

## REVIEWS

John E. deYoung, *Village Life in Modern Thailand*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1955. 225 pages with maps, plans and photographs.

Since the late John F. Embree published his stimulating book on the Japanese village of Suye Mura in 1939, there has been a new approach to the socio-anthropological study of Asian rural communities. Professor deYoung's book on Thai village life is one result. Embree, however, devoted his entire effort to an exhaustive study of one village. Professor deYoung's method is much broader, being, as he explains in his foreword, "an attempt to present a descriptive account of the life of the Thai peasants who live in that vast area of Thailand which lies outside the Bangkok delta plain." Naturally the author could not cover this entire area in his investigations, and it has consequently been necessary to generalize from the particular which occasionally, as noted below, leads to some rather unconvincing conclusions. Nevertheless, the author spent some three years of study in Thailand, one year (1948-49) being devoted to field investigation in a northern community near Chiang-mai, followed by shorter periods of work in the Northeast provinces and other areas.

The picture which Professor deYoung presents of village life in Thailand is essentially that of small holders, both owners and tenants, living until very recently in small almost self-contained communities. These communities follow a pattern of life determined by time-honored customs and traditions, built largely around the rice-growing cycle and resulting in a culture which reflects the simple, hard-working but fun-loving and friendly character of the people. The picture is thus an idyllic one of a people with few wants but with ample means to satisfy them, imbued with a festive, hospitable spirit, and living, working and playing under a communal system of existence with its simple but workable democracy. Such communities are virtually free of class consciousness and distinctions, racial antagonisms and religious prejudices. Bound together by a racial, religious, cultural, social and economic homogeneity, the

Thai village community looks largely to itself, but is at the same time friendly toward the outside world and, more important, is receptive to its influences.

It is on this last-named matter of receptivity to the influences of the outside world that Professor deYoung devotes considerable attention throughout the course of his book; namely, the changes which have come about in recent years as the village communities have been brought more closely into contact with the nation as a whole and with the things as well as the ideas which so often accompany them which have been brought into Thailand from abroad, particularly from the West. So far these changes have not been great and they have not, as the author later notes, brought about any disintegration of village community life.

In discussing the passing of some of the older customs and habits, one receives the impression that the author may have experienced exceptional conditions in the communities where he conducted his field investigations. For example, he notes on page 31, in a manner which would appear to apply to the entire country, that home weaving has now been given up. This may be true among the highly commercial farming communities of the Central Plain, but household looms may still be observed in operation throughout the Northeast and in many parts of the North. The reviewer has observed hand weaving being carried on in every province in the Northeast, and in the Phu Thai village of Renu in Nakorn Panom Province almost every household had its loom, the women weaving both cotton and silk and even producing their own mosquito nets. Again, the author maintains that betel-chewing and tattooing have died out as customs among the younger people of rural Thailand. To some degree this is probably true with respect to the use of betel, but from the reviewer's observations over most of the country talismanic tattooing is still very much in vogue among younger men (and occasionally younger women for that matter), not only in the villages but in the market towns and even in Bangkok. One may question, too, some of the author's conclusions about chasity among young folks in the countryside and his view that harvest and other

festivals only *sometimes* produce bawdy songs. One also wonders if the Thai peasant, as noted on page 92, really obeys any "ancient taboo on milk products," when consideration is given to the great quantities of tinned milk imported into this country, some of which does reach the village level of consumption.

The author's account of the religious life of the village communities should go far to clarify some of the confusion and misunderstanding left by certain other writers who have touched upon this subject. Particularly valuable are his descriptions of the important rôle played by the Buddhist temple in village life and the division of the villager's religious observances between the temple and its monks and the animistic spirits which people jungle and stream, trees and stones, the rice fields, and even the very pillars of the villager's own house. The author notes that many of these animistic beliefs and practices are now losing their significance, although the spirit house and the use of votive offerings, charms and amulets are still widespread and from all observation appear to have retained some validity and meaning.

The final chapter of the book, describing the changing scope of the villager's world, is especially interesting and significant. Despite the persistence of many customs and beliefs, the growing contact of the village communities with the outside world has already begun to produce political, economic and social changes. Through its modern political machinery, its economic controls, its health, welfare and educational activities and military conscription, and to a still limited degree through the media of radio and press, the central government is now reaching into the village and affecting its life patterns to an extent never known before. Other influences from the outside world are reaching the village through the itinerant medicine men and merchants as well as the ordinary traveller. Conversely, the people of the village are moving more and more from the confines of their own small communities. The coming of the railroad was the first impetus, but more important have been the great extension of the highway and road system, the establishment of networks of bus and passenger truck lines which now reach

the most isolated corners of the nation at least in the dry season, and the increasing use of the bicycle. In consequence, we now have almost monthly visits by village and commune headmen to the *amphur* or district seat, and comparatively large movements of the villagers themselves to the *amphur* and the provincial capital to visit shops and moving picture theatres, and to attend provincial and temple fairs. Another significant point is the large yearly migration of laborers from the villages of the countryside, especially from the Northeast, to Bangkok and other areas. Many of these migrants come to work as unskilled laborers and samlor drivers for only a year or shorter periods, thereafter returning to their home villages with impressions and ideas which, for good or for ill, will affect to some degree the thinking and habits of their families and neighbors.

There is thus not only the beginning of changes in the ideas and customs of the countryside but also evidence of a change in the physical character of village life. To a large extent, the rural Thai have now adapted themselves to a money economy, and the villager today has come to think in terms of money and the things it will buy. The former autonomous, self-contained character of the village has already undergone modifications. Villagers now think of purchasing and actually do purchase many things which would have been regarded as unattainable luxuries only a few years ago, or for which there would have been neither a desire nor a need, such as bicycles, radios, sewing machines, kerosene pressure lamps, and a great variety of tools and utensils. With the slow growth of education, the Thai village is also becoming a political factor. Heretofore, "politics" in village life was confined essentially to the election of the village and commune headmen; today villagers are beginning to think of broader issues in terms of the province and the nation, forming ideas about communism and democracy, taxation and corruption, and even Thailand's international relations. A decade or so ago such matters would have aroused little or no interest.

Like all the country, the village communities have also become subject to the stresses and strains, the benefits and woes, and the promises and delusions of Thailand's expanding economy.

The author touches upon this problem at a number of points throughout the book especially in the final chapter, but it is unfortunate that he did not explore it and its implications more fully, for herein seems to lie the explanation of so much of what is taking place in this country today.

In brief, any longer-term view of Thailand leaves no doubt that it is experiencing the mixed blessings of a rapidly expanding economy. Since the beginning of the century the population has more than doubled (increasing from approximately 8.0 million in 1900 to perhaps 20.0 million or more today). This has been largely the result of a marked decrease in the mortality rate from something around 17 per thousand 25 years ago to 10.5 per thousand today. Despite this proportionately large increase in population, the area of land under cultivation and the production of food has not only increased steadily but has kept so far ahead of population growth to maintain an increasing exportable surplus. In almost every other sphere of economic activity there has been a rapid and in some cases a sensational expansion during the past few decades. Moreover, new industries have come into existence which, while still forming but a small segment of the total economy, never existed a few years ago, such as textile factories, sugar, steel and cement mills, the production of tapioca flour, canning and various kinds of manufacturing. Concomitant with these developments and contributing to them has been the large extension of transportation facilities, the growth of foreign trade, banking and insurance, and the expansion of the internal market through increased population and rising purchasing power.

The government has, of course, played an important rôle in recent years in the economic growth of the country, and while many of its actions and policies have been subject to criticism and censure the economy has nevertheless expanded and continues to do so. The point which is often lost sight of, however, is the fact that an expanding economy of the kind Thailand has been experiencing produces inflationary pressures, dislocations and maladjustments, its irregular upward trend benefiting some and discomforting others. Such a combination of benefits and disadvantages inevitably leads

to demands for political, economic and social changes, which are already being voiced in the urban centers of the country and which are beginning to be evident at the commune and village levels.

In the long view, however, the author regards the future with optimism, provided external forces do not attempt to alter the basic political, economic and social structure of the country. While the belief of some that Thailand could by intensified farming, adequate irrigation programs, and other improvements comfortably maintain a population of 100 million may seem a rather frightening look into the future, the fact remains, as Professor deYoung emphasizes, that as Thailand's population continues to grow, so can her rice production, and it is his considered view that "for the next half century at least, there is no danger that Thailand will suffer from population pressure; rather, the reverse will be true, for the standard of living of the peasant should rise as his numbers increase."

So far, in the author's opinion, the changes inherent in an expanding economy have not yet fundamentally altered the basic life of the village communities. Consequently, it is significant to note the author's final conclusion that "Thai peasant society shows none of the signs of disintegration that are so often evident when a peasant group is brought rapidly into contact with modernization and Westernization." We can see such disintegration, often with disastrous consequences, in some other Asian countries. It would appear, therefore, that in their organization, traditions, and easy and adaptable way of life, the Thai village communities possess an unusual resiliency which may, it is hoped, enable them to preserve their integrity and community values in the face of a changing world.

### Charles Nelson Spinks

Miguel Covarrubias, *The Eagle, the Jaguar, and the Serpent. Indian Art of the Americas. North America: Alaska, Canada and the United States.* Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1954. 294 pages, illustrated.

Miguel Covarrubias needs no introduction to students of Southeast Asia because of his magnificent *Island of Bali* (1938).

This gifted Mexican artist and anthropologist has, since publishing *Mexico South* in 1946, devoted his efforts to the ethnic and cultural background of the pre-Columbian Americas. The volume is not only a monument to Covarrubias' scholarship and humanistic approach to the subject but it is also a tribute to the publisher as an example of splendid book-making. The work is lavishly supplied with drawings, maps, sumptuous color plates, and photographs.

Readers of the *Journal* will find Chapter I, Origins of the American Indians, covering pages 9-72, of particular interest. The author does not pretend to solve the mysteries which have surrounded the original peoples of the American continents; nor does he plunge into the heated "isolationist-diffusionist" controversy which has for so long handicaped research in this field. While a partisan to neither of these conflicting schools of thought, Covarrubias, however, presents some weighty evidence to support culturally if not ethnically a Pacific and Eastern Asian origin. In doing so he has, of course, leaned heavily upon the works of such noted scholars as Rivet, Gladwin and Heine-Geldern. He presents a most startling list of art motifs and cultural concepts which are common to Eastern Asia (including much of the Pacific) and the Americas. The list includes such things as the bilateral splitting of animals in art designs; the use of totemic posts; the placing of eyes and faces on the joints and hands in pictures of the human figure; the widespread *Makara* motif; bird, feline, and serpent cults; the carving of jade and the lore attached to this stone; funerary mounds of earth; masks for the dead; turquoise and feather mosaics; the use of lacquer; striking similarities in pottery techniques and styles; and the making of bark cloth (*tapa*). One of the most remarkable of all these similarities is the use of the so-called "hocker" motif, namely, a figure with arms and legs outstretched in frog fashion—a circum-Pacific art element which has been typical of early China, Malaysia, Melanesia and Polynesia. Its use was, of course, widespread in the Americas.

Covarrubias has done much to dispel the confusion which has grown up concerning pre-Columbian civilization in the New World, and in doing so he has brought to his task his own broad cultural background which happily includes an understanding and appreciation of the cultures of Eastern Asia.

C.N.S.

Brian Harrison, *South-East Asia, a Short History*, Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London, 1954. 268 pages, with illustrations and maps.

With Southeast Asia today arousing increasing interest among students and the general public in both Europe and America, the appearance of this concise history of the area should be most welcome. The author has attempted nothing definitive, nor does he claim to offer anything new. What he has done is to prepare for the general intelligent reader a clear summary of the historical and cultural development of the countries of Southeast Asia on the basis of the works of such authorities as Professor Coedes, which were primarily designed for the specialist. The book is extensive in scope, beginning with a description of the various ethnic groups which first peopled Southeast Asia and ending with an account of the political, economic and social problems which have been bequeathed to the countries of this area as a result of the second World War. To cover so much ground both geographically and historically in so few pages but in such a clear, readable manner is a tribute to Professor Harrison's ability as a scholar and writer.

The first 49 pages of the book are of particular interest, for in this section the author outlines the ethnic background of the area, the early Chinese and Indian influences, and the history of the various Indianized states which appeared. These complicated historical developments have been most effectively summarized in the chronological table on page 39. The two pages of bibliography are somewhat overly weighted in favor of more modern developments, and only four titles are listed in the section devoted to Siam,

C.N.S.

E.H.G. Dobby, *Southeast Asia*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, no date. 415 pages.

This book fills a vital need for students of Southeast Asia. To use the author's own description, it is "a picture of environmental conditions and human adaptations" in this part of the world. It begins with a treatment of the natural landscape of Southeast Asia as a distinct region, then analyzes the natural and cultural landscapes of each country and its social geography, and concludes with a description of the human geography of the area in terms of agriculture, fisheries, and industry and trade. The final chapter discusses the future prospects of the peoples of this region. The book is profusely illustrated with sketches, maps, charts and tables.

The section on Siam, however, is rather short and sketchy, being only a little over 16 pages as compared with 59 pages devoted to Malaya. Much of the statistical data, especially on Thailand, is also considerably out of date.

C.N.S.

Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *Minority Problems in Southeast Asia*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1955, 295 pages.

Of the various minorities in Southeast Asia, the Chinese have attracted the most attention. This problem has already been treated exhaustively and sympathetically by Victor Purcell in *The Chinese in Southeast Asia* (Oxford University Press, 1951; rev. ed., 1952). Accordingly, Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff have devoted only a comparatively small section of their book to this largest of all the minority groups and the one which, from the economic and political standpoints, is undoubtedly the most important. Consequently, we find more space dealing with the Indian minority than any other. This is fortunate for two reasons: first, because this sizeable group has heretofore been treated only in an incidental or fragmentary manner; and secondly, because the authors' discussion of the overseas Indians is told against the backdrop of India's new and at times positive rôle as an independent state in Southeast Asian affairs.

The authors have also made a real contribution by their accounts of the indigenous minorities throughout Southeast Asia—the Eurasians, the Arakanese, the Malays of Southern Thailand and the Ambonese—all of whom have heretofore received inadequate attention.

The chapter with the rather perplexing title "Buddhists vs. Buddhists" is perhaps the most interesting in the book; it is also one of the most useful, for it brings together from a great many miscellaneous and often inaccessible sources the complicated and at times bewildering story of internal developments over the past decade or so in Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, including the activities of such new political groups as the Viet Minh, the Cambodian dissidents, and the Pathet Lao, the problems raised by groups of people from one of these countries residing within the boundaries of another, such as the Vietnamese in Northeast Thailand, the present-day position of the various Thai peoples in Tongking, and finally the appearance of the so-called "Thai Autonomous Area" in southern Yunnan. While this chapter seems to stray somewhat from what we might generally regard as minority problems, the authors have performed a real service by preparing it in such detail without sacrificing clarity.

Finally, the authors take up the problems posed by Christian minorities in some of the Southeast Asian countries, namely, those peoples—some from the indigenous majorities and others from the ethnic minorities—who through conversion to Christianity have in some cases become groups apart. The treatment of this particular minority is both sympathetic and realistic. As the authors point out in their concluding chapter, however, all the minorities in Southeast Asia are in the region to stay, and the problems they have posed can only be resolved if the national majorities and their governments offer them a stake in the countries in which they reside. Any ultimate solution of this kind, however, must be premised not only on time but also, as the authors take pains to emphasize, upon profound psychological adjustments.

C.N.S.

H. Otley Beyer, *The Relation of Tektites to Archaeology*. Paper No. 23, Proceedings of the Fourth Far-Eastern Prehistory Congress, published by the National Research Council of the Philippines, 1955. 45 pages, illustrated.

*Time* magazine, in one of its recent issues (July 9, 1956), devoted a brief article to the unusual subject of tektites in reporting the theories of the American physicist Ralf Stairs concerning the celestial origin of these semitransparent black, brown, or dark-green pieces of natural glass, different from all earthly materials, which have been found in many parts of the world. Professor Beyer of the University of the Philippines discusses these peculiar objects, found principally in Quarternary and Tertiary strata, in terms of the clues they provide in archaeological research. For example, as the tektite-containing deposits of much of Southeast Asia and South China, which are collectively known as *Indomalaysianites*, appear to have been formed in the Middle Pleistocene geological period, the appearance of these pieces of natural glass and their frequent use as artifacts by primitive peoples in this area contribute to dating correctly early human remains. It is also of interest that tektites, because of their peculiar shape and appearance, were later held in awe by many peoples in the Metal Ages, especially in Southeast Asia, who believed they possessed magical powers and used them as charms, amulets, and gems, a practice which still prevails in parts of this area. Professor Beyer has added a lengthy bibliography on the subject of tektites to his scholarly monograph.

C.N.S.

Maurice Collis, *Cortés and Montezuma*, Faber and Faber, London, 1954. 251 pages.

The author of *Siamese White* and a host of other delightful histories and fantasies about Burma, India and China has now wandered far afield, at least geographically, in writing this engaging account of the great Mexican drama of Cortés the Spanish *conquistador* and Montezuma the Aztec king. Yet devotees of Collis will at once recognize in this book his usual facility to grasp the

dramatic elements of history, his ability to interpret the character and motivations of his protagonists, his knack in recreating the scenes in which events took place, and his easy-flowing style and skill as a storyteller. No doubt the strange careers of Cortés and Montezuma and the even stranger association of the two men presented Collis with a great opportunity, for therein were exactly the kinds of personalities and situations he is able to exploit so successfully, whether the locale be Asia or America. Although thus appearing in rather unfamiliar Mexican attire, Maurice Collis is once again at his best.

C.N.S.

D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, Macmillan and Co., London, 1955. 807 pages with appendix.

The assignment of this specific volume for review was as specific and explicit as an editor could make it without risking an affront to the reviewer. In the face of that charge and its acceptance the reviewer feels compelled to begin by ignoring the book assigned and paying respects to another work whose appearance a century earlier calls for some commemorative comment.

Bowring's famous two-volume account of Siam appeared just a century before Hall's work but this coincidence is not in itself adequate justification for its inclusion in this review. A re-reading of Bowring as a commemorative act does, however, prompt certain reflections which tend to overshadow the considerations and judgments more properly belonging to the later volume alone. In spite of this risk the reviewer would pay his respect to Hall by way of a preliminary obeisance to the older work. The full significance of Hall's impressive volume can best be appreciated when the reader recalls that for decades the only work by a Western scholar on Thailand was Bowring. He was not a trained historian and the brevity of his stay in this country militated against its serving as a proper substitute for historical research or wide familiarity with the sources. Despite these limitations, his study remained not only the best general work on Siam in a Western language but it was the only work. Not until Wood's *History of Siam* appeared thirty years ago did any other writer attempt to produce a history of this country. Wood, too, was no trained historian, but he brought to his writing a sympathy and understanding born out of a lifetime of service and residence among the Thai people.

Despite the merits of Wood's work and not because of its deficiencies, his volume never supplanted Bowring. For three-quarters of a century the latter constituted virtually the sole introduction to Siam on the part of most Westerners. A search of American libraries at least during the last third of the 19th and the first quarter of the 20th century would have shown clearly enough that for Americans Siam had become the country of but one book—and

that was Bowring. A re-reading of this work against the background of materials now available may cause some bewilderment, particularly to those who prefer "straight history" rather than the melange of social institutions, culture, history, and geography which constituted Bowring's Siam. Friends of Thailand can be grateful, however, that so many became indebted to Bowring and his sympathy and goodwill for their introduction to and understanding of Siam.

All of this is pretty much of a demonstrable fact and few would, and even fewer can, challenge it. Much more important is the question as to why Bowring had no rival—not even a successor. True, it was long after Gibbon had presented the world with his famous *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* before anyone had the hardihood or the courage to challenge the seemingly definitive quality of his work by offering another interpretation of the period. This is not to suggest that Bowring's Siam was comparable to Gibbon's Rome. Admittedly much of the explanation for the non-appearance of any serious challenge to the primacy of Bowring lies in the fact that there was relatively little interest in Siam or its people among Western readers. Historians were not frightened away from the subject by any towering genius; they simply were not attracted to it.

The dearth of readable and scholarly studies on Siam and its history might tempt one to suggest the old saying that happy is the country which has no history. But any reader of Bowring would know the basic falsity of such an assumption. The materials available and used a century ago made clear that Siam's history was replete with internal struggles and foreign wars. It may not be a very flattering consideration for any Thai nationalist, but the paucity of published materials on this region arose out of a lack of interest in the country and not out of any reverence for the dominating position of Bowring.

This lack becomes all the more interesting in view of the British interest in Malaya and Burma which evoked the scholarly work of such men as Furnivall, Luce and Percell, and the amazing amount of first-class historical materials by French and Dutch scholars for Indochina and Indonesia. Siam remained largely

neglected, save as her territory and interests impinged on the expanding interests and territories of the imperialist Powers. Nor was there much attention to the region as a whole. Not until the shadows of the Pacific War began to fall across Southeast Asia early in 1941 did Western interest in the strategic area find expression in published materials of more than reportorial quality. The war itself and its aftermath sped the process, but the very nature of the interest which prompted the appearance of such works tended to confine them to the contemporary scene.

It is true, of course, that in a number of professional journals with small but impressive lists of subscribers there had been appearing an accumulation of published research by such noted scholars as Coedès. This *Journal* has carried a significant part of this total. These articles have dealt with individual countries, including, of course, Thailand, and they have been regional in character as well. They have ranged from the minutiae of the artifacts exhumed from a grave mound to post-mortems on thousand year old cultures. Important and significant as these have been, few outside a handful of specialists and nationals of the countries concerned have been aware of them, much less familiar with their conclusions. The sheer bulk and the significance of this research have demanded increasingly someone to produce a readable synthesis for the public. As though in response to this need, Hall's *History of South-East Asia* appears just a century after Bowring's *Siam*.

Hall's work is a careful summary of the results of this accumulated scholarship and not so much the presentation of the author's own findings. In scope it is most impressive—almost overwhelming. He marches steadily and without seeming doubt or hesitation from the prehistoric cultures of the region to 1950. The result comes narrowly close to being an encyclopedia rather than a work of history. For many, if not most readers, it will be used as an encyclopedia and an excellent reference work it will be. Save for the first introductory chapter, the work is studded with names and dates. The reader will find an average of five dates for every full page of printed matter with the exception of the first chapter. The

appendix contains some nine hundred names and invaluable lists of monarchs and reigns. All of this constitutes the strength and some might add, the weakness of the book.

Specialists will criticize the handling of their own areas of competence. Nationalist historians will complain of alleged slights to glorious chapters of their own histories. Such reactions would greet any survey as this, but in the reviewer's opinion subsequent revisions of this book will call for few serious modifications of judgments rendered either as to the allocation of space or emphases placed on men and events.

Readers of the *Journal* may be less able to appreciate the worth of this book than the general public, for much of the material already has passed in review before them. The enormity of the task of compiling and evaluating this accumulation will not seem as impressive to those who have been introduced to it gradually as to those who are confronted suddenly with this treasure house.

Some scholars will find surer basis for criticism in the disappointing lack of reference to the research of Southeast Asians. In the bibliography for Thailand out of 37 items listed only two are by Thai scholars; out of the 75 for Burma only four are by Burmese. This fault will be felt most grievously by the specialists. For the general public the fact remains that Hall has done a great service which will be long appreciated.

Frank G. Williston

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