

BOOK REVIEW

Text-Book Thailand

Unlike E.H.G. Dobby (*Southeast Asia*, University of London Press Ltd., London, 7th Ed., 1960, 415 pp.) C.A. Fisher has not explicitly stated that the aim of *South-east Asia* (Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, 1964, 831 pp.) was to 'provide the student with a basic text and at the same time stimulate the sociologist, the administrator, the politician and the businessman to see the relation of their work to the general field'. Perhaps the author believed—and quite rightly—that *South-east Asia's* 'text-book' character being self-evident, a statement to this effect could scarcely fail of being redundant. Certainly anyone who has satisfied even a casual interest in this fascinating part of the world previous to a reading of Professor Fisher's book will come away from it more in wonder than in wisdom.

In general plan *South-east Asia* is much the same as *Southeast Asia*: first the 'region' is considered in broad physical and cultural aspect, each political unit is then discussed in greater detail and finally, this hazy corner between India and China is placed in world perspective. Consequently, both books grant Thailand the benefit of an appreciation on several levels of generalization. The 'expert', of course, pales at the grossness of even that consideration given Thailand as an entity unto itself, but to damn these contributions for failing to titillate the informed is hardly warranted if, as seems obvious, this was not the audience intended. Indeed, criticism, if it is to be constructive, must be concerned with the value for the layman. And the synthesis of a great mass of unobtainable or too technical literature into a clear and comprehensible, widely disseminated essay must be accounted a signal service—the worth of a 'text'. Unfortunately, the Dobby and Fisher syntheses, being based almost wholly upon available readable secondary sources—in the latter's text this reliance reaches remarkable proportions and even readily obtainable statistical data are so referred—cannot lay claim to such an accomplishment. In fact, Fisher goes so far as to express his conviction in the likelihood of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development's *A Public Development Program for Thailand* (Baltimore, 1959, 301 pp.)—as

glossy a study as could be imagined—remaining 'a major work of reference for many years'. Despite these shortcomings, however, both authors have presented fairly decent resumé—Professor Dobby more in the treatment of the physical scene and Professor Fisher more for recent political machinations; resumé which, despite several lamentable errors of fact (and in this regard it is astounding that all maps of Thailand in Dobby's book—he a 'Sometime Professor of Geography at . . . —proceed no further south than approximately the parallel of eleven degrees north; certainly convenient, but obviously inaccurate) must be reckoned as required reading for the uninformed; and, as such, both *Southeast Asia* and *South-east Asia* must enjoy many impressions.

As might be anticipated Thailand receives an even more generalized treatment in Professor Dobby's more recent effort *Monsoon Asia* (Quadrangle Books, Inc., Chicago, 1961, 381 pp.); but here the author has succeeded in eclipsing even his own brutal code, 'selection must be ruthless to be brief', and Thailand neatly disposed of on both sides of scarce a dozen pages. However, with this brief compass Dobby somehow manages to so vary the 'mood' that the reader's interest never wavers as he is shuttled from the innocuous to the absurd and back again with remarkable pace. Indeed, I must confess that this snappy swipe was prompted (and, I hope, may be excused) by an attempt to analyze an involuntary grin which bubbled up and onto my face upon a reading of the author's assertion (possibly innocent) that being 'Written from inside Asia', this up-to-date geography is not focused on any one Asian nation, and it should enable Asian students no less than Western students to see their national problems in relation to those of others! Apparently, in a most improbable moment of lucidity, it became quite clear that 'Written from inside Asia' referred to the fact that the text had been partially written at the University of Malaya; 'up-to-date' was warranted in that 'factual data' had been obtained from the very 'latest United Nations reports'; 'not focused on any one Asian nation' described the fractured presentation, by 'landscape types', of countries considered as belonging to the several 'regions' delimited—a format which, having served its somewhat oblique purpose, has been abandoned (necessarily) when economic and political aspects were under discussion; and 'enabling Asian

students no less than Western students to see. . . .’ had relied largely upon that eerie ability students (of whatever race, creed or color) possess of seeing only that which is presented.

Occasionally, an author’s opening remarks are so temerous, so audacious – no, outrageous – however, that they invoke not the rather gleeful derision reserved for comrades in toil but rather hot indignation. The preface to *Thailand (its People, its Society, its Culture)* – Human Relations Area Files, Inc., New Haven, Connecticut, 1958, 528 pp., – states, complacently, that the book’s ‘Research and writing are done with the aid of a new research guide and in accordance with new procedures for interdisciplinary team research’, that ‘Both guide and procedures were specifically developed to ensure that analysis undertaken within the context of any one discipline be informed by the theories and findings of the others; and that the resulting interpretations of the several disciplines be refined and integrated through a process of challenge and synthesis’; and claims, calmly, that the Survey ‘examines in depth the sociological, political, and economic aspects of a whole society’ in order to ‘define basic cultural and institutional patterns, and to identify dominant values and attitudes’. *Thailand (its People, its Society, its Culture)* is simply a decent round-up of readily available information presented in staccato sing-song.

The suspicion must be entertained that Professor Dr. Wilhelm Credner’s *Siam, das Land der Tai* (J. Engelhorn, Stuttgart, 1935, 422 pp.) owes some of its ‘sacred cowness’ to both its unavailability and its German, but, nevertheless, it is unquestionably the least contemptuous of the attempts at overall coverage – the more remarkable for being based on but two years personal observation (1927-29). Woefully inaccurate (most of the statistical data used have since been found wanting) and flushed with rhapsody (where information was scanty or entirely absent) as it is – premature as it is – *Siam, das Land der Tai* must remain the ‘text’ model for any future attempts (though, unfortunately, it has not been so used in the generation since its publication). Had Professor Dr. Credner been content to confine himself to one aspect of his ‘Landeskunde’ – the sections on the physical landscape are exemplary – however, he surely would have

precluded the suggestion of a Wordsworthian ripeness. And, similarly, had the American Geographical Society sought to honor the late Dr. Robert L. Pendleton it might better have collected and published his relevant works as *Thailand: Aspects of Landscape and Life* (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1962, 321 pp.) instead of completing the Handbook after his death in 1957 with 'the assistance of Robert C. Kingsbury and others'. For, with the exception of those portions bearing the hallmark of Dr. Pendleton's lucid pen (this despite editing) this is a poorly written round-up of seemingly anything that came to hand which could be encompassed under the headings adopted. The simple clarity with which Pendleton treated complex subjects further obscured by a lack of basic information resulted from a life-time of intimate association; the simplicity which characterizes the remainder of *Thailand: Aspects of Landscape and Life* has resulted either from the unrealistic apportioning of space or from sheer naivety. And, although Dr. Pendleton's contribution is obviously in a class apart, it demands a good measure of self-control to restrain a natural impulse to cut away the rest.

'Text' has been used herein as a derogatory term, for this written form has been so abused as to be almost synonymous with mediocrity. But a true text — surely the rarest of volumes — presents an author with one of the most difficult tasks in writing: a clear, coherent synthesis following incisive analysis of a mass of information of varying quality. Obviously, a would-be text writer must first be possessed of sufficient information. Should basic data be unavailable for any reason — and the author's inability to conduct an adequate enquiry is certainly not the least of such reasons — it is not enough to gather together and re-present (in a clever new form, of course) that which is readily available from other secondary sources; it would, in fact, be better simply to refer the reader to these sources while acknowledging that inadequacy which becomes so painfully apparent from a reading.

Much basic work — painfully slow slogging research — remains to be done in Thailand. Humbly, I enter a plea for a bit of silence whilst the job of providing this basic information proceeds. Such forbearance must be rewarded by a sophisticated generalization — a text in the true sense — at some future date.

Larry Sternstein
University of Hawaii
Honolulu

RECENT SIAMESE PUBLICATIONS

318. Dharmakośācārya, the Ven. P̄ra: *Attributes of His Holiness Kromsundeč̄pra Paramānujit* พระเกียรติบางประการในสมเด็จพระมหาสมณเจ้า กรมพระปรมาภิไธย memento of the dedication of the late Prince's effigy in December 2507 at his seat in Wat P̄ra Jetuṣon, Prayurawong Press, Dhonburi, 2507 p. 174

This is undoubtedly a creditable presentation of a genuine appreciation of the greatest of mid-nineteenth century poets, who has been ranked as a *littérateur* of the greatest calibre, writing not only inspiring prose but also epic as well as romantic poetry despite the fact that he had been brought up from childhood within the austere walls of a Buddhist monastery. One detects certainly inspiration from his tutor and preceptor who also wrote poetry and was a well known and authoritative historian; but his works have been excelled.

Like the object of his appreciation the author of the volume under review also studied in Wat P̄ra Jetuṣon in the prime of his life; he has made a name up to now as a scholar and an organiser though perhaps much less experienced than the object of his study in this book, making up however with a push which was not so evident in the character of the Prince. The contrast makes the reading of this work all the more interesting. The author states that it was the present Lord Abbot of the Wat who persuaded him to undertake this work, himself contributing a preface mentioning that he had been entertaining great admiration for the Prince Paramānujit but did not feel himself capable of doing full justice to the great poet. Then it appeared to him that the author would be such a man as would be able to write in the way he thinks fit.

It looks as if P̄ra Dharmakośācārya set out originally to write just *the Attributes* of the Prince which in fact forms the first chapter. This is a biography occupying pages 1-28. Naturally he would turn to the Prince's writings which would give us characterisation of the man. So we have the literary criticism of what our author considered to have been his *chef d'oeuvre*, the poetical romance of *Samudaghos*. This criticism emphasizes the Prince's eloquence and romantic imagination

combined with an extensive knowledge of the standard Pali classics of the time. A full analysis of the romance is given and commendation of the poem's eloquence is freely given. It should be noted that the author's realisation that the Prince's ability to appreciate mediaeval romance was a feature of the romantic poem. (pp. 28-86) The most famous of the Prince's works is then examined—the *Taley Pāi*—or 'the Defeat of the Taley'. It was then a mistaken idea that the people whom we defeated were the Mons in league with the Burmese. In whatever case this epic poem remains still alive on the lips of school children; is still quoted by those who love epic poetry young and old of the present generation and it seems evident that our monastic author is still carried away by its patriotic eloquence (pp. 87-178).

One cannot help remarking that another poem of eloquence which is almost as popular as *The Advice of Krishnā to her Sister* has not been included in this book. In spite of its somewhat unnatural theme it should be in here for its eloquence is well known.

To sum up the work under review is something worthy of attention.

319. Vibhāvadi Rangsit, Princess: *Letters to a friend during the state visit of their Majesties to America*, จดหมายถึงเพื่อนเรื่องตามเสด็จอเมริกา Pīraçand Press, Bangkok, ill. 2503, pp. 148.

These letters, written by a woman, are not made up of female gossip, fashion notes etc; but contain, under a veneer which may seem to suggest such topics, much that the average reader would find that he or she could 'read, mark and learn' from the wealth of graphic description of the topography, the scenery, the life and the social aspect of the great nation on the other side of the oceans. They contain moreover interesting information on the economic development and enterprises and at the same time do not neglect to give us a view of the human side of the American ideal of life. All through the book one realises the hard work entailed in writing this book for the author was attached to the royal suite, participated in all the social and ceremonial happenings that go to make up a state visit, served not only as the Queen's lady-in-waiting but also very often as the sovereign's secretary and at the same time had to do packing and repacking

every two or three days of the really strenuous journey of over a month covering more than the mileage of an air journey round the world, in which protocol required changes of dress quite often if not as exacting as if the trip was through Europe.

As to the American continent it is so well known to the world's reading public that the author's general description of it would not command as much attention as it might deserve. The state of Hawaii, on the other hand, by reason of its having been an independent kingdom up to quite recently and of its position midway between the continents of America and Asia, is a topic of interest from both the historical and botanical aspects. The rest of the United States nevertheless offers much interest in point of their being the home of great enterprises in industry and commerce and the home of a people which have been particularly friendly to us on this side of the Pacific especially since we have become the vanguard against an aggressive political movement that may in time bridge the ocean on her either flank.

320. Vibhāvadi Rangsit, Princess: *Their Majesties' Official Visits to Pakistan and Malaya*, เรื่องเสด็จพระราชดำเนินไปที่สถานและสหพันธ์มลายา
 P̄raçand Press, Bangkok, 2505, ill. pp. 142 etc.

The account is written in the form of a diary. It has, more than most travelogues, observations of a literary and historical nature a feature which may be perhaps attributable to the long line of her ancestors noted for their literary attainments. The author has already made her name in fiction, her books being widely read all over the remotest parts of the Kingdom. She has now enlarged her field of activity by writing accounts of the state visits in which she has had the unique opportunity of close observation and access to the highest quarters. We find here therefore not only descriptions of the lordly mansions initiated by the British Raj when it had charge of the destinies of this part of the world which are now inherited by the Pakistani government and offered to the guests of the state, but also of the present government's observation of international courtesy and protocol. One cannot help remarking upon her attention paid to the traditional Siamese nomenclature of places and personalities, once widely known in Siam but since given up in favour of the dreadfully

distorted versions adopted by the badly informed intelligentsia of British rulers, such for instance as the Anglo-Indian Muttra for Mathurā, and the Greek-based name of Patna for Pātaliputra, the Greek-based names of Menander and Taxila for the widely known Thai Milinda and Takkasila. Peshawar, however, though in close proximity with the former capital of the Gandhāra kingdom, is not that capital but the Sanskrit Purushapura. The capital has now been identified with a group of ruins at the village of Charsadda, which may be believed to have been the old Pushkarāvati, the seat of Emperor Kanishka's government. West Pakistan indeed covers a ground of that Indian Buddhist culture which inspired our own Buddhist traditions. Its connection with the *Jātaka* and the story of Rāma was considerable. The reviewer, for example, noticed in the maps to the west of lower West Pakistan a name of the ancient capital Sibī, the seat of the bodhisattva's kingdom. On enquiry however he was told that Sibī was known to be an old site but nothing else was known of it. Sibī is nevertheless well known here in our country by name because of its connection with the story of Prince Vessantara, an apostle of liberality; though we have never looked upon the name as a possible archeological reality.

As might be expected the Princess devotes considerable attention to food and delicacies of the table as well as to the interior decoration of houses. As for general descriptions the author has not neglected to present the more important data, such as the observation that while East Pakistan is thickly populated, exceeding West Pakistan by some eight millions, her extent is only one sixth of the latter. She feeds moreover the whole country including the Western partner.

Although Malaya-before the days of 'Malaysia'—appears in the title of the book, there is only a skeleton programme of the visit which is however copiously illustrated.

321. *The Story of the Sihala Image* นิทานพระพุทธรูปสีหิงค์ Pali text by the Ven. Bodhirāṅsi, new translation into Siamese by Dr. S. Manavītūn with critical notes, ill. Sivaṇṇ Press, Bangkok, 2506, pp. 79.

The author was a resident of Chienmai (1402-1442). The "story" consisted of eight canto in prose scattered with verses and

entitled the *Sihingānidāna*. It was translated into Siamese in 1906 by Luāṅ P̄rasroeth, well known through the *History of Siam* of the reign of King Nārāi which he presented to the National Library. It has been published now and then since as the *Tammān P̄ra Buddha Sihingā* but without the Pali text. The present publication of Pali text and a new translation into Siamese owes its origin to the initiative of the Director-General of the Fine Arts Department and was intended primarily for presentation to monks who visited the Museum during the festival of the Soṅkrānt of 2506 (1963).

The book under review contains photographs of each of the 3 Sihala Images claiming to be the original one of the name. The verdict on these claims has not yet been given.

According, then, to the story of the book under review, a meeting took place 700 years after the *parinibbāna* of Our Lord the Buddha between royalty and 20 saints (arahats) which discussed what the Buddha looked like. A *nāga* turned up from nowhere who claimed that he knew the likeness of the Lord. On the invitation of the assemblage he transformed himself through miraculous powers into a likeness but disappeared within a short time. The assemblage then helped one another to create a likeness as far as they could remember and naming it the Sihala Buddha set it up to worship. The fame of the Sihala Image became widely spread and the King of Sukhodaya in conjunction with the King of Nakorn Sridharmarāj sent a mission to the King of Sihala to beg to share in the worship of the famous image. The request was acceded to but on the way across the ocean it was shipwrecked; but through its supernatural power it floated to its destination. The King of Nakorn Sridharmarāj in paying great respect to it prayed the image to give some manifestation of its sanctity. Thereupon the image ascended into the sky, radiating a halo of glory all over the landscape. At that time the valiant P̄ra Ruāṅ of Sukhodaya was present on the scene. He prayed the image to move to his state of Sukhodaya; where he held high festival and adored it. The narrative mentions here a glaring historical inaccuracy, for it says that this valiant King by the name of P̄ra Ruāṅ was succeeded by his son Bān Mūaṅ, who in turn was succeeded by his son Lidaya, whose son Lūdaya succeeded him later. All these kings adored the Sihala

Image. It was then taken to the southern state by 'Rāma of Ayudhyā'. Then followed further peregrinations between Kampēṅṅēj, Chieṅmai, Chieṅrāi, in between which time a model of the venerated image was made. Finally there remain a Sihala Image in Chieṅmai, another one in Bangkok, and a third in Nakorn Sridharmarāj

One cannot but feel in reading the above jumble of traditions that the main objective of the story was not a historical narrative but an eulogy of the Sihala Image. From the historical point of view the first period in Ceylon is not substantiated by Singhalese history. Not even a mere mention of its name occurs in the longwinded *Mahāvāṅsa*. One might note the statement that when the Sihala Image was in Nakorn Sridharmarāj it 'ascended unto the heavens'. The implication seems to be that it returned to earth and was taken to Sukhodaya. Could we take this to mean that there were already two images? The third one would surely be the 'model' made during the peregrinations in the north. The suppositions above are admittedly 'tall'. In any case it is not the duty of a humble reviewer to solve the problem of the genuine image. Perhaps it now remains a problem for the historian of plastic art. From the point of view of the average reader one must bear in mind the remarkable sanctity attached in each locality to their individual Sihala Image. After all they are representative of an ideal of hallowed memory and a highly respected personality.