

SECTION V

# **REVIEWS**

*Reminiscences of Old  
Bangkok: Memory and  
Identification of  
Changing Society*

TAKASHI TOMOSUGI

Tokyo: The Institute of Oriental Culture, The University of Tokyo, 1993. Supplement to the Bulletin of Oriental Culture. 254 pp. Index. 40 plates, maps.

With some notable exceptions among the scholars of Thai studies in the related fields of social and historical research (e.g. the work of Richard O'Connor and Rudiger Korff), sociocultural and historical studies of Bangkok (excepting work on slums and the environment) are thin on the ground. In this context Professor Tomosugi's contribution to the study of urbanism should be welcomed. This book follows a very interesting essay on Bangkok published in the author's collection: *Rethinking the Substantive Economy in Southeast Asia* (1991). In that essay (entitled "A Historical Perspective of Urbanism in Bangkok") he proposed that the modernisation of Thai society could be viewed from the standpoint of Karl Polanyi's theory of the transition from the "substantive economy" of traditional societies (which employed a range of meaningful cultural symbols and exchanges) to a "market economy," the exchanges of which are mediated by money transactions, resulting in commodification and the alienation of personality. He proposed that studies of economic history should pay attention to changing symbolism and symbolic representations in order to fully appreciate the transformation of traditional societies. He advanced an interpretation of the changing physical landscape of Bangkok in terms of such a transition—a perspective which demanded further theoretical and documentary elaboration. This reviewer had reservations about his proposition that the historical built environment carried collective urban "memories" into the present, thus expressing continuities in perceptions of the city; nev-

ertheless the author's approach was attractive in the sense that it represented one of the few attempts in recent years to approach the urban history of Bangkok from a sociocultural perspective which incorporated an appreciation of physical change and the built environment. It was offering the possibility of a more detailed and textured view of the development of Bangkok's socioecological setting than ever attempted by Marxist-inspired scholars of Thai urbanisation, a group which has tended to dominate in the academic literature dealing with Bangkok's urbanisation.

This book is based on research conducted in Thailand over some three years in the National Archives of Thailand, in the homes of old residents of the Sao Ching Cha, Banglamphu and Ban Mo districts of inner Bangkok, and observations along the trok, sois, streets and canals of old Bangkok. The book is divided into three parts, dealing respectively with the changing urban landscape, a commentary on translated extracts from archival documents pertaining to life in Bangkok during the reigns of Rama V and VI (concentrating on the period 1890 to 1916) and a collection of family histories derived from interviews with elderly residents of Bangkok. The author proposes that all sources dealt with in these sections can be treated as "documents" for reconstructing the "lost world" of Bangkok as well as perceiving trends of transformation in the city over the past hundred years.

The introduction makes a claim for a methodological innovation in proposing that a "mosaic view" helps to reconstruct the urban past of Bangkok. There seems to be a contradiction in the author's claims: first, that the past had impressed itself upon the collective memories of inhabitants and landscapes of urban areas (thus ensuring persistence), and yet also that both society and the urban landscape had been radically transformed through the process of development. A claim is being made for the potency of social memory in the context of modernisation, largely through the argument that historical residues in the built environment serve a function in the present day world. While intrinsically

appealing, the frequent invocations of links between society and the built environment in this book are never convincingly carried through by the author, despite a wealth of interesting information he has unearthed about early Bangkok from a variety of generally untapped Thai primary and secondary evidence. The writers who have been influential in the development of the author's ideas about memory are recorded in the notes as including Yi Fu Tuan, the geographer who specialized in phenomenological studies of environmental perception, Christian Norberg Schulz, whose well-known *Genius Loci* bridged a gap between architectural theorists and landscape planners, and the historian Eric Hobsbawm, whose collection *The Invention of Tradition* formed a strong contribution to cultural research on the history of modernization. In contrast to the latter's emphasis on the state's role in the reconstruction of identity, Tomosugi emphasizes the connection between "common memory" and localities, suggesting that research founded on such a theme would further develop historical and anthropological studies. It is interesting, however, that while he cites work on memory and "place," he does not address the important works closest to his focus on the theme of the built environment, the past and cultural significance. Works of immediate relevance to a study of the built fabric of the city and social memory include Kevin Lynch's *What Time is This Place?*, Lowenthal's *The Past is a Foreign Country*, and Stanford Anderson's *On Streets*.

In addition to his thematic emphasis on common memories, Professor Tomosugi advances the view that the urban dwellers themselves should be viewed as major agents in the process of historical transformation, however minor their individual actions may seem through the documents and interview transcriptions. Nobody schooled in historical or anthropological technique would really doubt the importance of this basic interpretative assumption, yet the author seems to think this is a revolutionary step. The claims to innovation concerning oral history method are true enough with respect to Bangkok, which

has been subject to too many top-down historical treatments, but it certainly is not true in relation to urban research in other countries, even Asian and South-east Asian urban histories. At the same time, his voluntarist model stressing individual consciousness and experience is rather rigidly framed in a structural view of Thailand's transformation through the operations of market capitalism, a process which entails class formation, secularisation, and personal alienation arising from urban growth and the money economy. The relationship between the agency of historical actors and the process of economic change is never satisfactorily explicated in this book, despite the ambitious introduction. One also wonders why no mention is made of Sharp and Hanks's pioneering oral history of Bang Chan, the "village" whose transformation told us so much about the effects of modernisation and urbanisation in Thailand.

In any event, the first section is set up with reference to the function of memory in society and the significance of locality and "genius loci." Following a survey of the physical evolution of Rattanakosin Island from its foundation as Krung Thep Maha Nakhon, a story familiar through existing historical surveys (in particular the articles and books of Larry Sternstein), the author focuses on two of the earliest roads of the city—Fuang Nakhon and Bamrung Muang—for study. This follows his view that "the Road is an important key factor for the interpretation of the landscapes in old Bangkok" (p. 26). While this is probably self-evident to anyone aware of the gradual transformation of the city from a canal-based to a road-based system, the author stresses that the ecology of the street in fact encapsulates much about the nature of change which was experienced in the city. We are thus led to anticipate some important interpretations of these landscapes. The analysis begins with a study of data derived from Bangkok's first postal roll of 1883 (a source used before by Larry Sternstein and Yoneo Ishii). The data revealed, perhaps not surprisingly, that the streets were largely given to trading functions. Perhaps surprising is that the Chinese, who

were such a strong force in the economic life of the city, made up less than half of the householders listed as living along Fuang Nakhon Road, although the Chinese did outnumber Thai householders along Bamrung Muang by almost two to one. The distinction in housing preference between the Thai, who lived in wooden or thatched structures, and the Chinese, who dwelt in masonry shophouses, is clearly evident in his findings. Interestingly, not much emphasis is placed on the physical definition of the road by the shophouses, wooden structures often being arranged, by contrast to the linear arrangement of the *teuk thaew*, in clusters and compounds. This would have been made clear if some of the available maps had been used as evidence of the changing ecology. Given the author's emphasis on the street motif of the new urbanism of Bangkok, the question might have been asked, how did the streets affect the distribution of public and private space and its uses? This is a difficult question to answer, given the nature of the available historical sources, but nevertheless they are valid points of enquiry deriving from the author's empirical focus. With reference to the use of the 1883 Post Office Directory, it would have been useful had the author cross-tabulated the occupation of the householder with the type of structure to further reinforce the distinctions in the functional ecology of these roads. In any case, Professor Tomosugi claims that the mixture of housing types represents a shift from substantive to market economy by virtue of the apparent contrasts between the masonry shophouses (representing modern urban society) and the houses of thatch (representing a rural dimension). Since there is no longitudinal study undertaken here, the claim for a "trend" remains unsubstantiated. Observers such as Ernest Young in the late nineteenth century affirmed the very public and outdoor nature of life among Bangkok's poor inhabitants who dwelt in these impermanent houses of thatch; in addition, given the nature of the climate and the low population densities prevailing in this "city in a garden" (in the words of one contemporary), modes of accommodation such as these seem highly adaptable and de-

sirable. The persistence of *trok* neighbourhoods in the inner city attest to the persistence of such settlements which thrived in the interstices between the new streets and roads. Some attention to the phenomenon of the compound house in Bangkok, suggestive of social and economic relations, would have been useful.

Much of what seems to have constituted Bangkok's nineteenth and early twentieth century urbanism can be characterised as a pattern of coexistence among different groups and settlements. Professor Tomosugi's portrayal of the streetscapes of Fuang Nakhon Road from Banglamphu in the north to Ban Mo in the south, and along Bamrung Muang from Khlong Lod to the Ong Ang Canal in the east, succeeds in showing the variety of ethnic groups that settled in the city (particularly the Thai Muslims, the Mon and the Vietnamese), and the particular craft or trading bases which sustained these communities in the life of the city. Using a wide range of Thai language sources, he is able to reconstruct something of the appearance and range of activities once supported in these areas. But there seems to be less of a fit between the author's admittedly interesting descriptive observations and the major themes that inform the work. Moreover, those historical facts that are interesting, such as the constructions of institutions by local nobles in the vicinities of their palaces (Prince Narathip Praphan, for example), are not elaborated on to explain the nature of social or power relations within Bangkok society at the local level of the *yarn* (inner Bangkok's districts). Professor Tomosugi's commitment to structural economic explanations tends in the end to marginalise possibly useful fragments of information about land and building uses, while at the same time the physical fragments and residues that he claims are so significant to social memory tend to be simply described, with little connection made between the physical artefact and its present social or cultural significance. One is compelled to ask "so what?" of statements about some areas (such as Tanao Road) which are physically relatively well preserved. Interestingly, the very persistence of some, al-

though not most, of the *yarn* raises questions about their role in the modern city and the nature of the wider urban system.

The second part of the book is a commentary on translated extracts from archival documents dealing with various events in Bangkok. They comprise reports on land disputes, land sales, accidents, crimes and misdemeanours. The commentary attempts to link the various incidents through the theme of economic and social change in the city; hence, various land disputes that are represented in the documents are interpreted as showing the consequences of modernisation through the introduction of private property (through land titles) by King Rama V. Indeed, disputes over property could destroy ties between family members: the evidence thus apparently confirms the author's basic theme that the market economy destroyed a traditional social order. Similarly the crimes reported in police documentation—*theft, murder, assault and arson*—are claimed as suggestive of the socially deviant behaviour consequent on modernity, or the inability of groups to adapt to a new society which was based on money relations. The arguments in this section are quite weak, based as they are on single cases which also ignore counterfactual points: that, for example, crime outside Bangkok was regarded as a major problem at this time by authorities, and that phenomena such as gambling and debt in Thailand were not new. In the broadest sense we can acknowledge the fact that this documentation is itself a phenomenon derived from a newly created bureaucracy in the Western mould, confirming the idea that the incidents reflect a changing society; yet to overplay their representativeness of social relations in Bangkok society would be unwise. Like such documentation of regulatory agencies anywhere, they intervene in, and reveal, segments of life: crisis points and conflicts. Nevertheless the very existence of these documents is claimed as proof that society was fragmenting in the city. It is interesting that a high proportion of the people involved in the reported incidents are Chinese immigrants, a group that increased its presence in Bangkok markedly during the reigns of Rama V

and VI and fulfilled a multitude of functions in the growing city, from trading to gardening and labouring. Curiously, the author chooses to treat the Chinese as victims of urbanisation and modernisation as if they were the indigenous urban population of Thailand, rather than an immigrant group (almost exclusively male) of entrepreneurs and risk-takers adapting to a new environment. Reports of incidents of suicide and drug addiction in nineteenth and early twentieth century Bangkok should not really surprise us, but Professor Tomosugi seizes upon individual incidents with Durkheimian certitude to affirm the significance of alienation in a modernising urban environment. This is not to say that the incidents in themselves are not interesting, but the conclusions are largely overstated in relation to the evidence. In some cases, alternative interpretations can be proposed. For example, the author uses a police report about rumours among traders in the Sao Ching Cha area regarding an impending fire (reportedly a prediction by a local astrologer) to indicate the widespread fear of fire in the modern city: thus fear of property destruction. The incident could as easily be used to highlight the persistence of belief in prediction and supernatural agency in the communities of the city. Along the way, the link between the streets and the society in the discussion becomes quite lost in the generalisations about social processes.

The third section offers further interpretation of another type of document revealing the "lost world" of Bangkok. It is based upon interviews with residents or former residents of the author's chosen streets and areas in the city. As noted earlier, the foundation of this section is the conviction that the families represented in these testimonies played an active shaping role in the development of local social and economic life and, more broadly, of the urbanism of Bangkok. The testimonies reveal the lineages of families who have retained property in inner Bangkok, outlining the variety of careers and fortunes of the early middle class. By this term is meant those who worked in government service, the professions or trade. The stories tell of pa-

tronage and persistence among the founders of the families. For example, we read of an interviewee's father, born in the provinces, who started life in Bangkok at Thepsarin Temple School, graduating to Sirirat Medical School with the aid of a scholarship, later enjoying the patronage of a prince in obtaining his first position as private physician. Following dismissal from his post during the civil service cut-backs of Rama VII, he established a pharmacy in Tanao Road (Banglamphu district) that became a thriving business. The head of this family encouraged his five children, particularly his three sons, to further their education overseas in professional fields. Another story tells of a government official who suffered the same fate as the former interviewee, but succeeded in much the same manner, by patenting an ointment. His prosperity was such that he could purchase a house which laid the foundation of the family's future prosperity.

In summing up this section, the author advances three main points characterising the varied experiences of his interviewees. First is the apparent significance of what he defines as the "social division of labour" in Bangkok, based at first on ethnic distinctions, occupational identities and districts. This formerly efficient arrangement of complementary activities in the precapitalist city was transformed as the market economy evolved in Bangkok. He argues that the general decline of ethnic distinctions over time (the "Thaification" of the populace), made possible by the ethnically tolerant nature of Thai society, worked to the advantage of the emerging market economy in its creation of new class-based economic groupings. Second, all the interviewees worked for their living and valued educational advancement for their children. Third, he points to the significance of the apparently new consciousness of private property, part of a new set of social values accompanying the emergence of the market society in Bangkok. The material in this third section should have functioned as the key to the book's main argument about the cultural significance of memory in the changing city. But unfortunately the section ends lamely in a claim, not borne out

in the testimonies, that inhering in such memories is an alternative set of values to the current consumer ideology of Bangkok's urban dwellers, represented in the mass society of the burgeoning suburbs. While admittedly some of the testimonies point to sites and areas in the localities which were of importance to people, they by no means show that the urban streets and surrounding area of the author's focus were environments which nourished close-knit communities or neighbourhood systems. There are fragments, particularly in the first section of the book, of a possible account of the dissolution and fragmentation of Bangkok's old *yarn*, but the material is certainly not sufficient to sustain a claim that a rich and meaningful urban life in the present can be based on past experiences and values of old inhabitants. After all, a large number of the interviewees chose to desert the inner city streets for the new suburbs. And if the old residents lamented the loss of their old neighbourhoods, it is certainly not recorded with any great emphasis in the book, nor is the lived "texture" of that "lost world" outlined in any detail.

Professor Tomosugi has offered his own unique interpretation of a changing city in terms of the changes inscribed on its landscape, expressed in documents and in testimonies of old residents. More integration of the constituent sections of the book, I think, would have made his argument more convincing. As it stands the book provides the reader with a wealth of information, tied together by some rather idiosyncratic arguments about cultural persistence. The early stress on the significance of the urban dwellers' consciousness and human agency is all but lost in the stress upon the *Weltanschauung* of the thrust to modernisation in the city. The interview testimonies, which offered the most potential for reconstructing something of the texture of life in the neighbourhoods of old Bangkok, do not carry out this function as they perhaps might have.

A lot of effort has gone into the research for this book, and the author has certainly opened some perspectives for those of us interested in understanding Bangkok's urbanism and system of lo-

cales. It is, then, disappointing that more effort was not placed on presentation, structure, and above all, proof-reading and translation from the original Japanese. The English expression in the text is poor in the extreme, and detracts considerably from the interesting themes of the book. It seems that the volume was produced in haste, which is a pity, given the efforts of the author and the nature of the topic. Professor Tomosugi's able scholarship has been well demonstrated in his earlier work on Central Thai village economy and society, and well-focused case study work on local economic systems in the Asian region. With more care and attention, this volume could have made a stronger contribution to methodological and substantive work on the study of Bangkok.

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*Pour la plus grande  
Gloire de Dieu*

MORGAN SPORTÈS

Paris: Seuil, 1993. 638 pp.

Historical novels about the French involvement in Siam from 1685–88 are apparently in vogue. Following your reviewer's *The Siam Embassy to the Sun King* (Bangkok, 1990) and the recent Phaulkon series by Aylwen from London, Morgan Sportès, in what apparently is his eighth novel, has produced a blockbuster that seems to start in 1687, but which has in fact several flashbacks prior to this date, and goes on to the dénouement, the pal-

ace revolution of 1688 and its aftermath. The form also follows what is purported to be a hitherto unpublished English translation of a personal memoir from Kosa Pan to King Narai: here the novel is introduced as a previously unpublished text stumbled upon in the archives of the Missions Etrangères in Paris, and edited by one "Elihu Yale PHD, Yale University, mai 1992." A pity about that capital H, which rather gives the game away, though Elihu Yale (1648–1721) was a real person indeed, Governor of the East India Company fort at Madras at one time, who gave his books to the university that bears his name and was founded in 1701. Who is supposed to have written this text is not investigated; the book starts with the dateline Amsterdam, 8 July 1712 and is completed "in exile, Amsterdam, 8 October 1714," thus allowing the death of Tachard in Bengal in 1712 to be recorded.

This novel is scrupulously researched, with many sourced quotations being incorporated in the text ("as Father Marcel le Blanc was to write later ..."). The bibliography is astonishingly detailed, listing ten works of contemporary Jesuits, ten of the Foreign Missionary fathers, thirteen by French officers involved in the muddle (and of which ten are manuscript sources), nine by officials of the French Indies Company, nine by the French diplomats to Siam, five by "free thinkers," four texts of Phaulkon himself, six Siamese sources, and seven by assorted Englishmen, Dutchmen, Portuguese and Persians. Details too which appear romantically or even erotically imagined, like the trials and tribulations of the Missionary Pocquet (here spelt more phonetically) when imprisoned, have a solid base in fact: in the case of Pocquet in Robert Challe's *Journal d'un voyage fait aux Indes Orientales 1690–1691*, listed among the works of "free thinkers."

Sportès divides his work into five "acts", which are rather elastic divisions as the tale moves backwards and forwards within each, and refers to the whole as a tragedy which, for the French at least, it was. But the tragedy of the whole is far from tragic in its parts, and indeed the comic aspects become almost farcical, as when the huge frame of General

Desfarges, jumping up from his seat in protest in front of the ambassadors, bangs into the traverse beams of the cabin, or when the ambassadors themselves, both suffering from the ill-defined "Siamese sickness," are perched on their "chaises percées," evacuating their bowels while receiving visitors, pudenda barely concealed by a coverlet. All this is good fun, but the emphasis on the ribbons and feathers of the French musketeers, the almost comic stupidity of Desfarges (not far from the truth), the grovelling idolatry of Tachard for Phaulkon (barely convincing; surely someone as wily could not debase himself to such idiotic positions, even if he is historically recorded as conveying Phaulkon's orders to his cooks) make one wonder how far this can be considered a swashbuckling thriller or a realistic reconstruction.

The language does not always help in deciding. It veers uncomfortably between the imperfect of the subjunctive to modern injurious slang, with more emphasis in the company of La Loubère and Céberet on the former, and for the soldierly the latter. But some touches are consistent: "le 4 octobre, que Dieu fit ...." The novel, perhaps to its credit, concentrates more in its latter part on the military than the diplomats; with the departure of La Loubère and Tachard by January 1688, Desfarges was on his own to cope with the diplomatic niceties, and was singularly ill-prepared intellectually for this. His abandonment of his sons as hostages to Petracha, and their subsequent disclaimer of their father in Martinique, after his death at sea, is well brought out. Whether all the concentration on "going up" or "coming down" the Chao Phraya, usually with the verbs in italics, is really justified is another matter. For some, the novel could be considered to slide towards verbal ribaldry, but as it focuses on the covetous factor Véret and the soldiers in the end, this has some justification.

As a novel, does it work? From the point of view of the plot, there is no doubt that it does, truth being stranger than fiction and all that. It would all make a marvellous film, and the feminine element is not lacking: the plight (and ancestry) of Madam Constance and

her son George, the Princess Queen Yothathep (here paired by a Yothatip, sister of the king, as opposed to his daughter), the Christian St Cyr girls, orphans in the suite of Mme Constance (in the model of Mme de Maintenon), and of course the infinite number of semi-naked slave girls, many provided with the express purpose of debauching the French ambassadorial party and troops. The endless intrigues of the Jesuits, on whom the narrator justly puts most of the blame for the imbroglio, are splendidly illustrated, and the Missionaries Laneau and de Lionne are not exempt (the former, as Bishop of Metellopolis, casuistically decides it would be a mortal sin not to hand Mme Constance over to Petracha after she sought refuge in the French fort at Bangkok—as a newly entitled countess of the court of France, she had some reason for seeking French protection—as one individual might save "thousands of Christians" from persecution, and so ignoring the fact there were probably not a thousand Christians in the entire kingdom in spite of his two decades of ministry). Sportès is probably right to say that the flood of Jesuitical publications about Siam and its revolution after the collapse of the conversion dream was prompted simply to put the participants and Phaulkon in the best possible light; certainly whatever a Jesuit wrote about Phaulkon has to be treated with the greatest caution. It is fashionable to lament the lack of Siamese archives of the period, presumably almost entirely destroyed in the Burmese invasion of Ayudhya in 1767, but the concept of archives is recent in Thailand, and palace intriguers are unlikely to have written each other lengthy missives. Phaulkon and his allies had to, though, as their support was ultimately in distant Versailles.

Blame then for the soutanes, blame for the "befeathered" choleric poetaster La Loubère, blame for the dishonourable numskull Desfarges and most of his military entourage, blame also squarely placed on Louis XIV, here nearly always presented as a variant on "Louis la Fistule" (referring to his medical problems with his fistula), and often referring to classical representations of him, as with "Louis

la Fistule en Jupiter-à-la-foudre." So much for His Most Christian Majesty, "the foul tyrant who rules over an enslaved France."

It should not be thought the author has merely produced a desk study from a centrally heated flat in Paris. His details about Siam of the period mostly appear quite authentic, even down to having one of the French officers varnish his teeth black so that he could embrace his thus-willing mistress, who considered only animals had white teeth (this information, correct at the time, is repeated). There are moments though when knowledgeable readers' imaginations are stretched: the underground mortuary of the Missionaries right next to the Chao Phraya in Ayudhya sheltering the fresh corpse of a son of Phaulkon, the dashing on horseback through the jungles of ricefields between Lopburi and the river. Here Sportès borrows from Gothick novels and Dumas. But such lapses from verisimilitude are rare. His explanations of the apparently inexplicable are also plausible. For centuries people have wondered why Phaulkon went to the palace in Lopburi for the last time when he knew full well he was going to his death and that he would be treated without mercy. The action is presented here as a theatrical gesture; knowing that his last card had been played, he could only put a good front on things. Since he had risen to power by effrontery and guile, so he went to die by putting on a show: he would obey the call of the King his Master.

The novel is then credible and certainly readable. Whether readers who know nothing of the background are entirely convinced is another matter (one known to your reviewer could not even believe Siam had a Greek as a chief minister at the time). But it is much more than a romantic travesty and in its own way throws up plausible interpretations of certain aspects of the French imbroglio in seventeenth century Siam which remain obscure to this day.

MICHAEL SMITHIES

*Bua Yai  
Thailand*

*La civilisation de port-  
entrepôts du sud Kedah  
(Malaysia) Ve–XIVe siècle*

MICHEL JACQ-  
HERGOUALC'H

Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992. 355 pp. ill.

The prolific Jacq-Hergoualc'h has produced another weighty volume with Harmattan in 1992, on a totally different subject from Céberet and seventeenth century Siam,<sup>1</sup> and returning to one of his original specializations of archaeology. This detailed work, covering some forty sites in the former Province Wellesley, takes a fresh look at the work of Quarich Wales and Alistair Lamb, and comes to some interesting if controversial conclusions.

Most of the book, published with the assistance of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is taken up with a methodical reexamination of the known archaeological sites and in some cases with their reconstruction. The second part details the archaeological discoveries, covering in turn inscriptions, sculpture, imported ceramics, pottery, Middle Eastern glassware, and beadware. He draws attention to the importance of a further investigation of ceramic shards, and his detailed work on the imported glassware fragments, following Lamb's lead, opens new vistas rarely covered in mainland Southeast Asian archaeology.

His conclusions relate in part to the changing coastline, and the importance of taking into account geomorphological change. But what goes against many accepted beliefs is less the function of the temples than the persons who built them. He considers them to be shrines built by traders of Indian origin to commemorate their good fortune and to seek divine favours. Although built with local labour, they were not, in his view, shrines of the local populace.

This raises the vexed problem of who the local populace was and whom they worshipped. According to Jacq-Hergoualc'h, they probably comprised some Chinese, most likely Confucian, and Malays. And the religion of the

Malays? He avoids the problem, though notes that the "conversion of the local population to Islam" took place from the fourteenth century. Ibn Batuta's account of his journey of 1345–6 indicates the ruler of the Malay peninsula was an infidel and the *Negarakertagama* of 1365 says the peninsula was a dependency of Srivichaya. Conventional wisdom has it that Indian traders certainly brought both Buddhism and Hinduism to Southeast Asia at an early date (Java can already be dated from the fifth century), and the local populations, or rather their chiefs, saw the advantages of both in their glorification of kingship and assimilation of the ruler to either the gods or to a bodhisattva, and readily absorbed the new and prestigious religions.

One other conclusion drawn by the author is that the temples examined combined the architecture of India in their foundations with traditional wooden Malay superstructures. Here again a comparison with Java throws some light. The superstructure of Candi Sambisari was clearly wooden, and recent excavations at Kraton Ratu Boko in Central Java also reveal shrines with a stone base and wooden superstructure. Dumarçay's discussion of wooden temples of the eighth and ninth centuries with masonry bases in *The Temples of Java* (1986) is relevant here. This form is only "Malay" in the broadest of ethnic interpretations, and indeed, given the considerable Javanese extension throughout the area, may be held more Javanese than Malay; the Javanese temples are also certainly more ancient than most of the sites investigated in Malaya.

These points aside, Jacq-Hergoualc'h has produced an extremely detailed study of these sites, and one which will be of considerable interest to scholars of early Southeast Asian history.

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\*Ed. Note: *L'Europe et le Siam du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle: Apports culturels* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993) reviewed in the *Journal of the Siam Society* 81(1), by Michael Smithies.

*Un jésuite à la Cour de Siam*

RAPHAËL  
VONGSURAVATANA

Paris: France-Empire, 1992. 330 pp.  
FF. 120.

Given the less than flattering press Guy Tachard has received in 1992, with the texts of Van der Cruyse and Jacq-Hergoualc'h underlining the key and in many ways fatal role he played in the events leading up to the deaths of King Narai and Phaulkon and the eclipse of French pretensions in Siam, it was inevitable that someone would try to come to his rescue and redress the balance. The young Raphaël Vongsuravatana has done this in his published master's thesis, which comes with a preface from Jean Meyer of the Sorbonne, who maintains that Tachard has been until now "a rather imprecise silhouette." Hardly, one would have thought, given the wealth of information about him, reinforced by the publications which appeared earlier in the same year as this book.

Vongsuravatana has produced a full-length life of this wily Jesuit, using unpublished archival sources as well as the usual texts. His book comes with a plethora of supportive material: bibliography, annexes, a chronology (somewhat inflated: why mention the advent of shogun Ieyasu in 1598 or the Sino-Russian Treaty of Nerchinsk of 1689?), a geographic and cultural lexis, and a seventy-eight page "dictionary of personalities," but alas no index (so it is just bad luck if the reader cannot remember at p. 80 that Verjus was the procurer general of the Jesuit missions). Even this fervent supporter of Tachard and his cause admits to finding blanks in his career; we still know very little about what he was doing in Central America from 1680 to 1684, and the last two years of his life, from 1710–1712 at Chandernagor, remain totally blank.

The periods of Tachard's life which are much less well known, that is the eleven years from his departure from Siam in 1688 to his reception as ambas-

sador of Louis XIV by Petracha at Ayudhya in 1699 (including his first stay in Pondichéry, his time as a prisoner of the Dutch in Middelburg, his visits to Goa, Chandernagor and Mergui), and again the years from his return to Versailles in 1700 through his second stay in Pondichéry to 1710, are admirably filled in by Vongsuravatana. He also draws attention to largely overlooked items, like the publication in 1687 and 1689 of the Latin–French and French–Latin dictionaries (actually composite works, in which Tachard took part some years earlier) "for the use of the Duke of Burgundy," that is, the Dauphin's eldest son, clearly taking advantage of the fame of the Jesuit recently returned from Siam and of the success of the published accounts of his first and second missions.

Yet our young researcher cannot avoid phrases like "intransigent Jesuit," "intriguer," "obstinate attachment to his mission," "the opportunism of Tachard," "furious," "delirious imagination," "the intense extra-missionary activity of the Jesuit father," his "independence" and his "authoritativeness." He goes too far in maintaining Tachard was the "hero" of Siamese history of the seventeenth century and in shifting blame for the French fiasco onto Vêret "the evil genius of the play, a sort of ambitious Iago wanting to bring about the downfall of Othello–Phaulkon." If anyone brought about the downfall of Phaulkon, it was Phaulkon himself, not totally blind to his exposed position which he tried to maintain with 600 soldiers from the King of France, but not sufficiently attentive to the hatred and envy that goes to those in power, especially when they come from another culture. Vongsuravatana blames Vachet for dangling the idea of the conversion of Narai before de la Chaise (here "Chaize": we also have throughout "Bancoq", which is a little precious), and then appears to praise Tachard for doing precisely the same thing "in a fine universalist vision" to the Pope in Rome in 1688.

For all the whitewash, one remains unconvinced that "these events [of the French withdrawal in 1688] show at least the pertinent judgment of Father Tachard

in Siamese affairs." For this extraordinary statement, two arguments are advanced. Tachard foresaw the complications that would arise from the publication of the religious treaty between Phaulkon and Chaumont of 1685 (it was in fact neither published nor implemented); and he was correct in writing to de la Chaise that he was worried by the poor relations between the French and Phaulkon. Poor relations on the part of whom? Everyone except himself, possibly Paumard, who sometimes acted as Phaulkon's secretary, and the idiotic Desfarges.

There are times when the author stretches his historical "facts" a little too far. On pp. 64–65, Vongsuravatana claims Chaumont resigned himself to playing second fiddle to Tachard and recognized the qualities of Tachard. This is quoting from Chaumont out of context. Chaumont simply agreed that Tachard should be the person to go to France and seek the twelve Jesuits Phaulkon asked Father Fontenay to send. Fontenay correctly informed Chaumont, and told him he was proposing to send Tachard which Chaumont logically approved. This is not at all the same as saying that Chaumont abandoned his ambassadorial prerogatives; it is also going too far to say that Siamese affairs from then on were in the hands of Tachard. Tachard was certainly a key player in the game, and made sure he was involved, but he was by no means master of the situation. Phaulkon used Tachard at this point because Choisy, with whom he had done his best to ingratiate himself, was taking a religious retreat prior to his ordination and was not available to interpret from Portuguese via Italian into French for the minister.

There are other moments when Vongsuravatana distorts the facts, as in saying Phaulkon made much of the astronomical session at Thalay Chubson (here Talée Cubson, which is better than Tachard's own "Thlee Poussonne") with Narai and the Jesuits; what proof do we have that Phaulkon "fait une large publicité" about this, apart from mentioning it in a letter to de la Chaise, Louis XIV's confessor, which Tachard quoted in full in his published account? It is

only partly true that the scene was one of the most celebrated images of the embassy, many times reproduced. In the first place, properly speaking, it had nothing to do with the embassy, since the Jesuits were travelling to China and were simply showing off their skills, as they had already done at the Cape and tried to in Batavia. The most famous image is undoubtedly the print showing the handing over of the letter to King Narai, in which Tachard had no part, and which did not appear in Tachard's own account, whereas the observatory scene did.

The account of Tachard's atrocious behaviour in the second embassy is almost naive; Tachard's words "were harsh, but the missionary was beside himself. He had good reason to be." Reason to dispute the authority of the envoy extraordinary of his king? It is true that Tachard had secret instructions, but they did not go so far as to authorize him insolence to La Loubère and Céberet and total submission to the will of Phaulkon.

Where Tachard's intriguing could be seen to be to his personal advantage, Vongsuravatana is careful to overlook it. A clear example of this is Tachard's proposal of a secret article in a new draft treaty between France and Siam whereby "in the event of the death or absence of the person at present occupying the position of chief minister, the king of Siam agrees to replace him by a Frenchman or by such other person proposed by His Most Christian Majesty so that the mutual union of the two kings could not be altered in the future by those who might occupy this position." Who might such a person be in the context of 1688? The very person who suggested the article, of course. Is this not an example of a departure from all sense of perspective even to suggest a clause? Carrying on with Fénelon's analogy, what would Louis XIV have thought of King Narai demanding that his minister of external affairs be a Siamese in view of the cordial relations between the two countries? Whatever one might think of Phaulkon, he rose to the position he held by his own abilities, not by the support of any external power.



Tachard's lack of perspective and even good sense is perhaps most clearly seen in his third voyage to Siam, which took ten years to get off the ground. He was prepared to overlook the treatment of the French missionaries and the murder of Phaulkon in an attempt to effect a reconciliation between France and Siam. He was ten years behind the times and represented no one but himself. What he hoped to achieve in real terms is hard to imagine; his obstinacy prevailed, he was coldly received—he was part of a past best forgotten, and represented a power which was perceived as being hardly one at all after the Dutch seizure of Pondichéry. Vongsuravatana mentions Tachard saw Madam Phaulkon when in Ayudhya in January and early February 1691, but not the circumstances: she was still a slave in the royal kitchens, whom he consoled with some money.

Almost every person Tachard had dealings with in Asia came to dislike him, often with great intensity; even the neutral Choisy notes Tachard got the benefit of a nice crucifix destined for him by Tachard taking over his translating duties for Phaulkon. La Loubère and Céberet could not in the end bring themselves to speak to him and the saga of La Loubère's return to France in the same ship as Tachard is well known. The French missionaries in Ayudhya were deeply suspicious of him (two, Vachet and Lionne, could not bear him), and with cause; Tachard was indirectly responsible for the ruin of their work of twenty-six years and their imprisonment. Kosa Pan had every reason to dislike him; for usurping his position as ambassador in France and, as Phra Klang to Petracha, for making unreasonable territorial demands and for his ambassadorial pretensions (Kosa Pan would have been even less forthcoming if he knew Louis XIV's letter carried by Tachard was destined for Narai and had not been altered). Kosa Pan is supposed to have said of Tachard to a missionary "What sort of man is he? Who can trust him?" Seignelay's successor, Pontchartrain, would have nothing to do with Tachard's Siamese proposals. Forbin detested Tachard, suspecting him of causing his unwilling detention in Siam to avoid his

views on the lack of importance and wealth in the country being known in Versailles. Martin's successor at Pondichéry, Hébert, was soon in conflict with Tachard and was probably the cause of Tachard's departure for his final resting place of Chandernagor.

Tachard appears to have had a persecution complex. He accused Vachet of opening his mail during the return from his first journey to Siam, La Loubère of cutting a hole in the wall separating their cabins and spying on him on the return from his second journey, and on his return from Ayudhya on his third journey overland he thought he had been poisoned. This and all the detestation to which he was subject do not indicate a rational or loveable man.

Who then supported Tachard? In Siam, Phaulkon, for what he could get through him and through de la Chaise. At Versailles, de la Chaise himself, probably the most powerful Jesuit in France, inevitably supported someone from his order with hegemonistic views. And at Pondichéry, that man of good sense Francis Martin, appeared to support him. But did he? The testimony of Robert Challe, dismissed by Meyer here as a demi-unbeliever, is considered "the fruit of an excessive imagination." But Jesuits apart (and Vongsuravatana was trained by them and apparently conducts research at the Catholic Institute in Paris), Challe's *Journal d'un voyage fait aux Indes orientales 1690–1691* is generally considered a model of balance and good sense. Challe clearly admired Martin enormously, and would not have included without foundation his extremely long entry of 24 January 1691, with its extensive record of Francis Martin's views, in which the role of the Jesuits in the Indies is mercilessly castigated. Tachard is specifically mentioned as owing 450,000 *livres* to the Company and of smuggling precious stones. Martin, through Challe's pen, praises the non-Jesuit missionaries, says Tachard is staying on in Pondichéry for reasons he does not understand, especially as "the Jesuits are hated here like the very devil" but respected if only because everyone is afraid of them. Vongsuravatana says Tachard needed money to run his mission and Martin

included Tachard in all discussions relating to the future of the entrepot. Was this through prudence, fear or friendship? Vongsuravatana would have us believe the last, Challe would probably opt for the first.

In spite of all the whitewash, the image of Tachard remains one of an intriguer and even of a liar. One cannot seriously take his words at face value when he writes in the record of his first voyage to Siam on being told he was to return to France to bring more Jesuits to Siam, "It grieved me to the heart then to see myself for a long time removed to so great a distance from China, which I had longed after for so many years" (the 1688 English translation of Tachard, from which this is extracted, curiously omitted the phrase which follows in the original French "mais il fallut obéir," "but one had to obey"). In the first place, his interest in China is nowhere manifest (though he might have seen himself in a position of power as a successor to Ricci and Verbiest), and secondly it was he himself who appears to have orchestrated Phaulkon's request for more Jesuits. Vongsuravatana though takes his words at face value: "he was enveloped in a strong feeling of deception" he writes, at not continuing to China.

It is irritating to read in almost every other reference to Phaulkon the phrase "le favori grec." Apart from the casuistic argument that Greece did not exist as a sovereign state at this period, and Cephalonia was in any case Venetian at the time of Phaulkon's birth, Phaulkon did not vaunt his Greek ancestry, with cause, since it was probably humble. But "the Greek favourite" implies Phaulkon's relations with Narai were the same as those between Qianlong and Heshen, which no one has yet suggested.

Vongsuravatana goes into great detail over the problems of the oath to the apostolic vicars and the question of Catholic ritual in China, but not everything about Tachard's own movements is explained. Why, for example, was he in Saumur when news came of Narai's death? How was it possible to overlook so readily the death of Phaulkon who had so befriended him (even Vongsuravatana admits this was too speedily done)?

In conclusion, Vongsuravatana admits to Tachard's authoritarianism, and his occasionally shocking rudeness, praises his determination, his sometimes tyrannical will-power, but considers his struggles far from being useless and enabling France to expand into the Far East. One may well question whether either were true and whether the latter was the role of a priest. Most consider Tachard's life a failure, and thanks to his lack of perspective in his blind support of Phaulkon (and helped by Desfarges stupidity and cowardice), French at-

tempts to implant themselves in Siam were a disaster.

While one might be critical of the over-supportive view taken by Vongsuravatana of Tachard's character and achievements, one has to be grateful for a study of the life of this curious, meddling and unloved man. The study would have been more successful if it were less uncritical of the person being investigated, and would have been helped by fewer intrusions from the author himself; there is no academic detachment in his style, which uses the

royal plural as well as the first person singular on numerous occasions. Lastly, the author could have been better served by his publishers, who have used what is absurdly known as perfect binding for this book, which guarantees that after turning a page a couple of times it falls out.

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