



REVIEWS

Terence R. Blackburn

The British Humiliation of Burma Orchid Press, Bangkok, 166pp

If you travel to Burma, you still feel the British touch. But in 1989, the present military government changed names to finish with the colonial past once and for all. The main argument was to continue where the last king of Burma failed: to resist the mighty foreign powers and become again master of their own destiny. Looking back at history, the Burmese have to overcome the British and therefore choose to be called Myanmar, the country of the Myanma people.

The author, Terence R. Blackburn, was born in London in 1938. After his education, he joined the Medical Corps in the British army and ended up as Senior Principal Administrative Officer at Guy's Hospital in London. Through the acquaintance with the Burmese scholar Noel F. Singer, he became interested in Burma, though he never visited that country because of his fear of flying. But after having visited many museums in Europe and having read many related reports, his interest focused on the three Anglo-Burmese wars and the total outcome of that mess.

The book's content is divided into eleven chapters, notes and three appendices, giving different lists of property lost after the looting of the Royal Palace in Mandalay. Seventy-nine illustrations and two maps, a comprehensive bibliography and an index make the work a most valuable contribution to understand the flow of happenings from 1824-1886, in between which years the British stole the whole country of the Burmese King in the name of the British Royalty and with God on their side.

After giving a short overview on the prehistory and turbulent history of Burma, Blackburn

mentions the main reason behind the confrontation between the British and the Burmese King: the annexation in 1784 of Arakan, next to the British dominion of Chittagong in Bengal. Soon after that, two missions headed by Michael Symes were sent to the Burmese King by the Governor General of India, who in the long run dominated the political affairs between England and Burma. Partly through ignorance, partly through arrogance, the Burmese King could not adjust to the British commercial and political demands, so on March 5th 1824, the then Governor General of India, Lord Amherst, declared war on the Empire of Burma.

After a disastrous campaign for both sides of the conflict, the war concluded with the treaty of Yandabo, signed on February 24th 1826. General Campbell did have luck on his side when the Burmese Commander-in-Chief Maha Bandula was killed by a chance shell from a mortar tube on April 1st 1825, but he stopped short of taking Ava, the Burmese capital at the Irrawaddy. The Burmese King lost the two provinces Arakan and Tenasserim and was forbidden to interfere in Assam and Manipur, on top of a large sum of indemnity. In September 1826, a mission headed by John Crawfurd reached Ava to initiate free trade between the two countries.

The second Anglo-Burmese war was provoked by the British to obtain all their greedy commercial interests and was fought in 1852, when Lord Dalhousie was Governor General of India. The Burmese King lost the immense teak-rich province of Pegu and any further access to the sea. Therefore, Upper Burma became a landlocked kingdom centered now on Amarapura, when King Mindon ascended the throne early in 1853. A mission headed by Major Phayre and Secretary Henry Yule in 1855 failed to get a commercial treaty signed by the

Burmese King. Interesting to note is the visit of the German scholar Dr. Adolf Bastian who travelled through Burma in 1861-1862 and stayed in the new capital in Mandalay. Bastian stayed many months in the King's palace to research Burmese religion and history, also mentioning American merchants who were favoured by the Burmese King.

More worrying to the British were the rumours that the French seriously planned to open a trade route up the mighty Mekong River to the riches of China's Yunnan Province. In order to counterbalance this annoyance, the British received permission to run the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company up to Bhamo. In return, King Mindon was to be allowed to buy arms, a concession the British never honoured. In 1872, a Burmese mission to London was not recognised at all, but welcomed in Paris instead.

There were many more events leading up to the third Anglo-Burmese war in 1885-1886 (see chapter VI). After the death of King Mindon in 1878, King Thibaw sent another embassy to Europe in 1883 to sign treaties of friendship with France, Germany and Italy. By then, his cruel Queen Suphayarlat had taken almost complete control of the local government, also controlling the trade in rubies from Mogok, amber and jade from Kachinland. In connection with a native court ruling against the British Bombay Burma Trading Corporation, extracting timber from the forest in the interior, Lord Dufferin, Viceroy of India, subsequently sent an ultimatum to the Burmese Government on October 22nd 1885, which was, as expected, rejected.

On November 28th 1885, the British war flotilla arrived at Mandalay under General Prendergast and Colonel Sladen. So King Thibaw surrendered, and he and his family were taken down to Rangoon on November 29th 1885. Three days later, they were on their way to Calcutta in India and final exile at Ratnatgiri on the rugged coast of Bombay. On January 1st 1886, the Burmese Kingdom was officially presented as a New Year's present to Her Majesty, the British Queen.

In Chapter IX of the book, the author discusses the missing treasures of the Burmese royal family. There was the curious case of the Nga Mauk ruby which was said to be without price. 167 items, known as the Mandalay regalia, were conserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and 141 items were given back to Burma under the Ne Win Government in 1964 (see pp.133-135). But there were eleven solid gold ancestral images of the rulers of the Konbaung dynasty and their consorts melted down by the British. It is unclear in what relation the collection of ten Hindu gods made of gold and silver stood to them (see p.136). In addition, the British Government removed the famous Lion throne to the Indian Museum in Calcutta in 1902 and returned it to Burma after independence in 1948.

King Thibaw died at the age of 58 on December 15th 1916 and was survived by his Queen Suphayarlat and their four daughters. Suphayarlat was allowed to return to Burma on April 18th 1919, where she died in 1925. As to the fate of the personal jewellery of the royal family and parts of the regalia, all the evidences pointed to Colonel Sladen, who ironically died at the age of 63 in London on January 4th 1890, only five years after the collapse of the Burmese Kingdom.

The book finally lists some selections from Indian indigenous opinion in newspapers. There are misprints regarding the entries of Ferrand and Fytche in the bibliography. Surprisingly, the reviewer misses the entry of Fielding Hall about Thibaw's Queen (London 1899). But certainly, a huge credit goes to Orchid Press and its House Editor in Bangkok for the courage to publish this book about the darker side of British colonial history.

Reinhard Hohler

Pinkaew Laungaramsri
Redefining Nature: Karen Ecological Knowledge and the Challenge to the Modern Conservation Paradigm. Chennai, India: Earthworm Books,



for the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development, Chiangmai University, 2001.

In recent years, regulation concerning land use and nature conservation has brought Thailand's ethnic minority highlanders into the national media spotlight. Campaigns to eliminate swidden (*rai*) farming in the name of watershed protection have justified the resettlement of many villages. At the same time, sympathetic activists have attempted to lend their support to villagers facing eviction and organizations such as the Northern Farmers Network have tried to counter the official classification of upland terrain in ways that might benefit the increasingly jeopardized farming populations. Among the issues at stake are the official recognition of ethnic minority highland farmers and the larger one of whether nature can only be sustained if it is cordoned off from habitation and livelihood.

Pinkaew Laungaramsri's book is a bold attempt to clear some of the layers of confusion and misinformation from the questions surrounding the future of highland farming populations in northern Thailand. A significant portion of her work concerns analysis of the key concepts that influence the way these issues are understood, discussed, and acted upon in Thai society. The basic concepts revolve around understandings of nature, conservation, and highlander identity. In everyday discourse, the notion of *chao khao* ("mountain people") is entrenched in images of national problems, in particular the idea that highlanders' farming practices are inherently destructive of the environment. Confronting this issue, the author offers a set of histories that show how the dominant image of *chao khao* and prevalent understandings of the environment share roots in a nation building project that systemically underprivileged and delegitimised ethnic minority practices of livelihood. Some of this history concerns the professionalisation of the Forestry Department and their American-borrowed idea of national parks as devoid of

people making a living in the area. Equally pertinent, the idea of *chao khao* as a problem and the negative view of upland dry rice farming are rather recent notions. Into the twentieth century, Karen peoples often had relations with lowland authorities, and highlander farming practices were not viewed as a threat to the environment. The previous notions of *chao pa* ("forest people") and of the forested highlands as *pa theuan* ("forested wilderness") not only differ from the contemporary notions of *chao khao* and *thammachat* ("nature"), they were embedded in a very different set of ideas about social life, ethnic identity, and relations with the environment. The strength of the book lies in the author's ability to spell out the political implications of particular concepts. The generally unquestioned terms used for ethnic minority highlanders and the forest that they have long been in association with are not only politically charged, they are also historically specific and entrenched in particular regimes of truth.

Questioning such regimes of truth-production, the author was also involved in collaborating with Karen people on a mapping project that turned the tables on the authorities whose maps justified the eviction of upland farming villages. The book does not engage in the romantic simplification of Karen farmers as defenders of the forest. Rather, the author provides a detailed account of plant use and local relations with forest land that underscore the complexity of highland farmers' environmental knowledge and situates this knowledge in local social relations. The author provides a valuable discussion of rotational shifting cultivation (*rai mun wian*), and how this notion of sustainable farming practices has gained currency in the context of the near-uniform condemnation of migratory shifting cultivation (*rai luan loy*). While Karen villagers may have used rotational shifting cultivation as a mode of livelihood for a considerable time, they began to brand the concept about only after public rhetoric had settled on migratory shifting cultivation as an index of national problems with *chao khao*.

The author's ability to provide a historical context to concepts, debates, and changing highland-lowland relations makes this a very valuable book, not simply in terms of understanding highland peoples and their changing place within Thailand, but more generally for understanding Thailand's national reality. The nation has been formed through particular understandings of space, history, social relations, nature, and ethnic identity, and one of the book's major contributions lies in showing how such understandings have crystallised in particular regimes of truth production. But hegemonic truths are never absolute, and while they set the terms of debate in important ways they also invite contestation and counter-arguments. Local knowledge among Karen peoples is reproduced in this context of dominant outsiders' understandings of identity, land use, and conservation, and by situating local knowledge in this way the author has precluded the sense that Karen culture and identity are of the past. While Karen history and culture are informed by a shifting and complex past, their local reality is very much that of national and global understandings and structures regarding farming, conservation, and nature. It is in this context that Karen local knowledge offers multiple challenges to the prevailing conservation paradigm of nature as devoid of people making a living.

The book is a revised Ph.D. dissertation, and the text shows various signs of the previous incarnation. Because the author shows how official Thai notions of national parks were modeled on American ones, a discussion of the place of Native Americans (Indians) in relation to nature and society might have added a comparative dimension to the Thai case. Also, a discussion of how the northern Thai setting compares with ethnic and environmental situations in neighbouring countries would have been informative. But these are minor quibbles with an important book that demonstrates the relevance of exploring the many dimensions that inform the local realities of northern Thailand's farming populations.

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Wajuppa Tossa

Phya Khankhaak, the Toad King: A Translation of an Isan Fertility Myth into English Verse.
Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1996

With the development of a national public educational system in the early twentieth century, the Thai government mandated the use of the central Thai language. Over time, although the regional language dialects have continued to be spoken, knowledge of regional literature declined. Fortunately, the 1970s saw a resurgence of interest in "indigenous knowledge." Efforts increased to locate and preserve indigenous regional texts, with teachers at provincial teachers colleges playing a particularly important role. Wajuppa Tossa has long been a major figure in efforts to familiarise a younger generation of students with the literature of the northeastern region of Thailand. This translation of *Phya Khankhaak* into English is yet another contribution to the effort, now making it possible for an international audience to gain access to this literature.

The story of *Phya Khankhaak* is great fun. I read it out loud to my children and they were quickly enthralled. The tale is a wonderfully rich account of a virtuous king and queen who bear a son, named Phya Khankhaak, who looks like a toad. When a beautiful princess falls in love with him, Phya Khankhaak transforms into a handsome prince. He and his bride eventually assume the throne and all is well until a Phya Thaen, who rules a heaven with a lake which generates earthly rains, becomes jealous of Phya Khankhaak. Phya Thaen then stops the nagas from frolicking in the lake, thereby stopping earthly rain. When Phya Khankhaak learns of this, he attacks phya Thaen with a massive army. The battle scenes are wonderfully vivid, an exercise in the imaginative magical surreal. Ultimately, Phya Khankhaak triumphs and rains are restored to earth.



While I might quibble with various awkward moments in the translation itself, these peculiarities in word choice in no way hinder one's understanding of the story. Some readers might even argue that these moments give the translation a certain quaint charm of an ancient text. Nonetheless, while sympathetic with the movement to preserve indigenous literature, I am concerned that regional nationalism not inhibit critical textual analysis. Neither folktales nor literature are necessarily noble and inspiring simply because they claim regional heritage. Thus, while this book stands as an important contribution to broadening international awareness of northeastern literature, I believe Ajarn Wajuppa's introductory remarks would have been strengthened if they engaged less romanticising exuberance, and more in a critical analysis of social and historical literary context.

Texts often have contradictory cultural messages and complex audiences. Wajuppa makes no effort to define the breadth of familiarity of the folktale or the frequency of the performance of this text. Is the folktale known or the text performed widely northern Thailand or Laos as well? Even western readers will recognise parallels with a European version of a frog-prince folktale. Furthermore, Wajuppa presents this text as "an Isan fertility myth"; however, it could just as easily have been presented as a Buddhist sermon. The version she has translated was recorded by Phya Ariyanuwat, a Buddhist abbot and Wajuppa notes that "this story is considered a sacred text to be recited by either a Buddhist monk or a holy man wearing white in a ceremony where people ask for rain" (p.11). Given the bawdiness of many of the passages, that monks recounted this tale raises numerous unaddressed questions about varying historical practices of Buddhism.

Aspects of the text reinforce Buddhist values. These values at once affirm the legitimacy of the institution of kingship, while simultaneously providing an implicit populist declaration for justice and equality. Hinting at a

prevailing authoritarian ethos, the text describes a saintly virtuous king, one whom "all humans in other cities shuddered and feared," "radiant with high merit and invincible power" (p.35). Phya Khankhaak attacks Phya Thean without prior efforts at negotiation. Poverty, slavery and the practice of capturing hostages were clearly widespread. However, while the text may have intimidated peasants with royal power, it also admonished kings to follow Phya Khankhaak advice:

Do not oppress or intimidate your subjects.
Do not insult or humiliate those inferior
in appearance or status...
Nobody can see others' merit or charisma
Accumulated in their past lives. (p.118)

The gendered aspects of this tale also bear consideration. The text delights in unabashed descriptions of love-making; fortunately it seems wives, concubines and captive angels enjoy these physical unions no less than the men. Nonetheless, the passages describing how Phya Khankhaak and soldiers divided "young maiden angels" as their spoils of victory did not strike me, as a woman, with joy (p.112). Nonetheless, the text has an interesting complexity. When Phya Khankhaak was lamenting, his return to the earthly realm of women in this world whose "bodies perspire and leak foul scent" (p.128), I enjoyed the royal mother's retort that her son could have "stayed and sprayed his love seeds with the angels" (p.130).

The text is a fascinating combination of village proverbs and Buddhist sermonettes embedded in gendered, authoritarian, propagandistic descriptions of royal virtue and power. Thus, my critical cynicism regarding class and gender issues provide a counterpoint to Wajuppa's exuberant romanticism. My anthropological background points to the cultural and interpretive void of the context for the text. Nonetheless, Wajuppa is to be thanked for providing English language audience with a wonderful translation of a delightful tale rich enough to provoke more questions. As people

seek the answers, Wajuppa's dream of an appreciative audience for regional literatures will increasingly become a reality.

Katherine A. Bowie

Michel Gilquin

Les Musulmans de Thaïlande Paris/Bangkok: L'Harmattan/IRASEC, 2002

Michel Gilquin's book is the first general survey of Thai Muslims in French. It is also the first overview since the publication of the comprehensive two-volume study *The Muslims of Thailand*, edited by Andrew Forbes, in 1989. A scholar at the Centre d'Études en Sciences Sociales et Humaines Jacques Berque in Rabat (Morocco), Gilquin's research focuses on the Mediterranean and Turco-Iranian world, but he has also written two books about Malaysia.

In his preface Gilquin notes that most French associate Islam and Muslims with the Mediterranean world and the Middle East, disregarding the fact that the world's largest Muslim nation is located in Southeast Asia: Indonesia. Other East Asian states – often assumed to be ethnically homogeneous – count substantial Muslim minorities among their inhabitants, which can be explained from the fact that traditional political entities in Southeast Asia lacked an articulated sense of national identity and generally adopted a tolerant attitude towards resident Muslims. Peaceful cohabitation of various communities maintaining their own cultural distinctions was very much commonplace. This changed with the arrival of modernity, when relations between the central authority and minorities became more antagonized as both sides faced new challenges.

To deal with these complex issues, Gilquin has divided his study in three sections. The first part can be considered a reconnaissance of the historical and demographic dimensions of Muslim presence in Thailand. Although the author admits that the issue of Islam in Thailand

transcends the regional question of "The Greater South", he has devoted an entire section to this issue, which takes up about one third of the book. In the last section, the author addresses the problem of Muslim identity vis-à-vis contemporary issues like democratization, economic development and cultural globalization.

Gilquin sets out by posing the question how Islam, a religion originating in the Arabian desert, was able to take root in a culturally so different region like Southeast Asia. The author seeks to explain this through the similarity between the political and economic circumstances at the first point of entry, the Malay Peninsula, and those of 7th century Arabia. In both areas, petty states, located at the periphery of larger political entities, led a precarious existence not based on military might or the assumed inherent stability of agricultural societies, but on trade. Islam provided the unifying factor necessary to iron out antagonisms and instill a sense of common interest as it became a vehicle for regulating the relationships between local potentates, who were usually the first to convert. However, in an environment so different from the Middle East local elements, antedating the arrival of Islam, were incorporated into the Southeast Asian variety of that religion.

Not long after Malay sultanates such as Malacca and Pattani had adopted Islam as the state religion (1450 and 1457 respectively) Siamese Ayutthaya started to extend its influence into the Malay Peninsula. The Muslim rulers who agreed to paying tribute regarded this as a kind of taxation buying the peace and tranquility required to prosper commercially. Ayutthaya, however, regarded this recognition of its authority as something of a much more sacred nature. Gilquin notes that such mutual incomprehension lie at the root of present-day misunderstandings between the central Thai authority and the southern Islamic periphery.

In addition to the maritime route, Islam entered the Tai world also via an offshoot of the Silk road. Between the 10th and 12th centuries,



Central Asian caravans had brought the religion to the western reaches of China. Because of their martial qualities the local converts, called Hui, became highly regarded mercenary forces for the Chinese Empire. By the 13th century a Muslim was appointed governor of Dali in Yunnan province. For centuries to come Yunnanese Muslims would control the caravan trade with Burma, Lanna and Lan Chang. But not until the period between the 1860s and 1940s, when wave upon wave of political unrest and repression ravaged southern China, would Chinese Muslims take up permanent residence in selected locations in northern Thailand.

In addition to these sustained southern and northern penetrations, Michel Gilquin also records more incidental cases, such as the arrival of Persian merchants in the early 17th century. Their leaders quickly succeeded in occupying very influential court positions, becoming the ancestors of some of Thailand's most well-known aristocratic families. The occupation of the Tenasserim region by King Naresuen brought the Siamese also into contact with Indian Muslim merchants operating there. Following the Dutch conquest of the island of Celebes in 1667, a substantial number of exiled Makassarese sought refuge in Ayutthaya, although they eventually merged into the general population. The 19th century, finally, saw the arrival of Bengali cattle traders, entering via Mae Sot and eventually settling down in Chiang Mai. Meanwhile, Indian (Punjabi) textile merchants had taken up residence in Bangkok, which is also home to a community of Muslim Cham. The latter had arrived from Cambodia after a Vietnamese offensive in 1758 and they became valued mercenaries in the army of King Taksin.

Together these elements make for a composite picture of Islam in Thailand. Gilquin then endeavors to give an initial characterisation of Muslim identity in Thailand. In this context he addresses the origin and meaning of the gloss category "*khaek*" and the impact of Thailand's prevalent religion, Buddhism, on the way Muslims experience their own religion: namely

more as a marker of cultural heritage than a set of dogmas that need to be strictly adhered to. Consequently Thailand's Muslim minority is viewed as heterogeneous in both its origins and religious practices, although Gilquin notes a number of distinctive sociological features such as: the prevalence of family cohesion and mutual (financial) assistance, dress code and social interaction (less outdoors socialising, refraining from the *wai*). These beg the question, however, whether they are manifestations of a "fundamentalist" understanding of Islam; a reaffirmation of the Muslim identity; or piety in the face of growing consumerism. The author rightly observes that Muslims are just as much affected by the tribulations of modernity as other Thai. Modernity has also brought the position of the *Sharia* or Islamic Law, in relation to family law and education, to the fore again. Both are areas of great consequence for the Muslims' sense of identity and their position as citizens of the modern Thai state.

The last chapter of this first section deals with demographics. Three quarters of Thailand's Muslims live south of the Isthmus of Khra, and in the most southern provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala, Satun and Songkhla they make up 75-80% of the population. Elsewhere in Thailand substantial Muslim communities can be found in Bangkok, Ayutthaya, Chachoengsao and Chiang Mai. Gilquin has included a table of the Muslim population in all provinces provided by the "Islamic Committee Office of Thailand", which adds up to almost 7.5 million. Given the fact that in his own narrative he discusses the discrepancy between these figures and the government's total of 2.1 to 3 million Muslims (as a result of the discretion of many Muslims with regards to their religion and the equivocal application of the category Thai Islam to southerners only) I question the prudence of displaying this table so prominently, especially since Gilquin himself suggests that a total of 3.5 to 4 million Muslims in the south would constitute a more reasonable estimate. With the almost one million Muslim inhabitants of the Central region this would make a total of

approximately 5 million Muslims or 7.5-8% of the population, excluding the smaller communities of Indo-Pakistani origin. For future projections, the author suggests that the higher birth rate, the formal impossibility of apostasy, and the phenomenon of re-islamisation be taken into consideration.

Formally the Muslims are organised under the office of the Chularajamontri (or Shaykh al-Islam). The legal status of this position is defined by article 7 of the 1997 Constitution, which designates the king as protector of all religions, but he has delegated these powers to the Chularajamontri as his adviser on Islamic affairs. The Muslim communities are further administered through the “Central Committee for Islamic Affairs” and its provincial affiliates, which all work closely together with the Ministries of the Interior and Education. The author pointedly remarks that the administrators of Islamic affairs in Thailand play therefore a double - maybe even ambivalent - role, because they act simultaneously as custodians of the creed and guardians of Muslim adhesion to the Thai nation. Some other issues that Gilquin addresses in the context of political administration are the tension between the Islamic concept of divine sovereignty and allegiance to the Thai king; the moves towards democratisation of the Islamic affairs administrative system; and alternative roads chosen by prominent Muslims towards emancipation: namely running for political office.

In the opening remarks of the section on “The Great South”, Gilquin notes that in Thailand’s collective subconscious Islam is generally associated with the country’s southern-most provinces. He points out that this equation of ethnic and religious referents is a gross simplification, which does neither justice to the position of the population of the south nor to that of other Muslims in Thailand. To illustrate the multi-layered identity of the southern Thai the author presents a detailed treatment of the significance of the Yawi language as an essential ethnic-religious identifier for the people of Pattani, Narathiwat and

Yala. As such this linguistic particularity serves — in addition to geography and religion - as an additional factor segregating them from mainstream Thai society and connecting them to the neighbouring Malay world. Apart from being the regional colloquial, Yawi is namely closely associated with a body of traditional knowledge in the field of religion and traditional medicine, embodied in the emblematic figures of the religious teacher or *tokguru* and faith healer or *bomoh*, respectively. It is therefore a complex of religious, linguistic and cultural factors that creates a caesura between the Yawi-speakers and “the others”.

History also weighs heavily on the Yawi conscience and has influenced the development of certain separatist tendencies. Gilquin illustrates this by the strong feelings of nostalgia evoked by the toponym Pattani, underscoring the local awareness of the significance of this Muslim sultanate. Founded in 1370, it survived in the guise of a variety of (semi-) independent or autonomous political entities until as recently as 1909. Against this historical backdrop, Gilquin characterizes the entrance of Yawi society into modern Thai nation-state as a “difficult insertion” rather than an “actual integration”.

In relation to current -day developments Gilquin identifies 1909 as a watershed-year. The Anglo-Siamese treaty of that year spelled the end of the South’s political independence and since then local resistance has primarily taken the form of defending the position of Islam, which led to open unrest in 1910 and 1911. In 1923 the government relented somewhat and a *modus vivendi* was found: Islamic schools were re-opened, the use of Yawi was allowed and Muslim sensitivities towards certain forms of Buddhist symbolism were given consideration. Under the first Phibun government, however, tensions rose again. Only marital and inheritance law escaped interference of the central administration in local affairs.

In the immediate post-war years Southerners drew inspiration from the Indonesian independence leader Sukarno’s Pan-Malay ideology.

However, in these early Cold War years Muslim separatists were grouped together with the Marxist-led guerrillas operating in British Malaya into the category of “Communist bandits”. The Sukarnist Pan-Malay and non-alignment doctrine was perpetuated until the early 1960s by the BRN (Barisan Revolusi Nasional). Arrests, internal fragmentation of the movement, and an active government development policy resulted in a temporary lull in Southern unrest between 1961 and 1968. However, this was followed by a flurry of guerilla activity between 1968 and 1975. Remnants of the BRN were joined by the Pattani United Liberation Organisation (PULO) and the Barisan Nasional Pembebasan Pattani (PBPP). In addition to these three main organisations smaller, more localized, organisations were active in the region as well. The author notes that in 1979 the authorities had identified more than 84 armed groups.

Gilquin qualifies the demise of the main resistance movements during the 1980s as the combined result of ideological reorientation, recurring internal disagreements, the discredit brought about by acts of brigandism and banditry, and the new course mapped out by Thailand’s senior army command: namely to find a political solution for the “Southern Question” instead of a military one. In the view of Michel Gilquin the noticeable progress of democracy also offers new perspectives for the South, although integration will remain very delicate.

In the exposé that follows, the writer presents an inventory of issues that need to be addressed: the interaction between economic development and politics; central government education policies towards Islamic schooling and dress code; and social problems such as drug addiction, alcoholism, disrupted families, and HIV. He has noticed that, in coming to terms with these issues, Muslims tend to anchor their rhetoric in the *Sharia*. They present adherence to Islamic Law as the means to heal social ills and halt moral decay. However, Gilquin sees two obstacles obstructing the way to a fruitful

engagement: the feeble knowledge of the Arabic language, which hinders access to reliable sources, and resistance to the secularisation of the legalistic, social and political aspects of life. This ambiguity is illustrated with a reference to the emergence of an Islamic banking system, exemplifying an attempt of Muslims to come to terms with the demands of a modern economy and simultaneously retain essential Islamic values. And while some Muslim modernists endeavor to actively engage modernism, others have turned “fundamentalist”.

In the two remaining chapters that constitute the final section of the book, Gilquin turns to drawing the contours of future perspectives. First he examines the way in which Islam in Thailand is being renewed.

The author starts by pointing out that “Islam” is what the majority of Muslims take it to be. In this context, Gilquin observes that Thai Muslims participate on two levels in the Islamic renewal. On the global plain they take part in the repositioning of Islam over and against the rapid transformation of a world where religion is becoming increasingly marginalised under the onslaught of secularisation. On the national level Muslims resist the menace of marginalisation. However, Gilquin detects a potential danger in this recently acquired assertive stand, posing the question whether emphasising the universal - and assumedly non-negotiable - validity of Islamic values will preclude any form of dialogue between Muslims and Buddhists, condemning them to a peaceful coexistence in separate realms.

Instead of further speculation the writer proposes to examine the attitudes of the actors. What Gilquin has found is that, where Islam for centuries provided the cement for a communal identity, it now functions as an affirmation of individual identity. This individualisation is a direct by-product of the modernisation process. Among the common people of the South this refund assertiveness frequently takes the form of rigid adherence to Islamic norms and values in the face of a dominant, materialistic and

westernised culture. But there is also an educated elite, presenting themselves as the spokespersons for Thai Muslims, who are taking a more engaged position. Since the 1980s this Muslim intelligentsia is shaping the discourse on Thai Islam. Their reflections on Islam take place in an intellectual environment that sees the simultaneous emergence of economic globalisation, a rise of a politicised Islam, advancement of democratisation. Consequently, the debate on the role of Islam oscillates between a dynamism and a reification of Islam as an immutable beacon in an unstable world.

Gilquin touches on the various intellectual roots of this Islamic revival, such as the inspiration drawn from the 19th-century Islamic renaissance in Egypt and the remarkable improvement in the knowledge of the original scriptures. In the course of his study he highlights the individual contributions of intellectuals such as Direk Kulsiriswad, Surin Pitsuwan, Imtiyaz Yusuf and Ismail Ali. Very important has also been the foundation of the College of Islamic Studies at the University of the Prince of Songkhla. It is in such a milieu that issues such as the religious rights of the Muslims, the role of women, and the position of the Chularajamontri are debated. Especially the discussion surrounding the relevance of this office Gilquin considers of great interest, because it raises questions regarding its credibility and relevance in the face of social change, religious transformations and increasing demands for democratisation.

Gilquin's discussion of democracy deals not so much with its compatibility with Islam as with its significance for the affirmation of the Muslims' cultural-political position, emphasising again that reducing Muslim identity to the confessional domain alone is misleading. Likewise the visibility of southern Muslim politicians carry the risk of their agenda becoming equated with regionalism, possibly at the expense of Muslim communities elsewhere in Thailand. The book's examination of the role of Islam in the wake of the 1997 economic crisis is somewhat feeble, because the effects of the ensuing events have not yet fully panned out.

What is interesting, however, is the observation of Thailand's opening up towards the Islamic world. Under the direction of Surin Pitsuwan, in his capacity of Minister of Foreign Affairs, Thailand not only asserted its role in ASEAN alongside Muslim countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, but also acquired observer-status with the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1998.

Les Musulmans de Thaïlande is a comprehensive summary study of Thai Muslims. In the space of a mere two hundred pages the author provides the Francophone reader with a fair impression of the situation in which Thai Muslims find themselves today. Although the extensive treatment of Thailand's Islamic South could have been offset a bit more with an account of the very interesting developments taking place in the Bangkok area — something Gilquin noted himself in the beginning of the book - the author has taken care to underscore the multi-layeredness of the region's ethnic identity. Another virtue of this publication is the update it provides on developments since the appearance of the landmark studies by Andrew Forbes and Surin Pitsuwan. The only drawbacks that need to be mentioned are the failure to say anything significant about the Muslim communities in Northern Thailand; the omission in the bibliography of both the earlier mentioned general study by Forbes and Suthep Soonthornpasuch's thesis on Chiang Mai Muslims; and, finally, the remarkable error in the footnote on page 89, in which Mahathir Muhammad and Anwar Ibrahim are identified as the president and prime minister of Malaysia.

Carool Kersten
Payap University, Chiang Mai



Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos

Edited by Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. xii + 312pp. US\$45

This book has a selection of ten papers from a panel at the 1996 International Conference of Thai Studies in Chiang Mai, along with an introduction by the editors and a tailpiece by Masato Fukushima. I will concentrate on three which I count among the most fascinating and important essays on modern Thailand in the 1990s. I will then more briefly describe the others, and finally comment on the theme.

The anchor of the book is Thongchai Winichakul's symphonic account of the 1976 Thammasat massacre and its uneasy place in Thai history. It is "symphonic" in the sense that it has three clear themes: the event itself, the changing memory of the event over time in the accounts of different actors, and the attempt to commemorate it. It is also symphonic in the sense that it breaks academia's cool conventions and runs the reader through a range of emotions including nausea, anger, sadness and compassion.

Thongchai describes 6 October 1976 as "a crime of the Thai state against its people". In the first theme of the essay, he composes a historical narrative of events from Thanom's return to Thailand in September through to the conclusion of the massacre. He details the roles of the monarchy, monkhood, Village Scouts, Border Patrol Police, Communist Party of Thailand, press, generals and politicians.

In the second theme, he traces how the memory and evaluation of these events changed over the following 20 years. On the side of the state, he starts with Salang Bunnag rejoicing over the bloodshed, and shows how such reactions were quickly replaced with a more shameful restraint. On the side of the student participants (such as Thongchai himself), vengeful anger was transformed into lost confusion. After the collapse of the CPT's jungle-based struggle,

which several joined, "they were only in their middle twenties, but they had already lost two historic wars". Even though they had been the targets of the violence, some "still fell partly responsible" for the violence.

In the third theme, Thongchai traces the history of attempts to commemorate the event with some form of monument. He argues that this is very difficult because "the massacre does not fit the normative ideology in Thailand for the memorable past". Conventional history is all about a paternal state protecting its citizens from outside threats. The modern account of the rise of democracy can string 1932, 1973, and 1992 into a coherent line. But 1976 does not seem to fit. As a result, the monument on Rajdamnoen was confined to 1973. The lack of any monument to 1976 commemorates that "Thai radicalism has been a failure". However, Thongchai has added a lot to earlier versions of this essay, giving it a markedly more upbeat ending. There has been some positive outcome. The radical conscience of the 1970s students, combined with a non-violent reaction against 1976, created the NGO movement. The 20-year commemoration in 1996 at least settled the dead and was "a major break in the silence". The essay starts out looking for "closure" but ends up accepting the "national ambivalence" about the event.

Charles Keyes examines why a schoolteacher was run out of Khorat by a mob of 25,000 headed by a national politician—for writing a book. The book, which originated as a Thammasat MA thesis, was about the statue of Thao Suranari (grandmother Mo) in Khorat's city centre. The writer, Saipin Kaewngarmprasert, showed that the story of Thao Suranari leading out troops to attack the Lao forces of Chao Anu in 1827 has a very shaky basis in contemporary records. It originated mainly from Prince Damrong's construction of a nation-centred history in the 1920s, and was translated into a monument in 1933 by Khorat people who wanted to display loyalty to Bangkok after Khorat had acted as a base for the failed Boworadet revolt. The monument was renovated in the 1960s when

Bangkok again wanted Khorat to identify clearly with Thailand rather than the rebellious Lao.

Keyes argues that there were three views of the past swirling around when in March 1996 someone in Khorat called a meeting to condemn “this shameful publication”. The first was Saipin’s academic deconstruction of the statue’s origins. The second was a Bangkok-statist view which stood by both the truth of the Thao Suranari story, and the intended meaning of the monument—to emphasise Khorat’s loyal contribution to the history of the Thai nation. The third was a more local version which has converted grandmother Mo into a protective local spirit.

As with Thongchai’s essay, Keyes has substantially modified the earlier version of the paper, and in a fascinating way. The earlier version went into some detail about the dynamics of local politics which resulted in the statist-inspired demonstration. This part has totally disappeared in the new version. Instead, there is an extended section about the expanding cult of grandmother Mo. She has colonised the city pillar shrine, taken over a local *wat*, and has another shrine at the supposed battlefield. Keyes takes us along for a chat with grandmother Mo through one of her spirit mediums. Keyes argues that this is one of many local cults that have emerged “as a response to the destabilising influences of rapid economic growth and, more generally, of the Thai pursuit of modernisation”. The 1996 demonstration was not only about Saipin’s book, but “an attempt by the state to wrest control of the memory of Thao Suranari from local people”.

Kasian Tejapira’s “The Postmodernisation of Thainess” is a dance of death over the corpse of the official version of national identity. It is also achingly funny. Throughout the twentieth century, the Thai state invented various versions of Thai culture, Thainess, or Thai identity as ways to demand obedience and conformity from the citizenry. These formulations made some sort of sense when they were rooted at least partially in the way people lived, ate, spoke, purchased, and performed rituals. But, Kasian argues with

evident glee, these attempts have been undermined by globalisation, at least as far as the urban middle class is concerned. People like to buy foreign things (or things with foreign brand names), look at *luk krung* stars, and generally think of themselves as global citizens. There is still a residual wish to “be Thai”, but it is not clear what this means when the official definitions of what “being Thai” means have little to do with lifestyle, consumption, self-image or aspirations. As a result, Kasian argues, Thainess becomes first “an object of desire” like any other consumer product, then gets “vaporised” into meaningless definitions, and finally reconverted into concrete form in the desperate attempts of advertisers, artists, and starlets to articulate what it might mean.

Kasian presents this as just one element of a larger cultural change originating from the end of the cold war and the collapse of Thailand’s military dictatorship. The Sino-Thai middle class now rules culturally. The old strategies of control have been blown away and replaced by the dictates of commercialism which affects Buddhism, monarchy, nation and identity.

Shigeharu Tanabe argues that spirit cults have proliferated in Chiang Mai as people move away from communities which had established methods of dealing with life’s uncertainties. As replacement they seek individual techniques including amulets, astrology, meditation and mediums. The latter have not only multiplied in number, but also developed as “lineages” which convey authority, borrowed Buddhist elements for legitimacy, assembled an eclectic range of spirits for consumer choice, and offer various ancillary services including exorcism, love magic, business consultancy, and help with lottery numbers. Rosalind Morris also presents Chiang Mai’s spirit mediums as part of a surge of ritual and ecstatic practices in response to over-rational modernisation. Nicholas Tapp shows how Hmong in Chiang Mai are losing their sense of the moral order of the universe, and the places of themselves and other Hmong in that order.

Nicola Tannenbaum shows how the erection of a founder statue in Mae Hong Son could take place in 1990 because the nation no longer felt threatened that regional particularism might lead to breakup, and indeed regional variety had new value for tourism. Grant Evans presents a valuable catalogue of statues in Thailand and Laos, and argues that the recent “statuemanía”, especially since 1960, reflects not only state nationalism but also a democratising trend resulting in images of monks, local figures, and the 1973 monument.

Kyonosuke Hirai shows how Lamphun women have redesigned the traditional house-warming ceremony in order to display their new-found wealth from factory work. Ryoko Nishii describes how Buddhist and Muslim families competed to control the funerary ceremonies for the husband of a mixed marriage.

The essays, without exception, are of very high quality. But what is the book about? What is the “cultural crisis” and what does it have to do with “social memory”?

Social memory is relatively clear. All these essays demonstrate that the memories of the past of any social unit—family, community, town, or nation—are constantly formed and reformed by a kind of conversation between the members of that unit. From time to time those memories become more concrete as a book, statue, ritual, or event. But ultimately these are just contributions to a continuing conversation. The memory changes not only because of what is chosen to be included, but also what is left out. Social

memories are now in tumult, the editors argue, as a result of cultural crisis.

But what exactly is the crisis? The editors seem to present at least three explanations. The first is (quietly) the old tradition/modernity paradigm. In the past, people knew who they were, who the members of their community were, and who the king was. Now these uncertainties are undermined, people have to make choices, and as a result they are anxious. The second explanation is a more extended exposition of modernisation, extending over a century or more. The old world has been overtaken by scientific knowledge, a globalised market, the nation-state, and mass media. The resulting “crisis” includes AIDS, pollution, protests, environmental decline, monk scandals, car accidents, prostitution, and the 1997 economic crash. In short, everything. The third explanation, reflected in most of the essays, focuses on a tighter time frame (roughly the last thirty years) and especially on the impact of commercialisation and democratisation. For some of the essayists this clearly is a crisis. But for others (like Kasian), this clearly is not.

This is a super collection. It is also much too expensive to be distributed, bought, and read here. With luck, Hawai’i will issue it in paperback. If so, they might correct a few mistakes. One of Kasian’s best jokes has been garbled by a spellchecker. Thongchai makes the classic mistake (about which he himself has written) of muddling 6 and 14 October.

Chris Baker

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