes, tandis que les Portugais souhaitent obtenir du sucre et réorienter vers Macao une partie du commerce maritime entre Bangkok et Canton.

Lors de la restauration monarchique portugaise, Carlos Manuel de Silveira, consul du Portugal à Macao, et le luso-descendant Pascoal Ribeiro de Albergaria, conseiller de Rama II, élaborent un projet de traité. Signé en 1820, celui-ci ne sera toutefois jamais ratifié ; selon l'auteur, en raison des troubles politiques et de la guerre civile portugaise (1828–1834). L'auteur considère néanmoins ce texte comme une étape préparatoire importante, voire comme une matrice du traité Bowring conclu en 1855 entre le Siam et la Grande-Bretagne. Un comptoir commercial portugais (*feitoria*) mis en place à Bangkok en 1820 n'arrivera jamais à se développer.

Comme les autres traités dits « inégaux », les accords conclus avec les puissances occidentales comportent une clause particulièrement sensible pour la souveraineté siamoise : l'extra-territorialité judiciaire accordée aux ressortissants étrangers. À l'exception du consul portugais Eduardo Pereira Leite, accusé de corruption et d'avoir vendu des certificats de résidence, le Portugal fit un usage relativement modéré de ce privilège, en ne reconnaissant que quelques centaines de ressortissants, principalement des Chinois macanais, alors que les représentations diplomatiques britannique et française pouvaient en recenser chacune, plusieurs milliers.

À la fin du XIXe siècle, le Portugal, après la perte du Brésil en 1825, cherche avant tout à renforcer et à développer ses possessions africaines. Il joue dès lors un rôle relativement limité en Asie. L'auteur rapporte, à travers les observations des consuls portugais, les profondes transformations à l'œuvre au Siam : l'affirmation de l'autorité du roi Chulalongkorn face au Vice-Roi en 1874, les trois principaux courants politiques, dont celui, particulièrement favorable à l'ouverture internationale, incarné par le prince Prisdang, la modernisation administrative du royaume, les projets de coopération européenne coordonnés par le juriste belge Gustave Rolin-Jaequemyns, la réforme du *thesaphiban* (เทศาภิบาล), c'est-à-dire la création d'un système provincial centralisé fondé sur les *monthon* (มณฑล; Skt, *maṇḍala*), et l'abolition progressive de l'esclavage. Aucun conseiller portugais venu de l'extérieur ne semble avoir participé à ces réformes, mais l'auteur souligne la permanence du recrutement de luso-descendants dans l'administration siamoise.

L'auteur fait le portrait de nombreux acteurs portugais comme le consul António Feliciano Marques Pereira qui devint un familier du roi Rama V ; ou des descendants de Portugais, par exemple Francisco Chit, Sino–portugais du quartier de Santa Cruz, qui devint le photographe officiel du roi Rama IV.

La période coloniale est marquée par la rivalité franco–britannique en Asie du Sud-Est. Les Français s'implantent au Laos dans le contexte de leur lutte contre les Pavillons Noirs, groupes armés issus des régions méridionales de la Chine. De son côté, le roi Chulalongkorn mène une politique diplomatique active visant à établir des relations avec l'ensemble des monarchies européennes et il cherche à négocier directement avec Londres, sans passer par l'intermédiaire du Vice-Roi des Indes.

Les seuls points de friction entre le Portugal et le Siam concernent les droits de propriété sur les terrains occupés par les églises portugaises à Bangkok : Santa Cruz à Thonburi, Rosario et la *feitoria* à proximité de l'ambassade, sur la Rive orientale du Chao Phraya, et Conceição à Sam Sen. Par ailleurs, le Portugal, traditionnellement allié de la Grande-Bretagne, se trouve progressivement malmené par son puissant partenaire, non seulement sur le plan économique, mais également en Afrique, notamment lors de l'ultimatum britannique de 1890 qui impose l'abandon des ambitions portugaises reliant l'Angola au Mozambique. Cela amène à une convergence

de vues entre le Portugal et le Siam, deux États dont les ambitions sont limitées par la domination des grandes puissances : le premier face aux intérêts britanniques, le second réduit au rôle d'État tampon entre les empires britannique et français.

En 1908, le roi Don Carlos de Portugal est assassiné. En 1910, c'est le renversement de la monarchie portugaise et c'est aussi l'année de la mort du roi Chulalongkorn. L'auteur juge la période de la Première République portugaise (1910–1926) comme une phase d'affaiblissement des relations bilatérales, en raison notamment de la disparition du lien personnel entretenu entre les deux familles royales et de l'instabilité politique au Portugal. Le Siam ne reconnaît le nouveau régime républicain portugais qu'après que celui-ci a été reconnu par la majorité des autres États. Le rapprochement intervient en 1917, lorsque les deux pays entrent en guerre aux côtés des Alliés : le Portugal en mars et le Siam en juillet. À l'issue du conflit mondial, un catholique siamois, Bornavantula Dias, est nommé ambassadeur du Siam auprès du Saint-Siège à Rome (1919–1932).

Au début du XXe siècle, le Siam est progressivement reconnu comme un État pleinement souverain sur la scène internationale et il entreprend de recouvrer son indépendance juridique. En 1925, le Portugal est le dernier pays européen à renoncer au privilège de l'extraterritorialité accordé à ses ressortissants au Siam.

De 1932 jusqu'à la fin de la Guerre froide, le Siam — devenu la Thaïlande en 1939 — est principalement dirigé par des régimes militaires autoritaires. De son côté, le Portugal est également soumis à un régime autoritaire entre 1933 et 1974, celui de l'*Estado Novo* instauré par António de Oliveira Salazar. Un nouveau traité luso–siamois est signé en 1938. Pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, les persécutions visant les catholiques touchent également les communautés luso-descendantes, soupçonnées de constituer une « cinquième colonne » au service de la France. En 1940, les deux fils de Plaek Phibunsongkhram, alors étudiants à Paris, trouvent refuge au Portugal dans l'attente d'une évacuation vers les États-Unis.

La Seconde Guerre mondiale interrompt temporairement les relations luso–thaïlandaises. Après 1945, toutefois, le Portugal et la Thaïlande se retrouvent dans le même camp géopolitique durant la Guerre froide, en tant qu'alliés du bloc occidental et opposants au communisme. En 1960, la tournée diplomatique du roi Rama IX comprend une étape au Portugal. En 2011, les deux pays commémorent le 500e anniversaire de l'établissement de leurs relations diplomatiques.

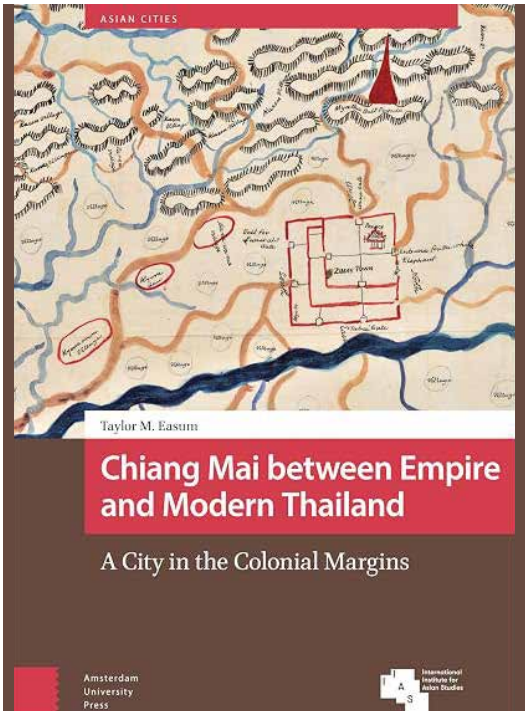
Pour conclure la recension de cet ouvrage, on peut dire que l'historiographie des relations entre les puissances occidentales et le Siam a longtemps été dominée par l'étude de la rivalité franco–britannique. Cet ouvrage propose un autre regard, marqué par une perspective nationale portugaise, voire par une certaine nostalgie des anciens empires et des liens entretenus entre familles royales. L'auteur met particulièrement l'accent sur la rivalité franco–portugaise autour de l'autorité épiscopale exercée sur les communautés catholiques d'Asie, ainsi que sur la spécificité culturelle

des Portugais, qui aurait favorisé leur intégration au Siam.

L'intérêt majeur de ce livre réside dans son érudition et dans ce changement de perspective. Il pourra devenir un ouvrage de référence pour les étudiants lusophones intéressés par l'histoire de l'Asie du Sud-Est. En raison de l'abondance des sources et de la masse d'informations mobilisées, les spécialistes du domaine y trouveront également de nombreux éléments nouveaux ou peu connus. Toutefois, une traduction intégrale en anglais ou en français semble peu probable en raison de la taille de l'ouvrage. Une diffusion internationale pourrait davantage passer par une traduction partielle de certains chapitres thématiques — notamment ceux consacrés à la diaspora portugaise en Asie — ou par une version remaniée, considérablement abrégée et réorganisée autour d'une structure plus strictement chronologique.

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Taylor M. Easum, *Chiang Mai Between Empire and Modern Thailand: A City in the Colonial Margins*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024, 288 pages, £116.79, ISBN 978–9463726467 (Hardback)



Taylor M. Easum's *Chiang Mai Between Empire and Modern Thailand* is an ambitious and stimulating contribution to the urban history of mainland Southeast Asia. By focusing on Chiang Mai—a city long treated as marginal in national historiography—the book challenges Bangkok-centered narratives, thus reconsidering Thai modernity through the intertwined histories of urban space, state formation, and imperial influence. While the study convincingly demonstrates the value of examining a secondary city, its conceptual framing and evidentiary base at times raise questions about scale, balance, and the role accorded to local agency.

At the heart of the book is the claim that Chiang Mai's urban space offers a valuable perspective on the overlapping dynamics of Siamese state formation and informal empire. Moving beyond familiar narratives of Thai exceptionalism, long grounded in the claim that Siam escaped formal colonization, Easum proposes instead a more complex semi-

colonial condition in which external and internal forces jointly reshape urban form and governance. This is a timely intervention, one that places Chiang Mai within broader efforts to provincialize national history and to situate mainland Southeast Asia within wider imperial formations.

Read in this way, Chiang Mai emerges not only as an object of imperial pressure, but also as a site through which Siam extended and consolidated its own power in the north. The book is at its strongest when it traces the reconfiguration of sacred, administrative, and commercial spaces under the intertwined pressures of Siamese centralization, British commercial expansion, and missionary activity. The book's main limitation lies in the gap between the author's regional ambitions and the more uneven source base on which he relies. Even so, this is an important book for the historiography of Lan Na, Thailand, and inland mainland Southeast Asia. It is best read not as narrowly municipal history, but as a broader historiographical intervention from the vantage point of a secondary city. Easum shows persuasively that urban space makes visible the layered and negotiated incorporation of Chiang Mai into modern Siam and, later, into Thailand. In doing so, he moves beyond the longstanding tendency to treat northern history either as an appendix to Bangkok or as a self-contained regional narrative. Instead, Chiang Mai is restored to a wider set of inland networks extending across Burma, Laos, southwest China, and the broader Tai world, even as its 19th-century transformation is shown to have been shaped by growing subordination to Bangkok and deepening entanglement with imperial capitalism.

The Introduction (pp. 11–27) clearly frames this broader historiographical ambition. By proposing Chiang Mai as part of the "urban middle", Easum makes analytical room for cities that were neither colonial capitals nor simple peripheries, but which occupied a more ambiguous position within regional and imperial formations. The category is useful, particularly by allowing the author to position Chiang Mai within overlapping regional, Siamese, and imperial formations. Yet this emphasis remains more suggestive than fully theorized and the question of how far the concept travels beyond this case is left unresolved.

Chapter 1 (pp. 29–60) situates Chiang Mai within a *longue durée* perspective, emphasizing its formation through layered interactions among Mon, Lawa, Tai, and broader mainland traditions. By rejecting rigid typologies of urban formation, Easum proposes the city as a "multi-layered urban palimpsest". This framework captures the composite nature of Chiang Mai's spatial history while opening a broader regional reading of urban networks and political transformation. While this metaphor is effective in conveying historical depth, it leaves open questions about how uneven power relations and hierarchies were negotiated across different phases of urban change. In this respect, the chapter can usefully be read alongside work on Lan Na state formation and regional incorporation (e.g., Grabowsky 2005) and on *mueang* (เมือง) spatial hierarchies and ritual territorial organization in northern Thailand (Bruneau

1978), thereby situating Chiang Mai's deep urban history within debates on hierarchy, incorporation, and regional political ordering.

Chapter 2 (pp. 61–111) places Chiang Mai's 19th-century restoration under King Kawila and his successors within a broad reconfiguration of political authority, urban form, and sacred geography. One of its main strengths lies in showing that the city should not be understood only as a continuation of King Mangrai's foundation, in the 13th century, but as a partly reimagined and rebuilt polity-space, making restoration itself central to the historical trajectory of Lan Na. By tracing the interplay between walls, waterways, markets, ritual sites, and cosmological ordering, Easum shows how sacred and cosmological forms of spatial ordering remained materially embedded in urban space even as new political arrangements emerged. This is a valuable counterpoint to linear modernization narratives, since it prevents Chiang Mai's 19th-century history from reduction to a straightforward story of administrative consolidation or external encounter. If the analysis occasionally privileges royal-sacred structures over lived spatial practices, it leaves less room for issues explored in earlier studies of northern Thailand, particularly the articulation between *mueang* and *ban* (บ้าน) hierarchies and the ritual centrality of the *lak mueang* (หลักเมือง; Bruneau 1978). These themes also resonate with Condominas's broad analysis of Thai political systems and hierarchical *mueang* structures (1980). Even so, the author offers a compelling account of restoration as both spatial reconstruction and political refoundation.

Chapter 3 (pp. 113–164) shifts from urban form to regional political economy, tracing how the teak trade, foreign interests, and Siamese expansion reoriented Chiang Mai away from older inland networks toward the colonial economies of the late 19th century. Easum is particularly effective in showing that teak was not only a commercial resource, but a medium through which questions of territorial control, political authority, and access to forested hinterlands were redefined. His emphasis on cooperation as much as tension between British commercial interests and Siamese state expansion complicates older depictions of Siam as a passive buffer resisting imperial pressure. In this respect, the chapter also qualifies the idea of a merely "silent revolution", showing that northern integration involved friction, uneven negotiation, and forms of coercive restructuring that would prove decisive for Chiang Mai's subsequent transformation. This also resonates with recent work that rethinks narratives of nationalist rupture in Siamese forestry history, emphasizing instead continuity with earlier regimes and the persistence of colonial entanglements (Tinakrit 2025).

Chapter 4 (pp. 165–213) is one of the book's strongest and most substantial chapters. Here Easum traces the spatial reconfiguration of Chiang Mai through what he calls "micro-colonial" transformation, focusing on the changing geography of power in and around the old city. The chapter shows how Chiang Mai developed into a kind of "dual city", though not in the classic colonial sense of a rigidly divided "black town" and "white town". Rather, the author demonstrates how Siamese administrative

expansion, British commercial interests, missionary institutions, and Chinese mercantile activity produced a more uneven and internally differentiated urban order alongside the older royal-sacral core. His main contribution lies in showing that colonial modernity in Chiang Mai did not generate a neatly segregated urban form, but a complex spatial arrangement shaped by overlapping and cooperative, though unequal, centers of power.

Chapter 5 (pp. 215–242) turns to sacred space as a terrain of contestation. Easum convincingly argues that, while administrative and commercial spaces were gradually incorporated into the Siamese state, sacred space proved less easily subordinated and therefore remained available for local mobilization. The chapter is at its strongest when it shows how the interventions of Khruba Siwichai (ครูบาศรีวิชัย; 1878–1939), especially through the restoration of religious sites and the reactivation of northern sacred geographies, gave renewed force to Lan Na's sacro-spatial order at the moment of its growing subordination to Bangkok. In this respect, the author makes a persuasive case for reading religion, urban space, and political incorporation as closely intertwined processes rather than separate domains. Yet the chapter tends to draw Siwichai rather firmly into a narrative of resistance to Siamese domination. Easum is more nuanced than this emphasis might imply, since he also situates Siwichai's authority in the moral and charismatic register of the *ton bun* (ต๋นบุญ), that is, a charismatic figure understood as possessing exceptional merit. This wider framing is important, for it shows that the political force of Siwichai's interventions cannot be separated from the religious idioms through which his authority was constituted and understood in northern society.

The Conclusion (pp. 243–255) brings the book's main arguments together by returning to the question of scale and its role in shaping historical interpretation. Easum's juxtaposition of Bangkok and Chiang Mai shows clearly how narratives of sovereignty, incorporation, and resistance look rather different when viewed from the perspective of a secondary city rather than from the capital. This sensitivity to scale is one of the book's most valuable strengths and is central to the broader historiographical contribution the study makes.

Methodologically, the book rests on a careful reading of archival sources, supplemented by close attention to maps and urban description, which allows Easum to reconstruct Chiang Mai's transformation with considerable clarity. Yet the strengths of this approach also mark some of its limits. The study is more persuasive at the level of political, administrative, and sacro-spatial reconfiguration than at the lived urban practices of ordinary inhabitants. This may partly reflect the constraints of the available sources, but it also means that some of the finer social textures through which northern urban life was inhabited and reproduced remain less fully developed.

From the perspective of scholars working on Lan Na and northern Thailand, the book nevertheless offers an important, if not exhaustive, framework for understanding the transformation of urban space. Its attention to continuity within change is especially suggestive. The same reservation, however, applies

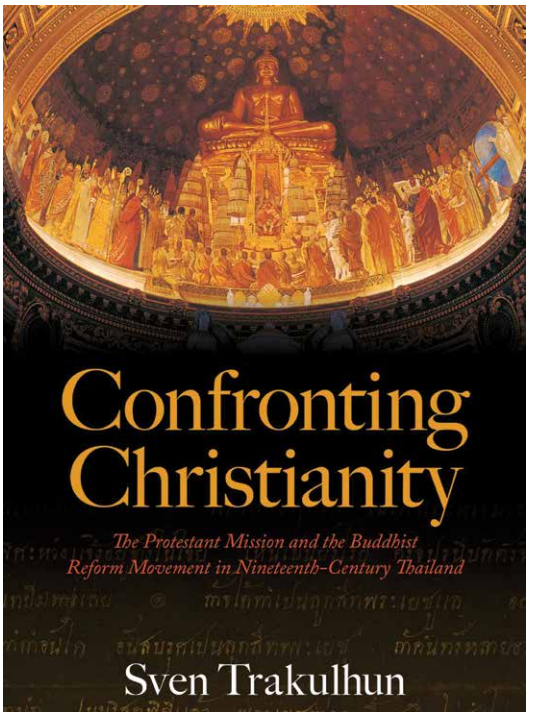
to the comparative dimension of the study. Although Chiang Mai is convincingly restored to a wider set of regional connections, the argument might have been strengthened by a more explicit comparison with other secondary cities in mainland Southeast Asia. Such a comparison would have helped clarify whether Chiang Mai is presented chiefly as a distinctive case or as an instance of a broader urban condition. At the same time, the book demonstrates convincingly that Chiang Mai cannot be understood either as a mere provincial extension of Bangkok or as a self-contained regional exception. Rather, it appears as a city shaped through successive reconfigurations of sacred authority, political incorporation, imperial pressure, and regional exchange. One of the book's chief accomplishments is its demonstration that urban space is not only the setting in which these transformations occurred, but also one of their most revealing historical archives. Some of the book's most suggestive conceptual moves, especially the "urban middle", are highly stimulating but remain only partially worked out. Even so, the study makes an important contribution to ongoing debates on scale, urban transformation, and the place of secondary cities in the historical making of modern Southeast Asia. It enriches the historiography of Chiang Mai while inviting a broader reconsideration of how secondary cities reshape larger narratives of empire, state formation, and modernity. In that respect, Easum's study deserves to be read well beyond the field of northern Thai history.

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Sven Trakulhun, *Confronting Christianity: The Protestant Mission and the Buddhist Reform Movement in Nineteenth-Century Thailand*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2024, 247 pages, US$70, ISBN 978–0824895747 (Hardback)



Modernist Buddhist reform in 19th and 20th century Siam, then Thailand, is a well-covered topic in academic scholarship. Dozens of scholars have documented, analyzed, and debated this issue over the past sixty to seventy years. Sven Trakulhun's *Confronting Christianity: The Protestant Mission and the Buddhist Reform Movement in Nineteenth-Century Thailand* seeks to add a new focus and perspective to these arguments. Trakulhun's study highlights the role of Christian–Buddhist debates, voices, and actors, as well as the larger conflict between "rival regimes of knowledge" (p. 6) in this modernist reformation. His goal is to foreground the agency and creativity of Siamese intellectuals as they sought not only to counter Christian missionary critiques, but also to simultaneously situate Buddhism as emblematic of modernity, rationality, progress, and civilization. In the end, Trakulhun argues that 19th-century Siamese Buddhist reform emerges out of a process of cross-cultural innovation and reinterpretation, of "intercultural mimesis" (p. 13), rather than simply imitation, appropriation, or subordination.

A short introduction (pp. 1–13) establishes the broad parameters of Trakulhun's approach, locating the 19th-century Siamese Christian–Buddhist encounter within scholarship interrogating Western (and non-Western) modernity, bourgeois culture, civilization, and modernist reform. Chapter 1, "The Origins of Buddhist Reformation" (pp. 14–32), briefly traces the history of Siamese Buddhist reformism back to its beginnings in the reigns of King Taksin (1767–1782) and King Rama I (1782–1809). Existing scholarship covers this ground well: How the restoration of the Pali canon, the monastic order, and Buddhist ritual culture by early Chakri kings under the logic of purification and orthodoxy, especially the scripturalism of King Mongkut (Rama IV; 1851–1868) and his founding of a reformist Thammayut order, took place. The author ably summarizes this material and usefully highlights the wider contemporary regional context of Buddhist reformism in Ceylon, Burma, Cambodia, and Laos.

Chapter 2, "Christianity in Siam" (pp. 33–81), is the longest at almost 50 pages. It provides a detailed and comprehensive history of Siamese Christianity, beginning in the Ayutthaya of King Narai in the mid-17th-century through King Mongkut's reign in the mid-19th

century. While earlier Catholic missionaries are briefly discussed, Trakulhun pays more attention to the Protestant missionaries beginning to arrive in the 1820s. In addition to documenting the social backgrounds, sectarian affiliations, and missionary successes and failures of a wide range of Protestant missionaries, he also discusses the public roles they played in Siam, their alliances with court elites, and how they responded to the initially inclusive and tolerant pluralistic attitude displayed towards them by Siamese Buddhists and institutions. As ambassadors of Western science and education, despite their evangelical fervor, Protestant missionaries appealed to a variety of Siamese elites. Trakulhun unpacks why—nonetheless—their number of converts remained disappointingly low.

Chapters 3 and 4 constitute a paired argument: first, exploring the process of translating Christianity for the Siamese and, second, the Siamese response to these evangelical arguments and provocations. Perhaps the most novel contribution of *Confronting Christianity* lies in the detailed attention to the work of translation that Trakulhun displays in Chapter 3, "Translating Christianity" (pp. 82–112). The chapter documents translations undertaken by missionaries, how missionaries struggled with linguistic and intellectual challenges, how these translations fueled a subtle cross-cultural dialogue, and the consequences that resulted from rendering Christian scripture and homilies into the Siamese vernacular language. Sources in the missionary archives enabled the author to highlight the important role that Siamese and non-Siamese assistants played in the translations of Karl Gützlaff (1803–1851), John Taylor Jones (1802–1851), and Dan Beach Bradley (1804–1873), among others. He also emphasizes how shifting choices between Siamese semantic terms and linguistic registers produced an ambiguous, unsettled language of translation that subtly fueled an emergent, localized discourse of comparative religion among Protestant missionaries in Siam. This discourse had widening impact as polemical Christian translations from Siam and their assumptions fed into the growing print industry and literary public sphere that the missionaries helped foster in contentious alliance with Siamese court and mercantile and literary elites.

The Siamese reply to Protestant evangelical challenges, documented in Chapter 4, "The Siamese Response" (pp. 113–138), relied on the transformative impact of print technology and culture on Siamese public communication, literary culture, education, and even governance. Trakulhun focuses on King Mongkut's critical response to the missionaries in the *Bangkok Recorder* newspaper in 1865, expanded upon in 1867 in Chaophraya Thiphakorawong's *Nangsue sadaeng kitchanukit* (หนังสือแสดงกิจจานุกิจ; *Book of Various Things*). These unflattering portraits of Christianity and defenses of Buddhism as a rational, moral philosophy compatible with Western science and cosmology established a Siamese benchmark in the refutation of Western (and Christian) claims to modernist and civilizational superiority. King Mongkut's famous prediction of a solar eclipse in 1868 provides a case study in how this discourse of progressive modernist Siamese Buddhist reform could claim an empirical mastery rival-

ling that of European scientists, was superior to court Brahmins and local superstition, and relegated Christian theology to the realm of nonsense. Trakulhun concludes the chapter highlighting the interactions, influences, and parallels between this confident Siamese Buddhist reformation and analogous movements elsewhere in Asia, particularly in Ceylon and Japan.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, "The Making of Modern Buddhism in Siam and the West" (pp. 139–173), examines the Siamese contribution to the Orientalist reimagining of Buddhism by sympathetic Western scholars who favorably contrasted Buddhism vis-à-vis Christianity. To this end, the author provides a detailed unpacking of Henry Alabaster's *The Wheel of the Law* (1871) and its portrayal of a humanistic, demythologized Buddhism. Trakulhun also examines scholarly debates over divine kingship and Oriental despotism that brought Western Orientalist scholars and Siamese court officials into conversation and disagreement during King Chulalongkorn's reign (Rama V; 1868–1910). He closes the chapter and book by documenting the ways that King Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh (Rama VI; 1910–1925) deepened and expanded upon the public image of Siamese Buddhism as a rational, moral, scriptural orthodoxy superior to Christianity. From an earlier awkward and contentious reliance upon Christian missionaries, by the end of the 19th century Siamese Buddhist reformers had cultivated an often-unstated alliance with Western Orientalist scholars who were similarly critical of Christianity.

The greatest contribution of *Confronting Christianity* lies in its careful, detailed documentation and reconstruction of, first, Christian Protestant missionary voices, perspectives, and arguments in 19th-century Siam and, second, the Siamese Buddhist voices, perspectives, and counterarguments that responded to these evangelizing challenges. Literary provocations and counterattacks volleyed back and forth in public print culture between these groups in the middle of the 19th century as Protestant missionaries provoked, fueled, and in many ways subtly framed and reoriented elite Siamese Buddhist intellectuals who were increasingly rethinking Buddhist orthodoxy under the encroaching discursive horizons of colonialism, civilization, modernity, science, and "progress". Trakulhun carefully documents the shifting motives, activities, and publications of these two groups, as well as the contentious substance and rhetoric of their intellectual jousting. He also tracks the shifting fortunes and consequences of their successes and failures among wider Siamese social circles. When the details and nuances of this ecumenical encounter and debate slip off center stage in the book's argument, such as in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5, the author must by necessity rely primarily on summaries and interpretations based on the secondary scholarship of others. Not surprisingly, the book's central argument falters and loses some steam at these moments.

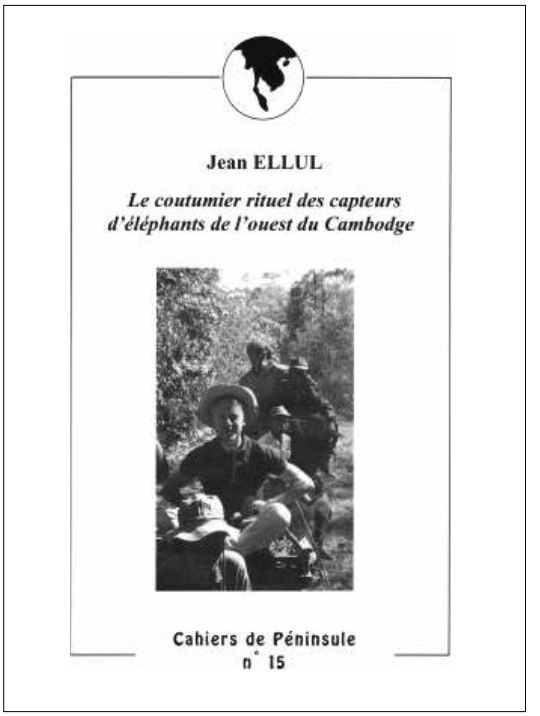
Confronting Christianity, therefore, enriches the historiography of the 19th-century Siamese Christian-Buddhist ecumenical encounter, an encounter that helped to reorient and intensify the Buddhist reform that preceded it. It allows readers to better understand one

crucial dynamic that profoundly shaped the unfolding trajectory of modernist religious reform in Siamese history. However, it is important to point out that there were other intellectual, cultural, social, political and institutional dynamics at play that similarly shaped and fueled the magnifying scope, character, and directions of Siamese Buddhist reform across the 19th and 20th centuries. At the same time, the book suffers from limitations shared by prior scholarship constrained by an inability to access or document the character and dynamics of religious debate and Buddhist reimagining beyond the limited boundaries of social elites and literary archives. The missionary journals and archival resources Trakulhun examines do provide a new window onto religious motivations, actions, and interactions on the ground in 19th-century Siam that would otherwise be cloaked from the historiographic record; but the perspective is still ultimately constrained and limited. Of course, *Confronting Christianity* should not be overly criticized in this regard. Unless and until expansive new archival sources are uncovered, historians of Thai Buddhism are forced to return over and over to the same premodern and early modern elite literary and archival sources, employing new strategies of critical reading in an effort to uncover the character, dynamics, and consequences of modernist Buddhist reform among the masses and in the registers of not only thought but also ritual and practice.

Ultimately, *Confronting Christianity* does not fundamentally alter or revise the current scholarly consensus on the overarching narrative arc, empirical scope, analytic dynamics, or argumentative conclusions regarding modernist Buddhist reform in Siamese and Thai history. Instead, it substantively enriches the empirical details of a previously recognized, but for the most part unexamined, element in that story. Nor does it fundamentally challenge the theoretical framing for making sense of modernist Buddhist reform. Postcolonial historiographic and sociological approaches highlighting and prioritizing the creativity of local, indigenous voices and perspectives in encounters between Asian Buddhism and Western modernity are broadly ascendent in current scholarship. Therefore, Trakulhun's argument that 19th-century Siamese Buddhist reform constitutes a moment of "intercultural mimesis" rooted in creative, innovative, contentious acts of agency and reinterpretation by religious elites reinforces and provides further evidence for a growing scholarly understanding of the cross-cultural dynamics underlying modern Asian Buddhist history.

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Jean Ellul, *Le coutumier rituel des capteurs d'éléphants de l'ouest du Cambodge*, Paris: Association Péninsule [*Cahiers de Péninsule* 15], 2024, 330 pages, €32.50, ISBN 978–2353214754 (Paperback)



This 2024 publication of *Le coutumier rituel des capteurs d'éléphants de l'ouest du Cambodge* (in French) marks a significant event in the anthropology of mainland Southeast Asia. Originally defended as a doctoral dissertation in 1983 at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS, Paris) and long accessible only in a small number of specialized libraries in France, the manuscript remained largely unavailable to a wider readership. Although Jean Ellul had begun revising the dissertation, the *Péninsule* editors have ultimately published here the original 1983 text, with only minor corrections to transcription, transliteration, notes, and references. Its publication therefore brings into circulation a major ethnographic study substantially enriching the corpus of scholarship on forest societies, ritual specialists, and vernacular cosmologies on the Indochinese Peninsula. The significance of this posthumous book extends well beyond its focus on the ritual capture of wild elephants. It develops a sophisticated analytical framework that situates this practice within a multifaceted social configuration.

In the first part (pp. 39–161), Ellul examines the institution across several interrelated levels of analysis—technical, organizational, political, and cosmological—demonstrating how elephant capture operates simultaneously within each of these registers. Rather than treating capture as a merely technical procedure, the author reveals it as a dynamic interplay of specialized operations embedded in a network of moral imperatives, hierarchical forms of expertise, and invisible agencies. This complex social matrix is further illuminated by culturally specific conceptions of the elephant's symbolic status and its profound relational significance within the Khmer system of kingship and royal authority, thereby underscoring the ritual's broader cosmological and political dimensions.

Beyond its ritual and technical dimensions, the volume is structured around a central analytical insight: the elephant captors' organization mirrors, in its own scale, the political architecture of the Khmer monarchy. Ellul distinguishes two interrelated levels: (1) the internal hierarchy of the captors themselves and (2) their external relationship to royal authority. The corporation

of captors does not exist in isolation; rather, it symbolically reproduces a segment of the royal polity within its own social structure. This structural homology constitutes one of the book's most original contributions, situating elephant capture within the broader political cosmology.

In this respect, Ellul's study invites comparison with Thomas R. Trautmann's *Elephants and Kings* (2015), which traces the long historical entanglement between war elephants and the formation of kingship in South Asia. Both works examine the political life of elephants, yet they proceed from strikingly different vantage points. Trautmann offers a history centered on courts, armies, and imperial institutions—a narrative unfolding at the scale of the state. Ellul, himself trained as a historian, writes a different kind of political history. He approaches the nexus between elephants and sovereignty from the forest margins, focusing not on royal administrations but on the corporate specialists whose customary order made elephant capture both materially possible and ritually legitimate. In doing so, he shifts the center of gravity from the palace to the corporation, from the apparatus of power to the structured practices that sustained it.

At the same time, Ellul does not overlook questions of circulation and transmission. As with Trautmann, he is attentive to the movement of techniques, ritual forms, and institutional models across regions and political formations. Yet, for Ellul, diffusion is conceived not as imperial expansion, but as the gradual embedding of royal demands within localized customary orders. What circulates are not merely techniques of capture, but normative frameworks continually reworked at the margins. This is especially evident in his discussion of lasso capture, whose practice is inseparable from ritual authorization and graded forms of expertise. Comparable configurations of ritualized elephant capture have been documented elsewhere in mainland Southeast Asia (e.g., Giles 1930; Lainé 2018), but Ellul's distinctive contribution lies in demonstrating their structural homology with the organization of royal authority.

In the second part of the book (pp. 163–220), Ellul devotes sustained attention to the *coutumier*, a customary corpus that is neither a codified legal system nor a loose collection of beliefs. Rather, *coutumier* brings together structured prohibitions (*tranam*; ត្រណាម), prescriptions, ritual formulae, embodied dispositions, and procedures of correction. All of these elements collectively render a hazardous activity both socially and cosmologically viable. Ellul insists on an important point: beyond the stated rules, the *hma* (ហ្មា; master captors) actively test, refine, and evaluate the efficacy of ritual formulae and techniques. The *coutumier*, in other words, is not fixed. It accommodates controlled adjustment and interpretive flexibility while remaining anchored in a shared normative framework. Recognized as mediators capable of engaging both natural and supernatural forces, the *hma* operate simultaneously on practical, social, and sacred levels. Their authority lies in maintaining equilibrium across these domains. In this sense, the *coutumier* functions as a stabilizing structure within an inherently uncertain environment.

This discussion of *coutumier* as a form of operative knowledge constitutes one of Ellul's most enduring contributions. What gradually emerges from the author's reconstruction is the pivotal role of locally grounded knowledge in the entire enterprise. The success of elephant capture depends not solely on royal injunctions or formal prescriptions, but on the accumulated experience of specialists—knowledge acquired through apprenticeship, refined through practice, and shaped by sustained familiarity with elephants and forest life. Viewed in this light, the *coutumier* is more than a normative framework: it preserves and organizes a body of lived expertise, a practical intelligence transmitted across generations and enacted in everyday relations between humans, animals, and the forest itself.

Ellul then turns to a detailed exposition of the *tranam* (prohibitions), which constitute the normative architecture of elephant capture. One enters the domain of the *tranam*, observes their prescriptions, risks transgressing them, and must eventually undergo a ritual process of release. Transgression is framed not primarily in juridical terms, but through its "natural" consequences, which may be severe or even fatal. The forest, its resident spirits, the captor's lassos, and the *tranam* themselves all emerge as fundamentally ambivalent forces—simultaneously protective and dangerous. Particularly striking is the existence of a rite of exit following the completion of a capture. Elephant capture is therefore conceived not as a discrete event but as a ritual process extending through preparatory, operative, and reintegrative phases. The normative system encompasses this entire cycle. Read this way, the *tranam* appear not merely as ritual prohibitions but as a missing link between oral normative traditions and written royal law. Ellul suggests that royal legal codification frequently drew upon such customary frameworks, at times incorporating them, and, at others, transforming them. The *coutumier* of the elephant captors thus provides a valuable point of entry for understanding how norms circulated between the forest margins and the royal center.

The volume also offers a careful analysis of initiation and transmission, challenging the assumption that elephant capture constituted hereditary specialization. The son of a *hma* does not automatically become one. Mastery requires initiation, discipline, and the capacity to assume the progressively greater obligations associated with each successful capture. The absence of straightforward hereditary succession highlights the elective and cumulative character of ritual authority: expertise must be acquired, demonstrated, and continually reaffirmed rather than simply inherited. Equally important is the tripartite organization of social roles, comprising the *hma*, the *ganval* (គង្វាល; assistants), and women. The *coutumier* therefore extends well beyond the community of forest specialists. It encompasses domestic space—thresholds, cooking practices, bodily comportment, and marital relations—revealing that elephant capture is embedded within a broader social field linking forest and village.

In the third part of the book (pp. 221–293), devoted to the analysis of the rules governing the *coutumier*, Ellul makes

explicit the structural logic of the normative system. It is here that the homology between customary order and royal organization becomes fully articulated. If the corporation of elephant captors reproduces, on its own scale, a segment of the royal polity, it nevertheless remains situated at the forest margins, a space marked by structural ambivalence. The captors are indispensable to royal power, yet they operate in zones associated with danger, uncertainty, and powerful non-human agencies. They are respected for their expertise while simultaneously linked to forces that must be ritually contained. The forest is never merely an ecological backdrop. Rather, it is a densely relational environment inhabited by both visible and invisible beings. Elephant capture unfolds as a process of negotiation within this layered world, where political authority, ritual obligation, and interspecies encounters converge. In a regional literature often dominated by studies of rice villages, court hierarchies, and centralized religious institutions, Ellul's work re-centers forest-based specialists and high-risk practices as analytically indispensable to understanding the relationship between political margins and royal centers.

Although completed well before the emergence of multispecies scholarship, Ellul's study speaks directly to contemporary debates on human–elephant relations. His portrayal of the elephant as a reactive, intentional, and consequential actor resonates with later ethnographic research on mahout–elephant relations in South and Southeast Asia (Lainé 2020). The *coutumier* encodes practical knowledge derived from sustained interspecies engagement. In this respect, Ellul anticipates later analyses of interspecies coordination and co-domestication without relying on the conceptual vocabulary that now frames such discussions. The volume acquires additional significance in light of the profound transformations that have affected elephant management and training systems across Asia. As Jennifer Crawley (2023) has shown, specialized knowledge once embedded in ritual practice, apprenticeship, and long-term experience has become increasingly fragile in many contemporary contexts. Ellul's ethnography therefore does more than document a customary order: it preserves an exceptionally detailed account of forms of knowledge that have since declined, disappeared, or been reconfigured under changing political, economic, and conservation regimes.

Publications on this subject in Southeast Asia have become increasingly numerous, reflecting growing scholarly interest in indigenous knowledge and human–elephant relations. Among the most recent is Alisa Santikarn (2025), which offers a complementary perspective on elephant capture practices in Thailand. Seen in this broader context, Ellul's book stands both as a landmark regional ethnography and as a record of a particular historical configuration of human–elephant relations, in which technical expertise, ritual normativity, and forest-based practice were tightly interwoven.

The text unfolds through careful differentiation rather than compressed synthesis. As a result, its original analytical architecture is preserved,

allowing readers to follow the progression of Ellul's argument without retrospective simplification. Although written within the structuralist horizon of its time, the volume ultimately transcends a strictly structural reading. While attentive to homologies and formal correspondences, Ellul never loses sight of practice, uncertainty, and situated expertise. The editors' decision to preserve the manuscript in its original form ensures that Ellul's analytical construction remains accessible without retrospective reshaping, making this edition a valuable contribution not only to the study of elephant capture but also to the historiography of Southeast Asian anthropology.

The social and ecological world documented in this study has since undergone profound transformation, if not near-complete disappearance, in the wake of political upheavals, changing regimes of forest governance, and rapid economic change. These processes have altered the environmental and social conditions that once sustained such ritual practices, fundamentally reconfiguring the relational order that framed human–elephant interactions. Read from this perspective, the volume offers not only a richly detailed ethnographic account of a vanished way of life but also a vital documentary archive preserving the memory of a forest-based relational configuration that has since been irrevocably transformed.

In summary, *Le Coutumier rituel des capteurs d'éléphants de l'ouest du Cambodge* stands as a major contribution to the anthropology of mainland Southeast Asia, illuminating forest-based specialization, ritual normativity, and human–elephant relations within a specific historical and regional context. It also reminds us that the political history of elephants cannot be reconstructed solely from royal archives but must also attend to the situated expertise of those who worked at the forest margins. More broadly, the work demonstrates the enduring value of regionally grounded ethnography, reminding us that a *coutumier* is more than a set of rules: it is a structured way of inhabiting and negotiating a shared world.

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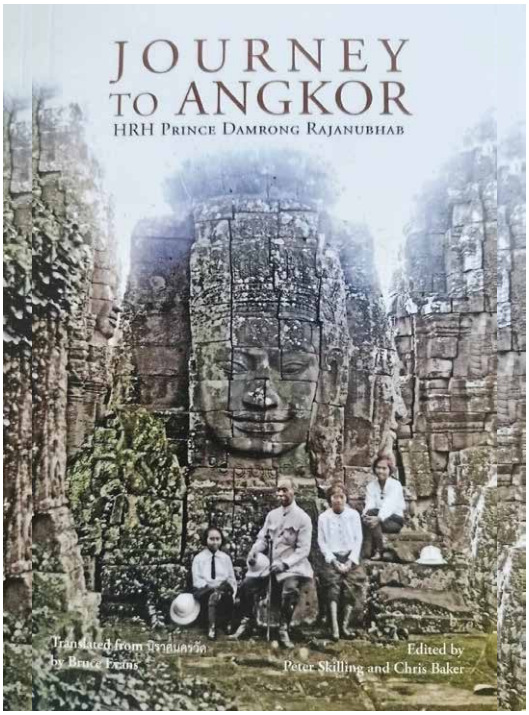
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HRH Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, *Journey to Angkor*, trans. from นิราศนครวัด by Bruce Evans, ed. by Peter Skilling & Chris Baker, Bangkok: River Books Press, 2024, 182 pages, ฿595, ISBN 978–6164510890 (Paperback)



In a recent issue of the *Journal of the Siam Society*, Alexandra Denes (2022) examined in English *Nirat Nakhon Wat* (นิราศนครวัด; *Journey to Angkor*), HRH Prince Damrong Rajanubhab's account of his 1924 visit to Cambodia, using a later Thai edition. After reading her article, my first impulse was to return to the original work, in my case the 1983 edition. This edition includes additional notes by HSH Prince Subhadradis Diskul, the youngest son of Prince Damrong and President of The Siam Society from 1979 to 1981. As I reread the text, I found myself wishing that this important work could be made available in English, allowing non-Thai readers to appreciate for themselves Prince Damrong's reflections on his journey to Angkor in 1924.

A hundred years after Prince Damrong's visit, in 2024, my wish came true. That year, River Books published Bruce Evans's English translation of *Nirat Nakhon Wat*, edited by Peter Skilling & Chris Baker. The volume's Introduction states that "this translation is based on the third edition" (p. 10), which it identifies as having been published by the Ministry of Education in 1938. However, the volume's own bibliography (p. 180) dates this same edition to 2469 BE (1926 CE). By contrast, the first two editions were published in 1925 and 1926 by Sophon Phiphatthanakon Press, one of Siam's most prestigious printing houses between the two World Wars. Its owner was my maternal great-grandfather, Phra Sophon Aksonkit (Lek), whose family bore the surname Smitasiri. Unfortunately, footnote 4 on page 11 misspells the family name as Samitsiri.

The introduction further explains: "The first round of this translation was done by Bruce Evans and edited by Peter Skilling. This was revised and completed (including the prefatory verse) by Chris Baker" (p. 10). Readers may

therefore expect the translation to have undergone careful scrutiny. Likewise, as with any work associated with Peter Skilling and Chris Baker, one can anticipate excellent footnotes, appendices, maps, and a carefully compiled bibliography that greatly enhance the value of the volume.

Footnote 5 of the Introduction (p. 11) directs the reader to Prince Damrong's address, "Angkor from a Siamese Point of View", delivered before The Siam Society on 28 July 1925. In that lecture, the Society's then Vice-Patron declared that he:

> shall, with your leave, treat the subject entirely from the point of view of an Oriental and especially that of a Siamese who professes the same religion and follows the same manners and customs as the Cambodians (Damrong Rajanubhab 1925: 141).

He described the ruins as "Khmer monuments" built by this "famous race", whom he referred to as the "Khmer or Khom" (Ibid., 142). During the lecture, he also showed photographs taken by his party, which had been converted into "lantern slides" and projected onto a screen by Mr R. Wening for the audience. It must have been a memorable evening.

Prince Damrong was no ordinary "Oriental". A son of King Mongkut (Rama IV), he served his elder half-brother, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), as Minister of the Interior from 1892. Widely regarded as the most successful of King Chulalongkorn's ministers, he transformed the kingdom's provincial administration into a system whose foundations remain in place today. He left the Ministry of the Interior in 1915, during the reign of his nephew, King Vajiravudh (Rama VI).

By the time of his journey to Angkor in 1924, Prince Damrong had been in semi-retirement for nine years. During this period, he remained active in public life, notably through his role in developing the National Library, while also embarking on an extraordinarily prolific writing career. His semi-retirement came to an end in 1925, following the death of King Vajiravudh, when he returned to government service as one of the *aphirathamontri* (อภิรัฐมนตรี; "super-minister") under King Prajadhipok (Rama VII). Even so, he never abandoned his scholarly pursuits.

After the 1932 "change of administration", Prince Damrong went into self-imposed exile in Penang, where he maintained a celebrated correspondence with his half-brother, Prince Naris. These letters were later published as *San Somdet* (สาส์นสมเด็จ; *Royal Letters*), a work that remains an invaluable repository of historical and cultural knowledge for Thai studies. Prince Damrong continued writing until the final days of his life in 1943.

Journey to Angkor consists of nine chapters, ranging from "Leaving Bangkok" to "Returning from Phnom Penh to Bangkok". As this is a review of the translation, I shall begin with a minor point. On the eighth line of the first chapter (p. 15), we read that "ambassadors" saw the party off at the East Asiatic Company landing in Bangkok on 16 November 1924. Although this is a fair translation of the Thai word *thut* (ทูต), it should be borne in mind that, at the time, nations were represented abroad by ministers resident in diplomatic

legations rather than embassies. This is, however, a minor quibble, as "ambassadors" adequately conveys the sense that members of the diplomatic corps were present to bid the Prince farewell. From that point onward, the translation is engaging and highly readable.

In 1924, reaching Phnom Penh and Angkor required several days of travel by sea and land; the return journey was even longer, as Prince Damrong returned via Saigon. The Prince was accompanied by three of his daughters, a senior palace official, a physician who also served as interpreter, a clerk, and a page. Professor George Cœdès, Chief Librarian of the National Library, acted as the party's guide. Cœdès had first visited Cambodia and Angkor in 1912. He later wrote an account of that journey for his family in France (Thissana 2025). By comparison, his journey with Prince Damrong twelve years later must have been considerably more comfortable.

Today, a journey by air from Bangkok to Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, or Saigon takes barely an hour. From Prince Damrong's account, the roads he encountered in Cambodia and Vietnam under French colonial rule in 1924 appear to have been considerably better than those found there today. In Phnom Penh, Prince Damrong paid a courtesy call on King Sisowath of Cambodia, who "came out to receive us and shook hands" (สมเด็จพระศรีสวัสดิ์เสด็จลุกออกมาต้อนรับจับมือ; p. 35). This must have been an unexpected gesture, although Prince Damrong himself made no comment on it. In the same paragraph Prince Damrong devoted a substantial passage to the historical relationship between the Thai and Cambodian royal families. I quote this passage in full:

> As for me, once he had invited us to be seated, His Majesty said he was very pleased to meet me, and that he did not regard me as a stranger since, as a son of His Majesty King Mongkut, I was a son of a king and master. He then gave a blessing as the senior person, which we received in respectful *añjali*. He seemed to be saying to the officials present that "This is the son of my master. I once served under King Mongkut". But to us he said that he was happy that we had come all the way to Phnom Penh to give him the chance to meet us many times, that he felt as if he was meeting a relative, and not to regard him as a stranger. I answered that the sons and daughters of King Mongkut all felt that the royal family of Cambodia were relatives because they knew that King Mongkut had been on close terms with them in the past (pp. 35–36).

The Thai original is as follows:

> ส่วนตัวเราเมื่อตรัสชวนให้นั่งแล้ว ตรัสว่ายินดีมากที่ได้พบปะ ไม่ได้นึกว่าเป็นคนอื่น ด้วยเป็นพระราชบุตรพระบาทสมเด็จพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว เป็นลูกของเจ้าของนาย แล้วประทานพรโดยฐานที่เป็นวุฒบุคคล ฝ่ายเราก็ประนมมือรับพรด้วยความเคารพ สังเกตดูเหมือนจะโปรดตรัสประกาศแก่ข้าราชการที่เฝ้าอยู่นั้นว่า "นี่ลูกเจ้านายของข้า ข้าเป็นข้าพระบาทสมเด็จ ฯ พระจอมเกล้ามาแต่ก่อน" ดังนี้ แต่ตรัสแก่เราว่ายินดีที่เราออกไปถึงเมืองพนมเพ็ญให้ได้ทรงพบซ้ำอยู่หลายครั้ง และตรัสต่อไปว่ายินดีเหมือนได้พบญาติ

> อย่าให้เรานึกว่าเป็นคนอื่นเลยทูล ตอบว่า เจ้านายซึ่งเป็นพระราชโอรส-ธิดาของพระบาทสมเด็จฯ พระจอม-เกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว ก็ดูเหมือนจะรู้สึกอยู่ด้วยกันทุกพระองค์ว่าราชวงศ์กรุงกัมพูชาเหมือนกับเป็นพระญาติด้วยทรงทราบอยู่ว่า พระบาทสมเด็จฯ พระจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัวทรงพระเมตตากรุณาสนิทสนมมาแต่ก่อน

As the reader can see, this is a good translation. I have only one minor question regarding the rendering of "แล้วประทานพรโดยฐานที่เป็นวุฒบุคคล ฝ่ายเราก็ประนมมือรับพรด้วยความเคารพ" as "He then gave a blessing as the senior person, which we received in respectful *añjali*". *Añjali* is a Pali–Sanskrit term requiring translation back into Thai and, in contemporary usage, tends to evoke a formal or elevated religious connotation. The ordinary Thai gesture of respect is defined as *pranom*; ประนม (*pranom*) means "to make a gesture of respect by pressing the palms of the hands together at the chest" (Domnern & Sathienpong 2549: 310, 609). This is surely the gesture Prince Damrong made on this occasion. I therefore wonder why *añjali* was chosen as the translation.

Another significant passage appears in the penultimate Chapter 8. It concerns the Thai dance teachers invited to the Cambodian court during the reigns of Kings Rama III and Rama IV. The passage concludes with the following:

> The upper cloths of the main female characters were draped over one shoulder (said to be the style of King Hariraks) and did not look good as one shoulder was left bare revealing the armpit. The ogre was dressed in a waist sash with hanging end, like a sculpture (pp. 149–150).

The Thai original reads as follows:

> ผ้าห่มนางตัวดีห่มสไบเฉียง (ว่าเป็นแบบของสมเด็จพระหริรักษ์) ก็ไม่น่าดูด้วยปล่อยแขนเปล่าให้แลเห็นรักแร้อยู่ข้างหนึ่ง เครื่องแต่งตัวยักษ์นั้นเจียระบาดทำเป็นชายไหวอย่างรูปปั้น

This is a difficult passage and the translator shows considerable resourcefulness in rendering นางตัวดี (*nang tua di*) as "main female characters". The translation of the final sentence is particularly brilliant. Bruce Evans deserves congratulations for a job well done, especially given the difficulties of the original Thai text. While no translation can fully convey the flavor of the original, Prince Damrong wrote in a relaxed, conversational style that Evans successfully captured. The result is an easy and enjoyable read, as fellow readers and researchers will surely appreciate. More of Prince Damrong's works deserve to be translated and I was pleased to learn recently that three more translations are already in the pipeline.

Although I was asked to focus primarily on the translation, I cannot refrain from commenting briefly on the substance of the book itself. As noted above, in 1925 Prince Damrong told The Siam Society that his work approached Angkor and, by extension, Cambodia, entirely from a Siamese point of view. This is perhaps the book's greatest contribution to Thai–Cambodian studies.

From the moment of his arrival, the Prince did what I myself did more than fifty years later on my first visit: he went to pay his respects at the temple on the hill, Phnom Penh—the eponymous site of the capital—and provided a detailed description of its historical significance. The millennium or so of Thai–Cambodian relations is presented

throughout in an objective and dispassionate manner. Prince Damrong was deeply curious about Cambodian developments since it had become a French Protectorate more than half a century earlier. He described in detail the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh, modelled on the Grand Palace in Bangkok, and recorded his astonishment at Angkor's grandeur. His interpretation of the decline of the Khmer Empire remains broadly consistent with the views generally accepted today.

He was equally attentive to the Cambodian Buddhist Sangha and, perhaps unsurprisingly given his experience as a former Minister of the Interior, to the workings of Cambodian administration under French rule. He noted that many Cambodians of his time were still fluent in Thai. Much has changed in the century since his visit and the loss of that shared linguistic and cultural familiarity is deeply regrettable.

We owe a debt of gratitude to River Books and its publisher, MR Narisa Chakrabongse, as well as to the editors, Peter Skilling and Chris Baker, and their colleagues, for bringing this important volume to publication. Prince Damrong's view of Angkor remains a supremely valuable source for the study of Thai–Cambodian history and historiography.

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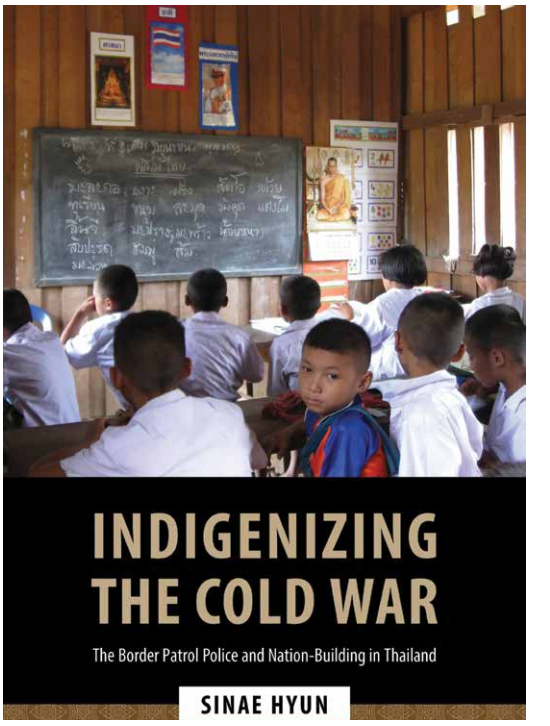
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Sinae Hyun, *Indigenizing the Cold War: The Border Patrol Police and Nation Building in Thailand*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2023, 248 pages, US$68, ISBN 978–0824894085 (Hardback)



On the first page of *Indigenizing the Cold War*, Sinae Hyun asks one of those deceptively profound historical questions that makes the reader wonder why it had not been asked before: What kind of border was the Thai Border Patrol Police (BPP) policing in Bangkok, far from the country's territorial frontiers, when it notoriously massacred student protestors on 6 October 1976?

In approaching this puzzle sincerely, as one whose solution is not obvious or preordained, Hyun's study takes the reader well beyond the institutional evolution of the BPP and its role at Thammasat University in October 1976. Though she does address these matters, Hyun's ambitious approach produces a theoretical model for understanding the Cold War in Thailand that can usefully be applied elsewhere.

Hyun's key contribution to Thai and Cold War studies is the concept of "indigenization". Drawing from missiology, she defines this as "adaptation and transformation of the foreign/external cause to achieve one's own goal" (p. 2). In the case of Cold War Thailand, the local ruling elite indigenized the "global Cold War system" to secure a conservative model of royalist nation-building—and ultimately enduring political dominance—over progressive alternatives, including those of student and civilian protestors and communists, "in a way that in Thailand and elsewhere in Southeast Asia became inevitably hot" (Ibid.).

In the first of five chapters, "From CIA Brainchild to Civic Action Agent, 1947–1962" (pp. 17–48), Hyun demonstrates the key role of the American CIA in forming the BPP as part of U.S. counterinsurgency efforts. Since American policy dictated that such initiatives be directed through civil policing forces, these efforts worked to the benefit of the Thai National Police Department, specifically Police Lieutenant General Phao Siyanon (พล.ต.อ. เผ่า ศรียานนท์; 1910–1960). The 1957 coup led by General Sarit Thanarat (พล.อ. สฤษดิ์ ธนะรัชต์; 1908–1963, later Field Marshal) precipitated a "life-or-death" crisis for the BPP. It would survive and later thrive by shifting its focus to civic actions and embracing two more influential patrons, the Thai monarchy and the United States Operations Mission (USOM).

Chapter 2, "Building a Human Border, 1962–1980" (pp. 49–82), takes up the monarchy's function as the BPP's key backer. BPP civic actions, informed by modernization theory and performed in collaboration with USOM, aimed to create a "human border". Hyun's evocative phrase explains the condescending and homogenizing aims of the civic action programs: to defuse the threat of subversion among susceptible ethnic "others" in Thailand's border areas—notably highland minorities—by inculcating "Thainess". The monarchy became the face of these programs—to the benefit of both it and the BPP.

The following two chapters focus on institutions integrated under the BPP—Police Aerial Reconnaissance Units (PARU) and the Village Scouts—that perpetrated violence at Thammasat in October 1976. Like the BPP, PARU (Chapter 3, "The Saga of the Black Panther, 1950–1976", pp. 83–109) was a child of the CIA. Unlike the BPP, PARU remained tied to the CIA after Sarit's coup and was

deployed to Laos to fight its "secret war" against Lao communism. Demoralized by its role in this failed effort to indigenize the Cold War, PARU returned to Thailand an "orphan" of America's Cold War and was duly adopted by its "foster parent" the monarchy. PARU thus became "its own agent of indigenization and an acting missionary arm of royalist nationalism" (p. 109).

Hyun's chapter on the Village Scouts, "Crusade from the Borders to Bangkok, 1969–1976" (Chapter 4, pp. 110–136), begins with the creation of a mass movement of "village vigilante groups" as a popular base of the BPP and monarchy's "anticommunist nation-building projects" (p. 111). It culminates in a forensic—and chilling—analysis of the brutal massacre of October 1976, including how the BPP, PARU, and Village Scouts instigated and subsequently narrated these events. The PARU unit was called to Bangkok due to its proximity in Hua Hin, its rapid mobilizability, and, above all, because it "was the only unit of the BPP that was straightforwardly assigned to provide protection to the royal family" (p. 127). The Village Scouts were similarly brought to Bangkok by a vague and agentless opportunity to "protect" the monarchy from the "threat" posed by protesters, the persons or agencies issuing the instruction remaining studiously elusive.

Afterwards, the BPP, PARU, and Village Scouts presented a perverse contradiction: they did not resile from the "success" of the massacre but could not broach their role in it. Not only was Bangkok far from the "border" the BPP was tasked with protecting; the BPP, PARU, and Village Scouts' close association with the monarchy could raise unanswerable questions about its "direct and indirect involvement" in these events (p. 133). Nevertheless, Hyun finds ample evidence of BPP, PARU, and Village Scout perpetration in her interviews and confidential reports. Their aims, she finds conclusively, were to defeat communism and thus protect and demonstrate their loyalty to the monarchy, encapsulating the BPP's effectiveness in indigenizing the Cold War.

With the end of the Cold War, the BPP's transformation from a missionary of American anticommunism to an agent of royalist nationalism and Thai-style democracy was confirmed. Nevertheless, its mission to uphold these ideologies was never complete. On more familiar ground, Chapter 5, "Mission Incomplete" (pp. 137–162), explores how the mission of the BPP, pursued through its alliance with the monarchy, especially the Princess Mother Srinagarindra or "Mae Fah Luang" (1900–1995), became the promotion of "Thai-style democracy with the king as a head of state". This system permitted repeated anti-democratic interventions by the military and other institutions acting putatively on the monarchy's behalf. The chapter reinforces the BPP's "integration of military, police, and civilian functions" (p. 162), a key to its capacity to indigenize the Cold War.

Although Hyun refers periodically to the non-territorial border invoked at the outset, her conclusion returns explicitly to this guiding question. The border policed by the BPP was a "psychological border of Thainess set against the supposed enemy of the Thai nation at the physical boundary of Thailand"

(p. 163). Although communism was the enemy of Thainess during the counterinsurgency era, it evolved into any threat—real, imagined, or pretextual—to royalist nationalism and the nation-building vision of military-monarchical elites.

Indigenizing the Cold War reveals how the triumph of anticommunism in Thailand, achieved through America's Cold War alliance with the Thai security services and monarchy, produced elitist conservative political structures that have long outlasted the Cold War—including the U.S. presence in Thailand—and persist to the present day.

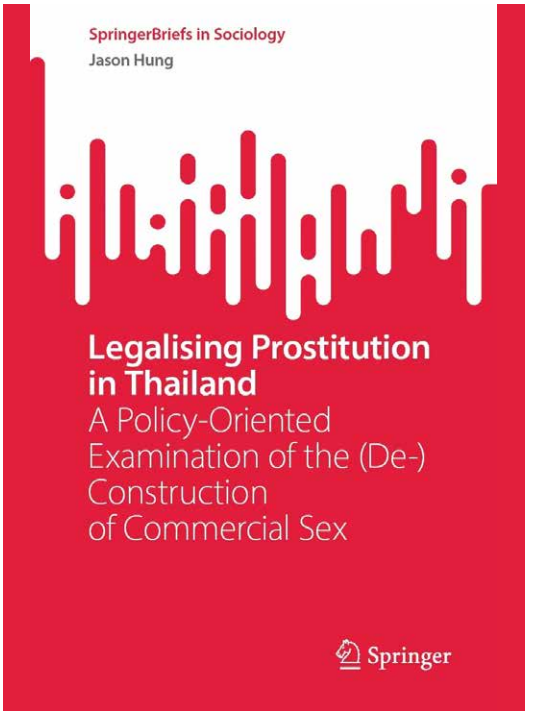
Hyun is not the first author to propose connections between the Cold War alliance of military, monarchy, and America and to link these to the evolution of Thai politics through the long reign of King Bhumibol (Rama IX; r. 1946–2016). But her book stands as a highly original, comprehensive, and conceptually sophisticated addition to this historiography, which brings it into conversation with other Cold War contexts and historiographies in Asia and beyond.

Hyun's research for *Indigenizing the Cold War* merits special mention. The author spent around two years conducting fieldwork in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. She gained formal research permission from the BPP, which granted her access to BPP sources and interviews. Although the book is not sympathetic to the BPP—quite the opposite—and relies only sporadically on her interviews, Hyun's approach shines through in an ethnographic sensibility that forces the reader to contemplate the BPP and similar institutions not as anomalous but as part of the world we inhabit.

Distinguished scholars of Thai history and politics are among those to have contemplated the structures and events leading to 6 October 1976. Hyun comfortably joins them in this indispensable account. *Indigenizing the Cold War* is a must read not only for scholars of postwar Thailand, but for those seeking new models to conceptualize the links between domestic, regional, and global political struggles in Cold War Asia and beyond.

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Jason Hung, *Legalising Prostitution in Thailand. A Policy-Oriented Examination of the (De-)Construction of Commercial Sex*, Singapore: Springer, 2024, 84 pages, SG$54.50, ISBN 978–9819984473 (Hardback)



Jason Hung is a young and highly productive researcher with a PhD in sociology from the University of Cambridge and an affiliation with the National University of Singapore. His impressive academic trajectory and broad range of publications testify to considerable ambition and intellectual energy. At the same time, the speed with which he has moved across multiple degrees, research projects, and fields—from education and gender studies to social inequality, artificial intelligence, and health sciences—also raises questions about the depth and coherence of his research agenda. This combination of evident talent, confidence, and intellectual breadth is reflected in the present volume, whose ambitious scope is undermined by a superficial treatment of the subject, a lack of sustained empirical demonstration, and a tendency to substitute repeated assertions for rigorous analysis.

More than a measured, detailed, unbiased analysis of Thai prostitution and government policies concerning it, the brief is presented as a propaganda—possibly lobbying—document in favor of the legalization of Thailand prostitution. What are the interests behind it? Who are the people and institutions that would defend such interests and policies for Thailand? All this legitimately leads to the question of the real depth and validity of Hung's analyses, which are hastily conducted and repetitive, more a kind of mantra than convincing; in short, these analyses are in no way demonstrated.

As a reminder, there are practically only three possible policies in the world relating to prostitution and pimping: (1) prohibition, (2) abolition, and (3) legalization (Dialma 2010). The first consists in prohibiting both prostitution and pimping (i.e., 0-0, in relation to an algebraic notation), a prohibition most often circumvented in many countries by governmental and social hypocrisy, frequently exhibiting corruption, allowing pimps to be relatively well-protected. This policy puts the prostituted woman in a difficult situation, leaving her with no rights before the police at any time, whether the police be corrupt or not in their application of the law, with pimps benefitting from this situation. The second policy, abolition, consists in authorizing or at least tolerating prostitution and in combating or prohibiting pimping (1-0). This is probably the most proactive policy for the defence of prostitutes (if it is really applied, which is almost never the case). The third policy consists of authorizing prostitution, considering the prostituted person as a sex worker with the practical result of the police registration of these persons (this is not the case with abolition) and authorizing pimping by considering the pimps as business leaders (i.e., 1-1).

The last policy is the worst possible for prostitutes under the influence of pimps because, under the pretext of fighting for the defence of trafficked persons, it does not fight pimping but authorizes it. This has been the case since the signing of the Palermo Protocol at the United Nations in December 2000. This Protocol is a cut and paste copy of the U.S. TVPA (The United States' Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act) against human trafficking passed in January 2000. This Act makes possible

the listing of countries seen as good while others are denoted as dubious and therefore liable to various sanctions.

The main consequence of the TVPA law and the UN Protocol of Palermo was to effectively cease the fight against pimping launched by the Société des Nations (SDN, Geneva) at the instigation of France before World War II, reinforced in 1948 by the nascent United Nations. This abandonment against pimping that began in 2000 was done under the pretext of reducing human trafficking. However, the real goal was the fight against terrorism, seen in a rather vague way because terrorism was defined according to shifting criteria subject to the interests of various governments, allowing indirect but effective intrusions into the policies of other states on a politically acceptable pretext.

This policy of legalization, defended by feminist movements, can be found in various Western countries as well as in India. India is an interesting case because it is dominated by a patrilineal kinship system leaving, in the context of independent economic activity, little space for a single, divorced, or widowed woman. In other words, it forces single women to consider renting their bodies as an opportunity to earn a living on their own. In India, as elsewhere, prostitution completely independent of pimping is rare: pimps are as often women as men and, moreover parents and relatives of prostitutes. As a result, defending a policy of legalization consists de facto in authorizing and facilitating pimping, or worse, in recognizing it socially, rather than facilitating the lives of prostitutes claiming to be independent sex workers.

The policy of legalizing prostitution is the world's rarest, however, and is often associated with the gambling industry. It is found, for example, in the United States in the state of Nevada (Las Vegas), and, in Australia, in the Capital Territory, in the Northern Territory, and in New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria, under the pretext of decriminalization. In Cambodia and France, especially since the so-called Sarkozy laws of 2008 which repressed clients more than pimps and prostitutes, the official policy was abolition. However, in practice, since prostitutes are registered and controlled or even repressed by the police, abolition amounts to a policy of prohibition, except that in both cases, pimps are largely tolerated, which ultimately amounts to a policy of legalization in favor of pimps and against prostitutes.

Most countries in the world defend a policy of prohibition, especially in East and Southeast Asia, notably in monarchies, Muslim countries, and countries officially under military, communist, or socialist regimes. Everywhere it is applied with great hypocrisy; in reality abolition favors pimps and traffickers, often out of pragmatic tolerance, relating the application of the official policy to the legalization of prostitution and pimping, possibly by sparing and authorizing prostitutes. This could amount to a policy of abolition, except that the prostitutes are under orders and dependent on the possible whims of the local police, without real rights. This is especially the case for prostitutes of foreign origin, often the most numerous, often without a visa, or with expired visas, most often with their passports confiscated by pimps. It is true that the

situation of prostitutes is often worse in Thailand's neighboring countries, communist or Muslim, than in Thailand itself, where the police and social services regulate the situation relatively well and show a certain tolerance for prostitutes, which partly refers to a policy of abolition. The Thai government even went so far as to provide prostitutes who applied for it with a minimum income during the time of COVID and the two years that followed, when Thailand did not accept any entry of foreigners into its territory; a gesture that is as socially generous as it is realistic, that is to say, with a full knowledge of social realities. This reviewer is well acquainted with these subjects, having created in 2004 and directed for several years in Cambodia the first scientific research unit devoted to studying prostitution, pimping, and human trafficking across mainland and insular Southeast Asia (Le Roux et al. 2010). The unit conducted research on behalf of several organizations, including a French–Khmer NGO, United Nations agencies such as UNIAP and UNODC, the Spanish ANESVAD Foundation, the French Embassy, and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Le Roux 2011). I can say that in Southeast Asia, particularly in Thailand, the best solution would probably be a policy of abolition: proposing a status relative to prostituted persons and therefore a kind of social recognition and some human rights, offering them more decent sanitary conditions, while fighting against pimping and human trafficking, which are the main problems.

Hung seems to only want to defend the legalization of prostitution in Thailand. He does this without considering the situations and policies in Thailand's neighboring countries, despite the fact that many prostitutes in Thailand may not be of Thai nationality. He appears not to have conducted any specific field research—at least none is mentioned—on prostitution in Thailand, even though it takes different forms depending on the province and city, with the exception of Bangkok. His study consists of a simple bibliographical approach and includes only titles in English. My own research has shown that a substantial body of serious scholarship exists in other languages, particularly in Thai and French.

The author considers his subject only in the present without taking account of a distant or more recent past, erasing historical and cultural aspects that may explain part of the current situation. For example, he does not mention at any time the idea of social seniority on which almost all Southeast Asian societies are based, as well as the importance of sacrifice in the symbolic function of these areas. These ideas and practices can be found in all societies in Southeast Asia and East Asia, not only in Thailand. One should also mention the persistence of external slavery, state slavery in particular, abolished in Siam by HM Rama V Chulalongkorn in 1905, and the still widespread appearance to this day, directly or indirectly, of internal slavery, i.e., for debt. Curiously, the author focuses his remarks on economic aspects conceptualized in the Western way, which, according to him, are induced by or lead to prostitution. At no time does Hung propose an operational definition of the concepts of wealth and poverty. Nor does he propose a clear and appropriate definition for the Thai case of what is called sex tourism,

prostitution, child prostitution, child pornography, and human trafficking. All these terms have complicated definitions regarding the persons involved—prostitutes, pimps, and clients—as well as the religions and nationalities concerned. There are complex questions of the legal or even socially acceptable age separating a "child" from an "adult" which vary depending on the country and other criteria: civil majority with the right to vote, sexual majority with or without parental consent, majority valid for marriage only, minimum age considered for an adult, etc.

Hung's discourse seems to be based implicitly on the neoliberal acceptance of purely Anglo-Saxon obedience concerning these concepts. This stance therefore forces Hung to be indirectly biased by placing an original sociological reality, that of contemporary Thailand, into an exogenous analytical grid. This grid does not consider the complex historical and multicultural reality of the kingdom and does not propose linking sociological facts together to obtain the solid framework necessary to a detailed demonstration fed by tangible facts. Moreover, Hung's Introduction states, "Here the Thai sex industry exploits vulnerable and poor individuals desperate for monetary gains to work as prostitutes" (p. 2), reflecting the same assumptions found in much American writing on the sex industry. The author only mentions "individuals" even while speaking of members of a society that is not "individualistic" but collectivist (i.e., "holistic" as defined by the French anthropologist Louis Dumont, 1991 and 2008). A holistic society, such as the Thai, is one in which people do not see themselves as independent individuals but primarily as members of various communities, redefined on each occasion, having rights and duties towards these communities.

Indeed, the author's announced demonstration in the Introduction of the beneficial effects of legalization never materializes in the subsequent chapters, which merely repeat—without substantive arguments beyond appeals to authority—a kind of mantra, as though it were a magic formula, without producing convincing evidence. Above all, what is likely to strike readers is the author's markedly arrogant tone, tempered only by a certain degree of naivety. This "brief" does not provide a detailed or convincing analysis of the reality it seeks to describe, nor does it convincingly demonstrate that its proposed solution is the most appropriate. Instead, it repeatedly asserts a personal opinion in favor of the legalization of prostitution and, by implication, of the legalization of procuring. Such a position ultimately does little to serve the interests of prostituted people.

Moreover, Hung repeatedly admonishes Thai authorities, government officials, and political elites as though he possessed an inherent authority to do so. This approach is all the more unconvincing because the work offers no sustained or credible demonstration of its central claims, relying instead on repeated assertions and appeals to authority. Yet the author addresses the institutions of a sovereign kingdom with a long-established constitutional and democratic tradition.

Who is better placed than the Thai authorities themselves to develop viable policies that serve the interests of victims of prostitution, civil society, and

the international community? These authorities are supported by the practical experience of the Royal Thai Police in addressing prostitution, procuring, and human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. These authorities also draw on scholarly research that proposes evidence-based explanations and workable solutions, rather than relying on strongly asserted personal opinions or perspectives that may not fully reflect Thailand's own social and historical context.

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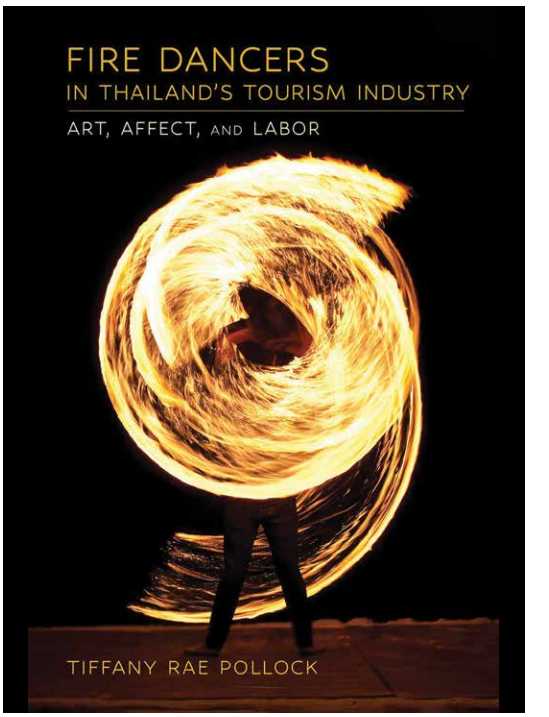
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Tiffany Rae Pollock, *Fire Dancers in Thailand's Tourism Industry: Art, Affect, and Labor*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2024, 186 pages, USD$27.95, ISBN: 978-1501774935 (Paperback)



This engaging ethnography is a spirited addition to the anthropology of Thai tourism. Tiffany Rae Pollock conducted her research on Thai island beaches in the south that cater to foreign tourists. Emphasizing how the "the explosion of Thai fire dance shows" (p. 9) coincided with intensified tourism on these beaches, she addresses the phenomenon of nighttime "tourist beach parties" hosted by bars. In these shows, fire dancers provide breathtaking performances, creating eroticized zones of encounter. She focuses on the performers who fill the night with spectacular fire displays, activated through tight choreographies of dance and "fuel cans, batons, hoops, and chains" (p. 1). She argues that fire dancers are agentive actors rather

than laborers constrained by, and catering to, an exoticist tourist industry. The second generation of fire dancers with whom Pollock spent time during 2015, 2016, and 2019 were largely young Thai and Burmese male migrant laborers. Pollock's ideas and questions are drawn from critical dance studies, performance studies, and anthropology; her book will appeal to readers from all these areas.

At fewer than two hundred pages, the volume features seven chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion, as well as compelling section headers, a minimal number of endnotes, an informed bibliography, and a good index. Pollock's writing is entirely engaging. While she focuses on the beach party scenes, she positions fire dancing within the broader global phenomenon of "flow art", movement practices that combine dance and props to draw both performers and audiences into flow states.

Chapter 1, "Transforming Fire Dance Surfaces" (pp. 23–36), addresses how young men talk about eroticized encounters with foreign tourists. Chapter 2, "The Energy of Artists" (pp. 37–56) takes a deep dive into how dancers talk about *phalang* (พลัง), energy and the affective and erotic connections cultivated on the beach that can result in a sense of "a collective self" (p. 55). In Chapter 3, "Feeling Art and the Labor of Sharing" (pp. 57–79), Pollock joins fire dancers who have created a fire dance center on Ko Samui that offers a space where they can reflect on the social aesthetics of competition, sharing, and art as work. In Chapter 4, "The Affinitive Labor of Freedom" (pp. 80–99), she considers how young Burmese dancers entering the scene are viewed by some Thai fire dancers as less professional and driven by economic need rather than artistic standards, even as young migrant men from Myanmar create communities of care for themselves that Pollock deems "sites of belonging" (p. 98). Chapter 5, "The Everyday Comfort of Practice" (pp. 100–119), addresses contradictions between tourist perceptions of island life as *sabai sabai* (สบายๆ; easy, relaxed, contented) and the everyday struggle of earning a living as a fire dancer. Chapter 6, "Striving on Koh Phi Phi" (pp. 111–125), reflects on how the international success of the film *The Beach* and then the 2004 tsunami drove extensive and sweeping new development on that island, effectively rewriting its local history. Chapter 7, "Fire Dance Femininities" (pp. 126–149), focuses on the experiences of a few women. Throughout, Pollock stays close to the many conversations she had with the fire dancers she knew, giving the book a sustained sense of immediacy as she centers individuals' lives and experiences.

This was originally a doctoral thesis, now revised and polished; the author has published related work sparingly (e.g., Pollock 2019). It directly relates to broader areas of inquiry: anthropologists of tourism in Thailand have mostly focused on the north, where Erik Cohen's work looms large (e.g., 2000, 2008). Tourism in southern Thailand has received comparatively scant attention, except for Malam's study of "the beach scene" (2004) and Cohen's attention to "bungalow tourism" in the southern islands and a Chinese festival in Phuket (e.g., 2001). Mary Conran's focus on intimacy and tourist encounters with Karen trekking guides is adjacent to some of Pollock's interests (Conran 2006). However, her focus on southern Thailand and her theoretical interests drawing

labor, class, performance, and affect into a timely set of questions connects to existing areas of scholarship while giving the book originality.

Pollock's ethnographic research sites were primarily in Ko Phi Phi and Ko Samui; she also spent time on Ko Phangan and Ko Lanta and in several public parks in Bangkok where fire dancers meet to teach and practice. The author provides detailed profiles of several individual fire dancers. She shows how fire dancing is a profoundly masculine form, practiced by Thai and Burmese dancers. However in Chapter 7, she broadens the lens and explores the minimized role of women in two ways, first through her interviews with two of the remaining Thai women fire dancers, a single French woman dancer, and then by interrogating her own participatory experiences as a foreign woman fire dancer. One of the Thai women describes fire dancing as a "protected genre" (p. 130), i.e., policed by Thai men, and Pollock explores at some length the respectability politics that position Thai women outside fire dancing.

But one of Pollock's questions surrounds the erotics of male fire dancing in relation to the dancers' sustained assertions that they are not motivated by any aim to enter intimate relationships with foreign Western tourists (ฝรั่ง; *farang*). In Chapter 7, she offers a nicely complicated analysis of how gendered and Thai/*farang* bodily praxis intersect quite intentionally in one Thai woman's style, in what Pollock terms "a cosmopolitanism" (p. 136). The author links these dancers' experiences to global capitalism and changing social constructions of gender rather quickly and in passing (pp. 148–149). In all, this chapter complicates the rest of the book in useful ways, as it positions Pollock's personal experiences as a participant with theorized care and honesty.

The author notes from the outset that "Many of my interactions with fire dancers were in the English language (or a mix of Thai and English), as many are fluent speakers" (p. vii), so her ethnographic work took place in a border zone where languages, workers' expectations, and global imaginations meet. That is, indeed, the book's point. Pollock asserts that "identities are made changeable", i.e., performers and tourists co-inhabit spaces and feelings, and this "complicates binaries" (p. 152). Pollock argues repeatedly that fire dancers are far more than exploited laborers. An underlying romanticism drives the study—the hope that difference can be overwritten through performance and shared experiences. As she writes, "Affect undoes the borders of bodies and invites connections and solidarities based on feeling" (Ibid.).

Pollock uses "alliances" to posit new relationships (between people and between objects and people) that undercut or refuse asymmetrical power relationships. She borrows the idea of alliances from ethnomusicologist Beverley Diamond (2007), whose research with North American Indigenous cultural workers never steps away from power relationships. In many ways, this approach challenges poststructural ethnography. Now that we acknowledge power is everywhere, how can we position our interlocutors as more than puppets or victims of powerful ideologies? Performers of many kinds in many places imagine otherwise and thus envision better

futures, as discussed by Kandice Chuh (2003).

Overall, I am a bit uneasy with the author's determined critical effort to see how fire dancers agentively set affect and feeling into motion to cross boundaries. She writes, "People activate the force of affect" (p. 153) and, while I am sure that is true, the extent to which it overwrites the powerful distinctions between tourists and performers, Thai and Burmese, is, to me, an open question. Pollock argues that "feeling together" generates the possibility of "political agency" (pp. 153–154); the "affective economy" created by fire dancers for tourists is situated within a "neoliberal capitalist industry", but also invites "a reworking of the political through the body" (p. 154). She almost entirely sidesteps any discussion of how this is or is not related to broad political movements in Thailand. She ends simply by asserting that performance and affect are messy, dissonant, and inexact. I do not disagree. Pollock leaves open the difficult work of parsing where or how actual social change results, but she is hardly alone in that critical limitation.

Attention to affect is a critical development sweeping through the Anglophone humanities and social sciences. Sometimes its critical payoffs barely land. How do affective formations become ideologies that then become the social structures of lived experience? I was provoked by Pollock's book in all the right ways, but I also uneasily noticed that she tended to assert more than she unpacked or interpreted. This sentence from page 2 thrilled me, but I kept encountering iterations of it through the rest of the book: "Affect is also a nexus through which dancers wrestle with the entanglement of their art form with neoliberal capitalist tourist economies and social narratives that position them as deviant beach boys rather than artists". Pollock claims that she "builds a theory of affect" across the arc of the book (p. 2). I am not convinced that happens, but her ethnography is rich and compelling. By focusing on (mostly) young Thai men whose artistic practice is embedded in foreign tourism, Pollock adds to the anthropology of Asian nightlife and tourism; she accomplishes this with sustained attention to gender, labor, and corporeal experience.

Fire Dancers in Thailand's Tourism Industry is available through JSTOR as an open access book and through Oxford Academic as an eBook. It contains three maps and 15 black and white photographs, mostly taken at night, with a few photos of bucket bar ambience but mostly depicting fire dancers in action to beautiful effect, unattributed but presumably taken by the author.

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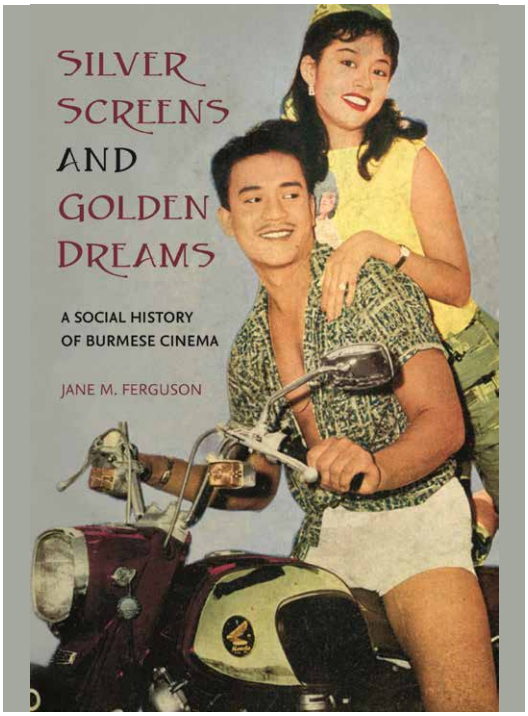
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Jane M. Ferguson, *Silver Screens and Golden Dreams: A Social History of Burmese Cinema*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2024, 284 pages, US$70, ISBN 978-0824895679 (Hardback)



As the first book-length social history of Burmese cinema in any Western language, Jane M. Ferguson's *Silver Screens and Golden Dreams* becomes a landmark contribution to the study of modern Myanmar. Challenging a historiography long dominated by what Ferguson calls "soldiers or monks" (p. 9)—political studies of conflict and authoritarianism on the one hand and scholarship on Theravada Buddhism on the other—the book brings popular culture to the center of historical inquiry. Cinema, she argues, is far more than entertainment: it provides a shared cultural language through which Burmese society imagines itself. This particularly significant intervention is important because, despite having one of the most active film industries in Southeast Asia during the 20th century, Burma's cinematic heritage remains largely unknown outside the country.

Ferguson, an anthropologist at the Australian National University, came to the subject through her fieldwork among ethnic Shan military veterans on the Thai–Myanmar border. She discovered that many of her interlocutors, despite opposition to the Burmese state, remained deeply attached to Burmese films, songs, and novels. One veteran's remark that "we're not against them, we're against the government" (p. 6) captures the paradox at the heart of the book: popular culture simultaneously embodies shared identities as well as

reflects political divisions. Drawing on this borderland perspective, Ferguson explored cinema as a "consensus narrative" connecting theatrical, musical, and literary traditions while asking whose dreams were represented and whose were excluded.

Writing a history of Burmese cinema is a formidable challenge, since most films have been lost. Film reels were often recycled, archives were destroyed, and the limited number of surviving prints contributed to the disappearance of many works. The author reconstructs this lost cinematic world through two decades of interviews with filmmakers and audiences, extensive collections of Burmese film magazines, and engagement with a rich but largely overlooked Burmese-language literature on cinema. Her decision to organize the history around changing political economies—colonial, parliamentary, and socialist—rather than governmental commemorative labels such as "Silver", "Golden", and "Diamond" eras (p. 16), allows her to move beyond nostalgia and examine cinema as a dynamic social institution shaped by politics, economy, and popular aspirations.

Chapter 1, "Exposure and Development: The Making of a Burmese Dream Factory" (pp. 19–38), traces the arrival of the bioscope in colonial Burma through itinerant showmen and transregional circuits linking Rangoon (Yangon) with the Straits Settlements, Java, and Thailand. Ferguson shows that the emergence of Burmese cinema was shaped by diverse actors and networks: her central argument is that "the birth of Burmese cinema depended on multiple midwives" (p. 38); despite later nationalist narratives of an authentically Burmese industry, its foundations relied heavily on South Asian capital, technology, and distribution networks. The first Burmese filmmaker, Ohn Maung (အုန်းမောင်; 1898–1945), developed his craft in the photographic studios of colonial Rangoon and launched the first Burmese feature, *Metta Hnint Thura* (မေတ္တာနှင့်သူရာ; *Love and Liquor*), in 1920. Her reading of this movie is equally insightful, showing how its temperance theme reflected wider anxieties about colonial rule, particularly the British monopoly over alcohol sales.

Chapter 2, "Gender Theater and the Silver Screen: Women and the Motion Picture Industry" (pp. 39–57), challenges the masculine bias of Burmese film historiography, the so-called fathers of Burmese cinema. Ferguson rejects the superficial solution of simply adding a few prominent women to an existing narrative—the "add women and stir" approach (p. 40)—and instead reconstructs women's contributions across the entire industry. She examines female screenwriters such as Dagon Khin Khin Lay (ဒဂုန် ခင်ခင်လေး; 1904–1981), early actresses drawn from theatre and respectable families, and, more broadly, women as a powerful force within the expanding cinema audience and consumer market. Her discussion of *Mya Ga Naing* (မြဂနိုင်; *The Emerald Jungle*, 1934), featuring the young actress Myint Myint (မြင့်မြင့်) as a rifle-wielding heroine, illustrates how women shaped both the production and reception of Burmese cinema. Although male directors and stars inevitably regain prominence in later chapters, a limitation partly explained by the surviving sources, Ferguson returns to

questions of gender in the book's concluding discussion (p. 217).

Chapter 3, "Sound Waves: Music for the Movies and the Advent of the Talkie" (pp. 58–77), restores sound to the supposedly "silent" era and is among the book's strongest ethnographic chapters. Burmese silent films were accompanied not by a lone pianist, but by adapted *hsaing* (ဆိုင်း) ensembles; the cinema hall emerged as a vibrant social space: drummers commented on the actions of on-screen heroes to the delight of audiences; lyric sheets enabled collective sing-alongs; and, in 1938, the audience's enthusiastic singing of the title song of the nationalist film *Thakin Myo* (သခင်မျိုး) alarmed colonial authorities, leading to a temporary ban on its screening. The second half of the chapter follows the A1 brothers to Tokyo, where their remarkable 1935 coproduction with the Photo Chemical Laboratory studio, *Japan Yin Thwe* (ဂျပန်ရင်သွေး; *Japanese Daughter*), combined a doomed transnational romance with a message of aviation-based techno-nationalism. Ferguson's observation that "the film experience is [...] a relationship between the viewers through the interface of the motion picture" (p. 77) could serve as the book's guiding principle.

Chapter 4, "Peacocks and Parrots: Anticolonial Nationalism Gets Its Wings" (pp. 78–94), examines anticolonial nationalism through the larger-than-life figure of "Parrot" Hsan Ni (ဟံနီ), a taxi-firm bookkeeper who transformed his fleet into a film company and repeatedly challenged the colonial censoring board during the 1930s. His debut film, *36 Kaung* (၃၆ ကောင်; *36 Animals*), depicting police complicity in illegal gambling, was never shown; his peacock films mobilized royal symbolism against the colonial order while *Alantaung* (အလံတောင်) commemorated the martyrs of the Hsaya San rebellion. Particularly significant for political historians is the 1937 strike film *Bwaing Kaut Ta* (ဗိုင်းကောက်သား; *Boycotter*), which starred future national leaders U Nu (ဦးနု; 1907–1995) and Aung San (အောင်ဆန်း; 1915–1947), and whose song by Saya Tin (ဆရာတင်; 1894–1950) was later adapted into the national anthem. Ferguson is careful, however, not simply to reproduce the patriotic narratives found in Burmese film histories, which often portray filmmakers as nationalist visionaries while overlooking their role as commercial entrepreneurs. Controversy, she argues, could also serve as effective publicity: Hsan Ni himself calculated that while newspapers reached around one million readers, a film could reach three million (p. 94).

Chapter 5, "Tender Celluloid among the Cactus? Burma's Cinematic Cold War" (pp. 95–113), offers a lively contribution to the literature on the cultural Cold War. Independent Burma's film industry benefited from state support through tax incentives, screen quotas, and an annual Academy Award ceremony, while competing ideological powers sought to influence the country's cinematic culture. The chapter's central case study is *Ludu Aung Than* (လူထုအောင်သံ; *The People Win Through*, 1953), an adaptation of U Nu's own play produced with support from the CIA-funded Asia Foundation. Conceived as an anti-communist prestige project costing the considerable sum of US$203,039, the film was a commercial failure, reportedly provoking some frustrated viewers to set fire to a cinema.

Soviet and Chinese cultural initiatives similarly struggled to resonate with Burmese audiences; Ferguson's account of director Shwedone B. Aung (ရွှေဒုံးဘဒေအောင်) candidly telling his Shanghai hosts that Burmese viewers would fall asleep during revolutionary epics (p. 108) captures the limits of ideological filmmaking. The chapter concludes with the soldier-star Kyaw Swe (ကျော်ဆွေ; 1915–1982), whose *Pule Myit Ye* (ပုလဲမျက်ရည်; *Pearl Tears*) adapted Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* to the Shan hills, transformed wartime sacrifice into an expression of postcolonial martial masculinity.

Chapters 6 and 9 form a particularly valuable pair focusing on the "ethnic film" (*taingyintha yokshin*; တိုင်းရင်းသားရုပ်ရှင်) genre and will be of special interest to readers of Southeast Asian history. Chapter 6, "The Primitive and the Beautiful: The Ethnic Film Genre" (pp. 114–131), introduces the colonial-era pioneer of the genre, director Hsaya Myint (ဆရာမြင့်) and the Shan starlet "Miss Shanghai" Mary Myint (မေရီမြင့်), whose ethnicity was marketed as exotic, charming, and modern even as Shan political autonomy was progressively eroded. The author also highlights the continued practice of Bamar actors portraying people from minority populations and the tendency of films to reduce frontier regions to picturesque landscapes rather than complex social worlds.

Chapter 9, "Ethnic Conflict on the Cutting Room Floor: Socialism, Chauvinism, and Tracking Hidden Histories in a Banned Film" (pp. 173–194), is perhaps the book's methodologically most innovative chapter. Ferguson reconstructs the troubled history of *Shwesayan* (ရွှေစံရုံ; 1962), a royal-history film centered on the legendary Shan princess Saw Mon Hla (စောမွန်လှ) and King Anawrahta (အနော်ရထာ; ca. 1014–1077). Released shortly before Ne Win's (နေဝင်း; 1910–2002) March 1962 military coup, the film was subjected to renewed censorship by the new regime and eventually withdrawn after protests. Ferguson openly acknowledges that she has never seen the film, reconstructing its history instead through interviews and a censored magazine article. Her analysis contrasts the Bamar-centered royal narrative with Shan-language chronicles that present the Mao polity as an equal, or even superior, counterpart to Pagan. Rather than attempting to resolve the historical debate concerning the 11th century, she demonstrates how the past became politically explosive in the present: the story of a Shan princess captured, accused of witchcraft, and dying of grief acquired new significance precisely when Shan autonomy was suppressed. This multilingual, multiperspectival approach to contested historical memory represents one of the book's most original contributions and deserves close attention from historians of mainland Southeast Asia.

Intermediate chapters 7 and 8 form the conceptual core of the book, examining the Burmese remake as a form of cultural translation rather than mere imitation. Chapter 7, "Last Tango in Rangoon: Burmese Borrowings and Reinventions of International Films" (pp. 132–149), demonstrates how deeply "transmutation" shaped the parliamentary-era film industry. Ferguson discusses the Burmese Academy Award–winning *Daukta Aung Kyaw Oo* (ဒေါက်တာအောင်ကျော်ဦး;

1957), a Burmese reworking of Hollywood and Bollywood sources; she argues that such adaptations should not be dismissed as derivative. Drawing on Madhavi Sunder's critique of the cultural assumptions embedded in copyright discourse, she instead asks what changes introduced by Burmese filmmakers—such as Buddhist merit-making resolutions and locally meaningful courtship conventions—reveal about audience expectations and social values.

Chapter 8, "The Burmese Way to Socialist Realism: Remaking Hollywood in the Ne Win Years" (pp. 150–172), follows the remaking of films in the socialist period after the 1962 military coup. Under Ne Win's government, the film industry was nationalized, censorship expanded, and cultural production redirected toward a state-defined "Burmese-style socialist realism". Yet remakes continued to flourish. Ferguson's discussion of *Hnit Hmwa Athe* (နှစ်မွာအသည်း; *Twin Hearts*, 1968), which transformed the Hollywood Disney film, *The Parent Trap* (1961), into a socialist-era Burmese adventure, illustrates her broader argument that censorship was not only restrictive, but also shaped new forms of creativity. Her analysis of filmmakers' strategies—working within constraints, inserting "decoy" scenes, and avoiding politically sensitive subjects—is one of the book's most insightful discussions of cultural production under authoritarian rule.

Chapter 10, "Socialism in Stereo: A Musical Bridge to Myanmar Culture" (pp. 195–210), returns to traditional theatre, examining socialist-era films centered on *zat pwe* (ဇာတ်ပွဲ) troupes, including Maung Wunna's (မောင်ဝဏ္ဏ; 1947–2011) acclaimed *Che Hpawa Taw Nu Nu* (ခြေဖဝါးတော်နုနု; *Tender Are the Feet*, 1971). Here Ferguson revisits questions of gender and artistic authority, showing how claims of cultural authenticity could reinforce patriarchal hierarchies.

The Conclusion, "The Muse in the Prison Celluloid" (pp. 211–222), brings these themes together through the life of Ferguson's friend, filmmaker and festival organizer Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi (မင်းထင်ကိုကိုကြီး; b. 1967), whose imprisonment under successive regimes frames her reflection on cinema and incarceration as parallel "dream factories" of modern Burma. Although the comparison might initially appear unexpected, Ferguson develops it into a powerful meditation on creativity, repression, and the enduring human need for imagination.

Criticisms of *Silver Screens and Golden Dreams* are few and mostly amount to wanting more. For a book presented as a social history, the voices of ordinary audiences are sometimes less visible than those of filmmakers, critics, and industry figures, filtered as they are through memoirs and surviving print sources. The vivid ethnographic moments Ferguson provides—such as Shan villagers fleeing army press-gangs or a tailor's son recalling the popularity of "Kyaw Swe collar" shirts—make one wish there were more, since the book is often, inevitably, a history of the film industry and its discourses rather than of its audiences.

Given that most Burmese films discussed here have disappeared and that surviving digital copies are rarely subtitled, Ferguson's careful reconstructions provide an essential foundation for future film scholarship. Her translations

of Burmese film magazines and ephemera likewise preserve a fragile and largely inaccessible print culture. The decision to end the main narrative in 1980, justified by the arrival of television and color film, leaves the later decades—the 1988 uprising, the video era, and the digital revival—largely compressed into the conclusion; one can hope a sequel will follow.

The volume is handsomely produced, with well-chosen, if scarce, reproductions of magazine covers, cartoons, and promotional materials. The inclusion of Burmese script alongside transliteration throughout will be particularly appreciated by specialists. Given the central role of individual films in Ferguson's argument, a consolidated chronological filmography would have been a valuable addition. The generous plot summaries, however, are among the volume's greatest strengths.

For readers in Thailand, the book has an additional significance: it reveals numerous connections between Burmese and Siamese/Thai cultural histories, from the itineraries of theatrical troupes and travelling cinemas linking Bangkok and Rangoon to shared traditions of shadow theatre, literary adaptation, and contemporary archival collaboration. In doing so, it lays important groundwork for a comparative history of mainland Southeast Asian cinemas.

Silver Screens and Golden Dreams is a learned, compassionate, and often remarkably witty account of popular culture under authoritarianism. It demonstrates how cinema provided ordinary people with spaces for imagination, negotiation, and collective memory, while reminding us that "there can never be a monopoly of meaning" (p. 221). At a time when Myanmar's artists continue to face repression, Ferguson's study offers not only a history of Burmese cinema but also a powerful reflection on the enduring relationship between creativity and freedom.

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