

Reviews

Divination au Royaume de Siam: Le corps, la guerre, le destin translated from Siamese and introduced by Pattaratorn Chirapravati, translated into French by Nicolas Revire (Paris: Collection Sources, Presses Universitaires de France; Geneva: Fondation Martin Bodmer). ISBN 978-2-13-058854-2

This publication is not a book but a box. Inside the box is a book of 108 pages, and a mock-up of a *samut thai* accordion book with 78 folds, each fold measuring 36 x 12 cms, mostly printed on both sides, with end-covers printed to resemble wood. The book contains an introduction by ML Pattaratorn Chirapravati and a French translation of the text.

The manuscript has three parts: a tract on prediction from a warfare manual, occupying 51 folds; a manual of therapeutic massage, occupying 14 folds; and a manual of divination, occupying 58 folds. Finding three different categories of text in one manuscript is unusual, and Pattaratorn argues convincingly that it was probably compiled at the request of a foreigner, and was possibly unfinished, as several pages were left blank. On grounds of the calligraphy, orthography, and style of illustration, Pattaratorn dates the manuscript to the first half of the 19th century, and most probably the 1830s. The original is in the collection of the Fondation Martin Bodmer in Geneva, but this publication presents no details on its provenance.

The section from a warfare manual has illustrations of the sun, moon, clouds, stars, rainbows and fog with notes indicating what result is predicted. The illustrations and the predictions are similar to those found in a 1793 manual kept in the National Library and published in facsimile form a few years ago, but not exactly the same. In particular, the 1793 manuscript is inscribed in white on black *khoi* paper, whereas this is the reverse. Pattaratorn speculates that this extract might be based on a copy seen in 1825 by Adolf Bastian but since lost.

The manual of massage has diagrams of a male and female body, indicating pressure points for the fingers, with notes on the therapeutic value of each spot, but no instructions on the technique of massage. Pattaratorn notes the evident similarity with the medical manuals inscribed on the walls at Wat Pho in the 1830s, but makes no close comparison.

The manual of divination is clearly in the form known as *Phrommachat*. It contains various grids, diagrams, pictures, stories and lists to be used for various kinds of divination including: good and bad days for various enterprises; days for wearing new clothes; compatibility of marriage partners and outcome of the match in

terms of longevity, number of children, and order of death; and miscellaneous other systems of prediction. It covers various systems of prediction, including the Three-tiered Umbrella and *naga* methods, though unfortunately the associated diagrams are not included.

The facsimile of the *samut thai* is a thing of beauty and a work of art and ingenuity in itself. Unfolded, it is over 9 metres long, achieved by some neat gluing. All this comes at a cost. The price on Amazon UK is £34.10.

Publishing such works in facsimile form is very important, because it preserves the spelling, handwriting, and graphic style which have messages of their own. As noted, there are other versions of military and massage manuals that are more comprehensive and with better provenance. Possibly the *Phrommachat* section on general prediction is the most interesting part of this text because no similar manuscripts of equivalent age have been published, as far as I know. We know that the art of prediction was vital for kings (and probably others) as far back as records stretch, and remains a flourishing business today. Yet, there is very little study of the genre. Perhaps publications such as this will prompt further study.

The extract from a military manual is solely about predictions based on phenomena in the sky. The full manuals also have sections on recruitment, weaponry, battlefield formations and tactics. Even so, systems of prediction occupy a very large space in these manuals. What does that tell us? Also, the predictions are highly intricate. Even this extract lists around a hundred different appearances of the sun, around fifty of the moon, and over a hundred of cloud shapes, stars, shooting stars, rainbows, lightning bolts and thunderclaps. How did the adept look at the sun? How could he decide whether a cloud resembled a woman giving birth to a crocodile (meaning the enemy will win) rather than four goats in single file, or the Buddha in tears? Although the listings sometimes seem to have an arbitrary character, there are clearly some guiding principles. The sun and rainbows mostly predict what will befall the king. The moon predicts such matters as rain, rice output, and general happiness or unhappiness. And so on. There is a language and principle behind such prediction which is obscured by the style of presentation, which often recalls Jorge Luis Borges' famous list of animals.

The manual of general prediction is similar to modern *Phrommachat* volumes in presenting a bundle of different methods of prediction – based on birth time, coincidences of the calendar, numerology, planets, and other methods. Interestingly, this text is set out not as a catalogue (the usual form of old texts) or a do-it-yourself guide (the usual form of modern manuals), but as a teaching guide. By the 1830s, were there prediction schools, or a market for self-learning guides?

While the catalogue form resembles modern manuals, the subjects predicted are very different. Modern manuals do not start off with predictions about troop movements. Nor do they predict the good and bad days for starting a journey or wearing a new piece of clothing, since such events are now more everyday than

special. More significantly, modern manuals are largely taken up with predicting an individual's good or bad fortune based on birth date, selecting a good time for any action, and selecting a good name. They are very much geared to the individual and to a search for general good fortune. The early 19th century extract presented here is more geared to events of different kinds, and are rather more specific. For example, if you have some clothing made on the fifth day of the waxing moon, you will gain elephants, horses and cattle.

Over half of the extract on prediction is devoted to marriage. While modern manuals also cover this subject, the early 19th century text is striking for its complexity. Besides the usual systems for choosing partners based on age and animal year of birth, there are more complex systems for divining what will become of the match. For example, if the difference between the partner's ages is 1, 5, or 7 they will love one another passionately, but if 7, 8, or 10 they will kill each other. Multiplying and dividing the ages can predict the number of children, and combinations of birth years predict how much wealth and how many dependents the couple will accumulate, and even which of them will predecease the other. What does this tell us about marriage in early 19th century Siam?

The style chosen for rendering the French in parts seems a little odd. The sentence form is transposed and the vocabulary a little high-flown, such as "Quand ainsi le soleil apparaître, abondantes les pluies seront." Yet the Thai is strikingly plain and simple, with almost no Pali words, and in English would translate as "When the sun looks like this, it will rain heavily." The style is utilitarian rather than poetic.

This is a fascinating publication and we owe a great debt to all those involved. With luck, it will inspire more study of the topics covered, especially of systems of prediction and their importance in old Siam.

Chris Baker

Chronicle of Sipsòng Panna: History and Society of a Tai Lü Kingdom Twelfth to Twentieth Century by Liew-Herres Foon Ming, Volker Grabowsky and Renoo Wichasin (Chiang Mai, Mekong Press, 2012). ISBN 978-616-9053-3-9

The affairs of the Sipsòng Panna Kingdom in Southern Yunnan are entangled with those of other Tai polities in the Upper Mekong basin, particularly Lan Na, Lan Sang, Chiang Tung and Moeng Laem. By rendering into English for the first time four versions of Sipsòng Panna chronicles written in Tai Lü with the Dhamma script, this book has made a significant body of source materials accessible to historians.

It has not been an easy task, because these chronicles bear the imprint of Sipsòng Panna's location within the orbit of the Chinese state and demand from the translators proficiency in Chinese language, script and history in addition to the normal skills required for Tai studies. The situation is further complicated by the

fact that the oldest known version, the History of Moeng Lü (Text 1), no longer survives in the original Tai Lü; that text was apparently lost sometime between 1944 and 1946 (see xix & p.78). For that reason it had to be rendered from the Chinese translation made by Li Fuyi 李拂一 in 1943 (but not published until 1947). Even the translation of Text III had to be prepared from the Tai Lü text published by Li Fuyi in 1947. Though the translators have used Tai Lü texts for three versions, they have closely collated them with Chinese renditions of all four versions by Li Fuyi and Gao Lishi 高立士, and annotated the discrepancies in copious footnotes. It is patently clear that the Chinese translations have played a pivotal role in the compilation of this book. Such heavy dependence on the efforts of Chinese scholars is highly unusual in the study of Tai chronicles, and reflects the intricacy surrounding the preservation and transmission of Tai script manuscripts in Yunnan.

It would be rare to find a single scholar accomplished in all of the necessary expertise, so it is most appropriate and prudent, indeed, that this volume is a collective effort by three extremely competent and experienced specialists. The first author, Foon Ming Liew-Herres, is an authority on the history and historiography of the Ming dynasty,¹ who has in the past collaborated with the second author Volker Grabowsky in translating Chinese sources on Sino-Tai relations in Yunnan and Continental Southeast Asia.² Grabowsky, a leading historian of Lan Na and north-western Laos, advocates writing the history of Tai polities from an indigenous perspective.³ Renoo Wichasin, a philologist and a doyen of Tai manuscript studies, has collaborated closely with Grabowsky in the translation of Tai Lü chronicles before,⁴ and her hand is visible throughout, especially in the sections concerning the characteristics of the Tai Lü language and script (pp. 98–104), and the transcription of Ming dynasty Tai Lü sources into modern Thai.

The principal contents of this book comprise a lengthy ninety-nine page introduction, followed by the annotated translations of the four versions (231 printed pages), and concludes with five appendixes and a detailed bibliography. The appendixes contain a genealogical table of the rulers of Sipsòng Panna, English translations of rare early Ming sources concerning the kingdom, including a bilingual memorial submitted by Tao Sam Pò Lütai (reigned in second half of the 15th century)

¹ Liew-Herres Foon Ming, *Annotated Sources of Ming History: Including Southern Ming and Works on Neighbouring Lands, 1368–1661*, 2011.

² For instance, see her translations of Yuan and Ming sources on Lan Na in Liew-Herres Foon Ming and Volker Grabowsky (in collaboration with Aroonrut Wichienkeo), *Lan Na in Chinese Historiography: Sino-Tai Relations as Reflected in the Yuan and Ming Sources (13th to 17th centuries)*, Bangkok, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 2008.

³ Volker Grabowsky. “Chiang Khaeng 1893-1896: A Lue Principality in the Upper Mekong Valley at the Center of Franco-British Rivalry”, in Christopher E. Goscha and Søren Ivarsson (eds), *Contesting Visions of the Lao Past: Lao Historiography at the Crossroads*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2003.

⁴ Volker Grabowsky and Renoo Wichasin, *Chronicles of Chiang Khaeng: a Tai Lü Principality of the Upper Mekong*, Honolulu, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Hawai’i, 2008.

to the imperial court, photographic reproductions of two wooden seals reputedly issued during the Qing and Republican periods, and a Modern Thai transcription and English translation of an inscription at a monastery in Moeng Cae dated 1994. An impressively large amount of first-hand data has been put into English for the first time.

The translation of the chronicles, which forms the main body of the book, recounts the history of the Sipsòng Panna kingdom from 1180 until 1950 through the reigns of forty to forty-four rulers, depending on the version; all rulers seem to have been directly descended from the founder Phaya Coeng (r.1180-1192). Phaya Coeng established the capital in 1190 at a place named Chiang Lan, where a Lua chieftain named Ai Lan formerly resided. The chronicles detail the rulers before the mid 16th century Burmese conquest of the Tai world, include the advent of tributary relations with China during the reign of the second ruler Tao Khai Noeng (r. 1192–1211), and later record vassal ships to Burmese dynasties from the reign of Cao Nò Moeng (r. 1530–1568), after which the kingdom owed fealty to the two dynastic giants. In 1991, Hasegawa Kiyoshi 長谷川清 published a study of the dual Chinese-Burmese overlordship, which pertained until the 19th century, but it has passed unnoticed by the sorrowful mischance of being written in Japanese.⁵ The Chronicles relate the political instability fomented by swearing fidelity to two thrones as well as the duplicity engendered by such an arrangement. Succession was no foregone conclusion, and claims to the throne by rival factions of the ruling house often caused havoc and harm whenever they sought political and military backing from China and Burma for their claimants, a phenomenon most pronounced during the period between 1818 and 1857. The account in Text II takes us up to the last ruler of the Kingdom Cao Mòm Kham Lü (Dao Shixun), who reigned from 1947 to 1950, and contains a narrative of the “Cow Cushion War” of 1913.

The numerous annotations given in the footnotes are immensely valuable because they enable readers to follow the differences and correspondences with other Tai Chronicles, Chinese and even European sources. Though highly readable, general readers may find the scholarly translation heavy going, yet the academic apparatus is absolutely essential to ensure the accurate transmission of fresh information. In fact, the authors should be highly commended for their linguistic juggling from Chinese into Tai Lü and Burmese in their translation of Text 1. Since the original text has been long lost, they have had to reconvert back into Tai Lü and Burmese the names of people, official titles and administrative units, toponyms, and myriad other terms from Chinese (see pp. 95–100). The present reviewer

⁵ Hasegawa Kiyoshi, “Chichi naru Chūgoku Haha naru Biruma: Shipuson Panna Ōken to sono ‘Gaibu’ 父なる中国・母なるビルマ—シプソンパンナー王権と其の《外部》(China is our Father, Burma is our Mother: Royal power in Sipsòng Panna and the ‘Outside’)”. In Matsubara Masatake 松原正毅 ed., *Ōken no Isō 王権の位相* (Phases of Royal Power) Tokyo, Kōbundō 弘文堂, 1991, pp. 380–408.

vividly remembers finding the Chinese version of Text 1 laborious to read precisely because the Chinese transliterations of Tai Lü titles and special terms did not always ring bells. Impenetrability has deterred scholars writing in English from using it extensively in the past. By reversion into terminology consistent with normal academic conventions they have rendered great service to Tai studies. Given the complexities, this is truly quite an achievement, which should not be under-rated.

The introduction is most erudite and informative. It provides an overview of the history and society of Sipsòng Panna within the context of the Tai world, and enriches our bibliographical understanding of the chronicles by elucidating details of the four versions translated as well as another nine Tai Lü sources used for corroboration (pp. 88–93). It includes information gathered by ear on the spot in Yunnan. Despite its thoroughness, I feel that the authors have been too reticent in discussing how important material made available by their translation contributes to our understanding of some of the larger urgent issues in the history of the Tai world. One that stands out particularly is the political power of Mon-Khmer ethnic groups and their role in the formation of Tay polities.

The foundation date of 1180 assigns a longer time depth to the Sipsòng Panna kingdom than Lan Na (the authors do not discuss the significance of this fact), but similarities, such as the erection of the capital on the site of a Lua (Lawa) chieftain and the marriage of rulers with Lua women, suggests similar trends at work. In the introduction, the authors carefully note the close relationship between Tai and Kha (hill peoples) in the formation of Tai Lü polities, but they do not discuss these similarities, or even make comparisons with the well-known case of the role of the Lua in the establishment of Lan Na. This issue, raised during the 1990s by Cholthira Satyawadhna and Aroonrut Wichienkeo, has gone by the wayside in recent years,⁶ relegated to the realm of myth due to a seeming lack of contemporaneous historical sources. The data presented in this set of translations confirms the active participation of Lua in the creation of moeng, and calls for more serious consideration of the significance of non-Tai participation in Tai polity formation. Given the authoritative line-up of the authors, it is a pity that they have avoided deep discussion of this major issue.

As a rule of thumb, the closer the Tai to Yunnan, the more information we can glean from Chinese sources to verify and supplement the chronicles. Sipsòng Panna is certainly no exception. Throughout the annotations, the authors extensively refer to corroborative Chinese sources, especially for the Ming period, but have overlooked a valuable source that I shall comment on here.

⁶ See Cholthira Satyawadhna, “Ethnic Inter-relationships in the History of Lanna: Reconsidering the Lwa Role in the Lanna Scenario”, *Tai Culture*, Vol. 2. No. (December 1997), pp. 6–29; and Aroonrut Wichienkeo, “Lawa (Lua): A Study from Palm-Leaf Manuscripts and Stone Inscriptions”, in Hayashi Yukio and Yang Guangyuan, ed, *Dynamics of Ethnic Cultures Across National Boundaries in Southwestern China and Mainland Southeast Asia: Relations, Societies and Languages*, Chiang Mai, Lanna Cultural Center, 2000, pp. 138–153.

For the 18th and 19th centuries, the authors refer to the *Qing Shilu* (清實錄 Veritable records of the Qing) often for the purpose of verifying the accession and demise of Tai rulers. This is sound procedure, yet memorials submitted to the throne by high ranking Imperial officials in Yunnan, preserved by the National Palace Museum in Taipei, also contain important first hand data not recorded in the chronicles or the *Qing Shilu*. For instance, the memorials document in detail the revolt of 1728 that broke out due to widespread dissatisfaction among hill peoples against malpractices by Han traders who purchased tea in the mountains under the administration of Moeng Ham, a constituent domain of Sipsòng Panna. This revolt shook the political structure of the kingdom to its foundations.⁷ Claiming that incompetence by the incumbent ruler Tao Cin Pao (r. 1724–1729) exacerbated the trouble, the Qing court annexed Sipsòng Panna territory east of the Mekong River and put it under the administration of imperial bureaucrats in 1729. Nothing concerning this event, which surely must have constituted a crisis of state for the kingdom, is recorded in the chronicles. In the end, however, the direct administration proved impracticable, and Tai rulers were left to govern most of their original territory. Nevertheless, the annexation was significant for it launched the polity on the path towards full incorporation into the Chinese state, a long journey that terminated in its final elimination in 1950.⁸

This event preceded by over 180 years the advent of stronger Chinese control over the kingdom in 1913 by the Chinese Resident Commissioner Ke Shuxun 柯樹勳, who was stationed at the capital Chiang Rung (Jinghong). Text III briefly records Ke's introduction of a poll tax and a military campaign (pp. 304, 309), and the authors characterise his regime as "Sipsòng Panna under Chinese Rule" (p. 69). In actual fact, Ke found it impossible to directly govern the kingdom due to the inability of the Tai populace to comprehend administrative directives issued in Chinese and the vastly different structure of their society. This compelled him to allow the paramount Tai ruler and his bureaucracy to govern as before, thus preserving the polity. This marked the second attempt by the Chinese to implement direct rule, and they did not succeed in abolishing the ruler and his bureaucracy until 1950. Counting from the first attempt in 1729, it took 221 years for the polity of Sipsòng Panna to be fully incorporated into the Chinese state!⁹

⁷ For instance, National Palace Museum, ed, *Gongzhongdang Yongzhengchao Zouzhe* (宮中木+當雍正朝奏摺 Secret Palace Memorials of the Yongzheng Period: Qing Documents at the National Palace Museum), Taipei: National Palace Museum Press, 1977–1980, Volume 9.

⁸ Christian Daniels, "Yōsei shichinen Shinchō ni yoru Shipuson panna Ōkoku no Chokkatsuchika ni tsuite; Taikai minzoku ōkoku wo yurugasu sanchimin ni kansuru ichikōsatsu" 雍正七年清朝によるシプソンパンナー王国の直轄地化について—タイ系民族王国を揺るがす山地民に関する一考察 (The Annexation of Sipsòng Panna by the Qing dynasty in 1729; an examination of hill peoples who rocked the foundations of a Tay Kingdom), *Tōyōshi Kenkyū* 東洋史研究, 62: 4 (March 2004), pp. 694–728.

⁹ Christian Daniels, "Seinan Chūgoku Shan Bunkaken ni okeru Hikanzoku no Jiritsuteki Seiken;

Memorials presented to the throne sometimes report demographic data and other information concerning Tai society. For instance, in the disturbances of 1728 whole villages in Meong Ham fled south into present-day Laos out of fright. Hao Yulin 郝玉麟, the Yunnan Provincial Military Commander 雲南提督, was forced to abandon brute force and formulate a pacification policy in order to repopulate the area. He absolved Tao Cin Pao of responsibility for the revolt, and restored confidence in the authority of the paramount leader and his regime. This measure proved effective, and by the first lunar month of the seventh year of the Yongzheng reign (1729/30), Hao had already managed to repatriate 8,100 people (1,600 odd households).¹⁰ According to another source, the *Dian Yun Linian Zhuan* 滇雲歷年傳 (A Chronological Record of [Events] in Yunnan) by the scholar Ni Tui 倪蛻, a total of 12,300 odd households, numbering about 20,000 to 30,000 men and women, were ultimately repaired to their homes in Sipsòng Panna.¹¹ Such house-enumeration statistics demonstrate the levels of displacement caused by the revolt.

It is curious that the authors do not discuss the antiquity and implications of the term Moeng Lü, apart from suggesting that it preceded the term Sipsòng Panna. In their introduction they state “*muang* was the older concept” and “*panna* was obviously a later structure imposed on the network of *muang*” (p. 29). They collectively refer to all four versions under the rubric of Moeng Lü Chronicles, a designation that translates the title of the earliest version Text I, which apparently was compiled sometime during the late 19th or early 20th century (pp. 52, 78). The title of the Chinese rendition of Text I is *Leshi* 勒史 (literally the history of the Lü), while that of the original Tay text, according to the compilers of this book, is *Nangsü Pün Moeng Lü* (p. 74). Though the authors do not comment on the first literary reference to Moeng Lü, its long usage can be verified by an early Sino-Tai vocabulary from the Baiyi (Tai) College 百夷 (literally “hundred barbarians”). This College was one of the eight colleges at the Siyiguan 四夷館 (“College of Translators for the Barbarians of the Four Quarters”), set up in accordance with an order issued by the Yongle emperor in 1407 for the purpose of handling the translation of documents submitted by foreign tribute missions. It was inaugurated roughly a hundred years before the establishment by the Ming of the translation college for

Sipsòng Panna Ōkoku no Kaido Kiryū wo Jitsurei ni 西南中国・シャム文化圏における非漢族の自律的政権—シブソンパンナー王国の改土帰流を実例に— (Autonomous Non-Han Regimes in Southwest China and the Tai Cultural Area: an attempt at *gaitu guiliu* in the Sipsòng Panna polity), *Ajia Afurika Bunka Kenkyūjo Kenkyū Nenpō* アジア・アフリカ文化研究所研究年報, No. 34 (March 2000), pp. 56–70.

¹⁰ National Palace Museum, ed, *Gongzhongdang Yongzhengchao Zouzhe*, Vol. 12, pp. 315–316.

¹¹ Ni Tui 倪蛻, *Dian Yun Linian Zhuan* 滇雲歷年傳 (A Chronological Record of [Events] in Yunnan), Kunming 昆明, Yunnan Daxue Chubanshe 雲南大学出版社 1992, pp. 600–601. It was first published in 1846. Its accounts of early Yunnan history are not always reliable, but its records of the 18th century contain data not found in other sources.

Fak Kham script and 170 years before the college for Ayudhya script.¹² The Sino-Tai vocabulary titled the *Baiyi Guan Zazi* 百夷館雜字 (“The Miscellaneous Characters of the Baiyi College”) lists Meng Le 猛勒 (Moeng Lü) as the Tai equivalent of Cheli 車里 (Chinese name for Sipsòng Panna).¹³ The Japanese linguist Izui Hisanosuke 泉井久之助 romanised the Tai equivalent of Meng Le as Mōng Löw.¹⁴ Since the extant *Baiyi Guan Zazi* manuscript dates to the 16th century,¹⁵ we can substantiate that the word Moeng Lü emerged in literary sources at roughly the same time as the term Sipsòng Panna, if not earlier. According to the authors, the first reference to Sipsòng Panna in the chronicles occurred during the reign of Cao In Moeng (r. 1569–1598, Text 1; see p. 159 fn 292).

The book comes with nine maps, including two historical maps from Chinese sources as well as one from British archives and another from French archives. They are useful aids, particularly for Tai studies scholars who may be unfamiliar with the historical geography of Yunnan. Unfortunately, there are inaccuracies in the plotting and romanisation of some toponyms which may mislead readers. In Map 2 “Dai (Tai) Settlements in Yunnan”, Ruili and Moeng Mao are marked as separate places, when, in fact, the former is the Chinese name for the latter; from the location on the map Ruili may have been an error for Mangshi (Moeng Khòn), the capital of the Dehong Autonomous Region. On the same map Genma should read Gengma. Map 8 “Eighteen Aboriginal Commissions in the Early Nineteenth Century” also contains imprecise romanisation:

3. Chuqiong should be Chuxiong

15. Wiengmu should be Manmu

16. Wiengding should be Mengding

17. Ganya should be read Gan'ai. The character 崖 now read ya in Mandarin is read ai in Yunnan. Gan'ai is the Chinese name for Moeng La (now Yingjing 盈江). La (or Na in Southern Shan) means face or front.

22. Menglian should be Mengdian.

¹² Christian Daniels, “Script Without Buddhism: Burmese Influence on the Tay (Shan) Script of Mäng² Maaw² as seen in a Chinese Scroll Painting of 1407”, *International Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 9, Issue 2 (July 2012), pp. 147–176.

¹³ The *Baiyi Guan Zazi* is included in the *Huayi Yiyu* 華夷譯語 (“Translated Words of the Chinese and Barbarians”). No name of compiler, date unknown. Ms. held by the Toyo Bunko 東洋文庫, Tokyo, Japan. It contains the *Zazi* (雜字 The Miscellaneous Characters) and *Laiwen* (來文 Incoming Correspondence) of nine colleges; Dada (韃靼 Tartars or eastern Mongols), Nuzhi (女直 Jurchen), Huihui (回回 Muslims), Xifan (西番 Tibet), Gaochang (高昌), Baiyi (百夷 Tay), Miandian (緬甸 Burmese), Babai (八百 Lanna polity) and the Xuanluo (暹羅 Ayudhya) colleges. Since the latter two colleges were only set up during the 16th century we can assume that this hand-copy was done after 1579 (Wanli 萬曆7) when the Xuanluo College was established.

¹⁴ Izui Hisanosuke 泉井久之助 *Hikaku Gengo Kenkyu* 比較言語學研究 (Studies in Comparative Linguistics) Osaka: Sogensha 創元社, 1949, p. 220.

¹⁵ Christian Daniels, “Script Without Buddhism”, p. 153.

In recent years, interest in the Tai world outside Thailand and Laos has surged, and this high-quality, annotated translation is most welcome because it furnishes us with primary source materials to fill the huge gap in our knowledge about the history of the largest Tai polity in Yunnan east of the Salween River. Of course, the attributes of this path-breaking set of translations far outweigh the minor flaws in the maps and the typos, for it multiplies our ability to make comparisons with other polities in the Upper Mekong basin. Undoubtedly, it will soon assume status similar to that of Sao Saimong Mangrai's translations of the Chiang Tung Chronicles, and David Wyatt / Aroonrut Wichienkeo's rendition of the Chiang Mai Chronicle, garnering plaudits for the authors.

Christian Daniels

The Tale of Khun Chang Khun Phaen: Siam's Great Folk Epic of Love and War translated and edited by Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2010). Hardback: ISBN: 978-974-9511-98-5 (two-volume set); paperback: ISBN: 978-616-215-045-6.

Khun Chang Khun Phaen (KCKP) is a great epic not only of love and war – but also of treachery, violence, magic, romance, sex, male chauvinism, bawdy humor and more, woven into a dense tapestry of colors, flavors, sounds, and emotions. Marveling at the sumptuous milieu of old Siamese customs, beliefs, and practices in which the story takes place, the great Thai linguist William J. Gedney, commented, “if all other information on traditional Thai culture were to be lost, the whole complex could be reconstructed from this marvelous text.”

The epic has long had a wide impact on many aspects of popular culture, including songs, sayings, movies, novels, magical amulets, and even cigarette cards. Its basic plot is a love triangle involving the fair, gentle Phim (who later takes the name Wanthong) and her childhood friends, Khun Chang, who is ugly and uncouth but rich, and Phlai Kaeo (later known as Khun Phaen), who is handsome and dashing, but lacking in wealth. Swept into relationships with each of them at different times for different reasons (romantic love with Khun Phaen, security with Khun Chang), Wanthong in the end is condemned to death because she cannot choose between them.

Along the way, Khun Phaen learns the lore of magic and sorcery which enables him to entice women and defeat his foes, while Khun Chang uses his wealth and wiles to bolster his position in society and win Wanthong. High points in the story include numerous occurrences of the classic Thai “wondrous scenes” or metaphors of tempestuous wind and waves used to describe love-making, Khun Phaen's creation of a spirit son and magical sword, his daring flight into the forest with Wanthong

astride the horse Color of Mist, and the frantic attempt to prevent Wanthong's execution.

Most of the action, apart from a military expedition to the north, takes place in the towns of Suphanburi, Kanburi and Phichit, at locations long abandoned, at some time around the early 17th century. Surrounding the main plot are common everyday events, such as births, deaths, funerals, and weddings, occurring in the lives of ordinary people, and told in the language of ordinary people, often with bold sexual overtones.

KCKP has been praised for its soaring poetic passages, criticized for its burlesque scenes and graphic portrayal of warfare, and condemned for its misogynistic ending. However, until a few years ago there existed no translation of the full text into a Western language because of the highly challenging nature of the task. Not only is the poem lengthy (a famous published edition consists of 40 volumes), it exists in various versions, has a complex history as a commoners' oral text that was transformed into a courtly written one, and is full of literary devices and references to cultural practices and beliefs, local flora and fauna, and other obsolete minutia that defy translation and are even difficult for Thais to understand.

In 2004, however, the husband and wife team of Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit took on that challenge. Baker, a researcher and resident of Thailand for over thirty years, and Pasuk, an economics professor at Chulalongkorn University, had already co-authored several books on Thai politics and history that earned them wide acclaim for their knowledge and insight. With their wide network of colleagues and contacts, the couple invited ideas, leads, comments and suggestions from everyone interested in contributing to knowledge about this iconic story. They made a working draft of the translation available online while they refined the language, organization, and references. The effort culminated in a brilliant and delightful two-volume, 1430-page opus published by Silkworm Books in 2010.

Anyone who has tried to translate classical Thai poetry understands the challenge of rendering into another language not only the meaning but also the essence and feeling of the original. Thai poetry is especially difficult to translate because it is based on elaborate patterns of meter, rhyme and alliteration, as well as a heavy infusion of loanwords from Khmer and Pali-Sanskrit, while completely ignoring grammatical structure. As Baker pointed out in one of his blogs, "the wording can be almost telegraphese. The reader has to supplement the syntax." Sensibly, the authors did not attempt a word-for-word translation or one in poetic form, but instead a prose rendition that captures the essence of the characters and their speech by way of the storyteller. The result is lively, straightforward, and readable. The phrases have a cadence that moves the reader along briskly though the long and winding plot. Sentences are alternately eloquent, informative, and earthy – as needed.

But Baker and Pasuk have done much more than translate the poem. Their detailed annotation serves as a cultural encyclopedia that defines esoteric terms,

explains metaphors, identifies place names, quotes literary authorities, and provides other clues that guide the reader through puzzling passages and references. In fact, the book is worth purchasing for these entries alone. Among the most fascinating is the staggering array of practices involving magical powers that Khun Phaen acquires as a Buddhist novice monk through his quest for knowledge of “inner ways” (*thang nai*) or hidden forces. These include powers derived from the use of mantras, yantras, charms and other occult practices sometimes involving use of bodies of those who had died a violent death. Much of the story hinges on the balance between these powers, human conflict and the desire for control, and the force of karma.

In terms of organization, the book consists of two thick volumes, each with a convenient ribbon place-marker. In Volume 1, comprising 836 pages, the action begins immediately after a two-page preface and a list of principal characters. The story starts with the birth of the three main characters and ends with Wanthong’s death. Following the translation are the various components of what might be called a users’ manual: a pronunciation guide for key proper names; a synopsis of the story; a timeline; maps; a glossary; and a detailed 69-page “afterword,” containing a wealth of information on the story’s origins and evolution, poetic features, physical landscape, and social setting.

Volume 2 presents a continuation of the story with additional episodes involving Khun Phaen’s son, alternative tellings of certain episodes of the basic narrative, two prefaces by Prince Damrong, and a catalogue of flora, fauna, costumes, weapons, and food in the text. Both volumes are heavily footnoted and lavishly sprinkled with 400 delightful illustrations by the gifted artist Muangsing Janchai, many based on old paintings and drawings, to help the reader visualize the setting.

And, for the convenience of readers who cannot commit to reading every page from beginning to end, the translators in their preface (p. x) suggest two approaches that exclude certain chapters and focus on the key episodes of the story. These shortcuts make sense because traditional oral performances usually consisted of a single episode rather than a set of acts narrating the entire story as in a Western play, and even in its early written forms, the story was not intended to be read cover to cover. Moreover, although all Thais are familiar with *KCKP* in some way or other, few have ever read or had to study more than a few lines, and these were often out of context.

Unlike other important works of Thai classical literature like the *Ramakien*, *Inaw*, and *Sam Kok*, which were courtly creations based on foreign (Indic, Javanese or Chinese) sources, *KCKP*’s plot is derived from a local tale, told and retold by ordinary storytellers as a means of entertainment. Moreover, its main characters are not the deities or kings found in court literature, but members of the minor local gentry and commoners who live their lives at the mercy at those with wealth and power.

As for its history, *KCKP* is thought to date back to around 1600 to a story about the death of a beautiful woman, which was passed along orally by storytellers

who embellished and expanded it over the years with outside episodes and bawdy comedy. Baker and Pasuk suggest that its continued popularity stemmed from its two core themes: 1) the situation of women living in a society in which they were unable to control their lives, and 2) the story of an ordinary man “pitted against wealth and power” (p. 886). Originally a commoners’ tale, it was adopted by the court around the early 18th century and revised repeatedly over the next two centuries. Along the way it was censored, revised, and edited, the most prominent edition of which was produced by Prince Damrong in 1917-18. This edition, in the form of a book that is divided into chapters, is the basis of the translation by Baker and Pasuk, who supplemented it with “roughly a hundred passages from older versions.” These include both printed versions and traditional accordion-folded paper manuscripts, including a 40-volume work published at Wat Ko (formally known as Wat Samphanthawong) in Bangkok in 1890, now in the University of Michigan’s William J. Gedney Collection. That edition includes many bawdy passages that Prince Damrong deleted in his edition out of a sense of overzealous propriety.

By assembling it all together into an historically accurate, highly readable work, Baker and Pasuk have created a stunning landmark contribution not only to the field of Thai literature, but to Thai art, performance, humanities, and social studies. Its references to gender relations, ceremonies, magical rites, social hierarchies, and myriad other aspects of life not only provide a wealth of evidence about the past but also raise countless questions for further study. Examples include the relative freedom of women of social classes, the role of the supernatural in everyday life, attitudes toward the forest, and the extent to which such beliefs and attitudes still impact outlooks and decision making today. Apart from serving as an encyclopedia of early Siamese culture, this book could comprise the basis of a syllabus for a semester-long college seminar on Thai literature, history, and traditions.

In November, 2012, according to the authors’ blog on the Silkworm Books website (<http://www.silkwormbooks.com/blogs/kckp/>), a paperback edition became available, containing 600 corrections (mostly technical edits and additions to the notes, only a handful or retranslations), attesting to Baker and Pasuk’s tireless dedication. The blog offers a wealth of insight into how they went about their work, with musings, events, performances, reviews, and updates. It also carries the news that they have completed a Thai text of *KCKP* based on the Wat Ko version. Let’s hope that their enthusiasm will inspire more translations of old Thai literature despite the difficulty of equaling the level of excellence they have achieved in translating this superb folk tale.

Bonnie Brereton

Thailand's Political Peasants: Power in the Modern Rural Economy by Andrew Walker (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012). ISBN 978-0-299-28824-2 (hard).

Anthropological research in Thailand began in 1949 with the Cornell University project to examine empirically the impact of modernization on rural Thailand. Bang Chan, the village in Minburi that was the focus of the Cornell project has long since disappeared, absorbed into greater Bangkok. Its disappearance was not, however, as Walker's new rich ethnographic book clearly demonstrates, the harbinger of the end of rural society in Thailand. Walker is one of a very few anthropologists today – and especially among anthropologists trained in the last decades of the twentieth century – who still sees relevance in the foundational project of asking how rural Thai society has been transformed by the influences of expanding state and market forces. The relevance stems from the fact that rural society not only continues to exist but that it has assumed a major, some would even say, a determinative role in Thai politics.

Walker's study is centered in a village he calls Ban Tiam in the Chiang Mai Valley of northern Thailand. The "village" designation requires some explanation since the term situates the residents both in a locally defined and demarcated locality known as a *ban* and in a local administrative unit known as a *muban*. Moreover, the *muban* is situated in an administrative "subdistrict" (*tambon*) and – unusually for rural Thailand – in a "municipality" (*thetsaban*) (see p. 62). In other words, the residents of Ban Tiam, like "villagers" throughout Thailand, belong and have long belonged to local worlds defined by local practices and are, at the same time, embedded in an administrative system determined by the central government. This double character of the village is key to understanding Walker's argument that "What is important in Ban Tiam's localism is that political society's relations with the state are mediated by appropriately embedded local actors" (p. 194). As I will suggest below, we must understand that Ban Tiam's localism, while sharing some characteristics with other localisms in rural Thailand today, also differs from them in some significant respects.

In contrast to theories prominent from the 1960s through the 1990s, Walker does not presuppose that rural relations with the modern state always entail "resistance", whether as overt protest movements or peasant rebellions or as what James Scott termed "everyday resistance", referring to how peasants subvert state policies in more nuanced ways. Walker, in contrast, argues that the "localism" of the village in Ban Tiam "seeks to draw the state into a socially and culturally legible field of meaning" (p. 194). By becoming active participants in the politics of the state, rural people in northern Thailand (and, it must be added, in northeastern Thailand) became the main source of power of the populist politician Thaksin Shinawatra and his Thai Rak Thai Party (and its successor the Pheu Thai Party). In short, Walker

has provided the most compelling case I have seen to date of why rural society in Thailand, as a consequence of marked increases in wealth especially since the late 1990s, today shapes national politics as much as Bangkok governments shape rural society.

Central to his argument is that the villagers of Ban Tiam are part of what he terms the “persistent peasantry” of Thailand, but a peasantry that has been transformed significantly because of marked increases in income. In the case of Ban Tiam, this increase has come about primarily because of expanded agricultural output that has been markedly facilitated by subsidization by the state. While Ban Tiam villagers have remained agricultural and while increases in household income have made them “middle income”, I find the “peasant” or even “middle income peasant” designation to be very problematic. The “peasant” has long been understood both in popular thought and by theorists, such as Robert Redfield, Eric Wolf, and Julian Steward, among others, as being a subsistence cultivator who utilizes a low level of technology for production, and produces a surplus, a portion of which is appropriated in the form of rent or taxes. In Thailand, the *chaona*, or rice-producer, was the traditional peasant. It is the image of the *chaona*, especially one behind a water buffalo pulling a plow or harrow, which continues to be dominant in urban middle class thought.

In Walker’s own description, the people who live in the rural village of Ban Tiam are very different to the traditional peasant. Most are still agriculturalists, but they are not subsistence farmers and cultivate a variety of cash crops, not just rice. They produce a much larger surplus than their forebears did, but today they sell most of this surplus for their own benefit, with rents and taxes constituting a very small proportion of their expenditures. And as Walker repeats numerous times in the book, agriculture by Ban Tiam villagers is today subsidized significantly by the state rather than being a major source of state income.

Just as Bang Chan did not represent the type of Thai village found throughout Thailand – having been established on what in the 19th century was a frontier, being constituted of households living in dispersed residences, and, especially, being located near Bangkok where many villagers could find non-agricultural work – so, too, Ban Tiam represents only one type of rural community in contemporary Thailand. In contrast to Ban Tiam, most village households in northeastern Thailand – which has by far the largest rural population of Thailand and where I have carried out long-term research – do not gain their income primarily from agriculture. Rather the major source of household income in the Northeast is non-farm labor, especially labor undertaken in urban Thailand or overseas. Rural households in central Thailand where there has long been commercialized agriculture and in southern Thailand where incomes are more likely to be generated from fishing and mining are again different to those in Ban Tiam.

Walker's study does, nonetheless, highlight one characteristic that is today found throughout rural Thailand – namely, that of political participation. Because of significant “middle-level” incomes (whether from agriculture or other sources), higher education (most rural dwellers, female as well as male, today have at least a 9th grade education), intense exposure to mass media (especially TV), and embeddedness in socio-political networks that entail many personal relations between rural and urban people, Thai villagers today belong to what Walker, following Partha Chatterjee, calls a “political society” as differentiated from a “civil society”. While participants in Thailand's civil society organizations that seek to protect local resource allocations tend to be drawn from members of the urban middle class, participants in Thailand's political society are predominantly rural. These participants “are concerned with channeling power in desired directions, negotiating deals, and striking a reasonable balance between private and public benefit” (p. 231). They reject, either explicitly or, in most cases, tacitly, the view advanced by the traditional ruling elite that only “good” or “virtuous” men should exercise power. While the political system based on elections is, according to Walker, “ragged”, it is, he concludes, “more likely to be able to deal with the warts-and-all realities of political life” (p. 231).

In sum, Walker's book has helped bring rural Thailand back to center stage both for social science scholarship and for understanding contemporary Thai political life. His book deserves a wide audience.

Charles Keyes

Bencharong and Chinaware in the Court of Siam: The Surat Osathanugra Collection by Jeffery Sng and Pim Praphai Bisalputra (Bangkok: Chawpipope Osathanugrah, 2011) ISBN: 978-616-207-069-3 (hard)

This is an excellent 286 page hard-cover quarto, full colour volume devoted to the collection of Thai industrialist, politician and serial collector, the late Surat Osathanugrah, and edited by renowned ceramics expert Bhujjong Chandavij. In an opening paragraph, the purpose of the book is stated as giving a wider exposure to the cultural treasures of Thailand, notably antique ceramics, many of which the collection, by its existence, prevented from being smuggled out of the country.

The term *bencharong* (or sometimes spelt in English as *benjarong*) refers to a class of colourful porcelain, or occasionally stoneware, ceramics that occur in a variety of shapes similar to those of Chinese export wares. They were produced primarily for utilitarian purposes and their forms are consequently simple with gentle contours. The most common items are covered and uncovered bowls, jars of different sizes, plates, stem or pedestal plates, spittoons, spoons, teapots and tea sets. Their exterior surfaces are completely covered with design motifs; the interiors are painted and decorated less elaborately. The colour combinations, especially of

red, yellow, black, white and green in the earlier wares gave rise to their descriptive name from the Sanskrit *pancha* and *ranga* — five colours — though other colours, including pink, purple and blue, were added in later pieces.

This volume under review is organised into twelve chapters commencing with a biographical study of Surat Osathanugrah (1930-2008), who compiled the entire collection over a period of some thirty years, but the collection of bencharong during only 3-4 years before his demise. The first of the chapters devoted to the collection deals with the rise of Chinese blue-and-white which pre-dated bencharong. The chapter is of considerable importance given the very strong influence of Chinese wares on bencharong though the relationship could have been made more explicit.

The second chapter introduces bencharong under the title “Bencharong of Iudia” and is printed in white on black pages, as are a number of illustrations in later chapters. There seems little benefit in this, neither does the introduction of the title of *Iudia*, given to Ayudhya, the regional capital of the province of the same name in central Thailand and whose ancient ruins were inscribed as a World Heritage site in 1992. Iudia appears in Vincenzo Coronelli’s map of 1696, but is no longer in common use. A modern map showing all geographical places to which reference is made would have been preferable to the two included — a small one in shades of grey based on a 1936 sketch map, and an historic (1683) Italian map covering mainland Southeast Asia and about two-thirds of Sumatra.

The two subsequent chapters, “Fall and Revival 1767-1809” and “The Gilded Age 1782-1851”, are essentially historical with particular reference to political events in Thailand. These events were relevant to the ceramics trade insofar as their influence on the junk trade with China and the revival of economic prosperity were reflected in the quality of imported bencharong. “The Gilded Age” introduces the gilded version of bencharong wares known as *lai nam thong*, a Thai term literally meaning ‘gold washed patterns’.

The remaining quarter of the text is more directly devoted to the porcelain itself with individual chapters emphasising what is described as a new creative period in Siamese porcelain unconstrained by classical rules.

A chapter is devoted to Himaphan symbolism based on Hindu rites and ceremonies many of which still survive in Thailand, Burma and Cambodia. The Himaphan forest is the legendary woodland said to be the home of an assortment of mythical creatures. In the 18th and 19th centuries, bencharong wares were decorated with images of Himaphan forest celestial beings and mystical beasts.

The following chapter, entitled “Good Fortune, Long Life and Peace”, draws attention to auspicious designs in Chinese porcelain, but makes no reference to bencharong. The next, “The Charm of Teapots”, includes items both of Chinese and Siamese designs and a later is devoted to “Chakri Tea Sets”, which are described as among the most prized Siamese court porcelain. Attention is drawn in this chapter to a declining interest in national taste in the bencharong tradition when it describes

the Chakri dynasty, which has ruled Thailand since 1782, as succumbing to Western “civilised” tastes in the second half of the 19th century.

The text is clearly written and informative, though heavily biased towards historical material, but the highlights of the book are clearly its illustrations by photographer Eddie Siu. These are reproduced excellently with each accompanied by a descriptive paragraph. Evidence for the dating of bencharong wares is scarce and most in the collection are dated as 19th century or by reference to the reigns of particular Thai monarchs.

The book ends rather abruptly with a chronology, a bibliography (in both English and Thai), acknowledgements, a biography of the production team and a rather limited glossary, but no index. Despite this criticism, the book is a major, if not the principal, contributor to this major style of Thai ceramics. The closing sentence to the editorial preface that “this beautiful and interesting book should serve as a welcome addition to the bookshelf” cannot be challenged.

Philip Courtenay

Siamese Coins: From Funan to the Fifth Reign by Ronachai Krisadaolarn and Vasilij Mihailovs (Bangkok: River Books, 2012). ISBN 978-974 9863 54 1 (hard)

This is a beautiful, if literally heavy, book. From the superb reproduction gold coin woven into the black cloth cover and the beautiful slip case to the more than two thousand sumptuous colour photographs that enrich the book throughout, it is clear that this has been a labour of love for joint authors Ronachai Krisadaolarn (Ronald Cristal) and Vasilij Mihailovs – both life-time members of the Numismatic Association of Thailand - and brought to fruition by Bangkok-based publisher River Books. Together, they have produced what will surely become the bible for Thai numismatists.

The book covers a lot of ground, outlining how the Thai monetary system developed over two millennia. The authors briefly describe the earliest forms of money found in the first millennium in the general area that now constitutes Thailand - including Funan, the Kra Isthmus, Sri Dvaravati, Haripunjaya, the Maritime Empires and Angkor – and continue through later eras of Siamese history. Coinage and ingots found in the Yonok, Sukhothai, Pattani, Lan Na, Lan Chang and Ayutthaya kingdoms are also quickly assessed before the book really comes into its own tracing in greater depth the history and manufacture of the unique Thai *pot duang* (bullet coins) and flat coinage before and during the Rattanakosin period. The authors rightly make note of the fact that *pot duang* evolved unlike coins used in any other country, and that the level of skill needed to make these coins was such that they could not be recreated today.

Of particular interest, the authors explain how the Siamese monetary system

evolved, and specifically how the baht currency system was introduced, initially comprising the octuple system - based on divisions of eight – in the Ayutthaya and early Rattanakosin eras before the current decimal system of coinage was adopted in 1897. As elsewhere, coins have evolved from being value-based, made predominantly from gold or silver, to being almost worthless, made from copper, bronze, tin and/or cupronickel.

A subsequent chapter focuses on emblems found on Siamese coins with clear illustrations provided of every possible mark, while another chapter provides considerable information on the numerous and varied legends found on Siamese flat coins. The final chapter, which makes up the heart of the book, provides plates and descriptions of all the various coins, ingots and gambling tokens known to have been in circulation (throughout the lengthy period of history under examination).

There are two completely new areas on which the authors have also focused. They have for the first time sponsored an extensive study of the metallic composition of most specimens of coins listed in the book, either through Energy Dispersive X-Ray Fluorescence (ED-XRF) tests at the Department of Chemistry, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University, Thailand, and/or Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry (ICP-MS) tests at the Department of Chemistry, Faculty of Science, University of Cincinnati, USA. The purpose of this costly and time-consuming examination has been to determine the exact chemical composition and weight analysis of each coin. While such research findings may be fascinating for the keen numismatist, the extraordinary wealth of fresh data and the manner in which it is provided is simply mind-boggling for the casual reader.

In contrast, I found the authors' extensive study of contemporary and modern counterfeit coins found in the market today much more interesting. The lengths to which humans have gone, from the earliest times, to produce counterfeit coinage (admittedly of varying quality) are impressive. Photographs distinguishing genuine old coins from contemporary counterfeits, together with clear explanations of what to look for, are provided extensively throughout the book and will doubtless be of great assistance to any collector or scholar.

The authors have included extremely thorough Appendices that provide extensive documentary context and support to the main text and photographs. Through the Appendices, the authors have traced the development of the various forms of currency found in the Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin eras by providing extensive documents in Thai and English from a broad variety of sources that provide the novice reader, in particular, a quick understanding of some of the more important events in Thai commercial and economic history. Some of these documents, such as those from the Royal Archives, have never previously been published or translated into English. Other interesting documents include proclamations and letters from the reign of King Rama IV relating to the purchase of minting machines and problems with counterfeit coins, as well as a review of the

coinage in circulation in Siam during the reign of King Rama V.

It is perhaps surprising how few books have been published in English about Thai numismatics since Reginald Le May's classic 1932 work, *The Coinage of Siam*. This learned book certainly attempts to make up for that deficiency. It will probably appeal more to diehard numismatists as the writing style is serious and direct, and the weight and depth of information provided is overwhelming to the reader with little prior knowledge of the subject. As if the meticulous photos in the book are insufficient, the authors and publisher have also seen fit to enclose at the back of the book a DVD with more than one thousand high-resolution photographs of coins and other forms of money from the National Museum and private collections.

My main criticism of the book is that it could have used a good final edit, as typos and grammatical errors occur throughout. However, that is a minor quibble given the fine work of scholarship that the authors have produced on this important subject. The astounding wealth of information is sufficient that it is almost impossible to read this book at one attempt. It is certainly a reference book to which the reader can, and will, return repeatedly – whether to find new information on Siamese coins or related historical trivia.

Paul Bromberg

Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art: An Anthology edited by Nora A. Taylor and Boreth Ly (Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2012). ISBN 978-0-87727-786-6 (hard) 978-0-87727-756-9 (soft)

Southeast Asian contemporary art still seems to be very much waiting in the wings, largely surpassed by art from China. It is still uncertain whether there is actually an eager audience for this medium. Looking back to the cultural history of the region, Southeast Asian contemporary and modern art practice has rarely been addressed collectively, largely due to the diverse and expansive expressions that have emerged over the past decades as a result of each nation's distinctive political and economic history. The first hand experiences of the essay contributors in this new volume offer intimate views on the complexities that identify their specific areas of expertise.

Though Southeast Asian contemporary art remains an under-explored and fertile field that deals critically with politics, materiality and aesthetics, this book offers different viewpoints of often deeply coded social and cultural messages. Given that the geography of Southeast Asia looms large, the chapters examine contemporary culture through works related to the individual, the community and the environments in which the writers have had their many forms of exchange. Simultaneously, the publication may be regarded as a cornerstone for the various academic and formalist narratives, with specific focus on current art practices of the region.

Art writing in past decades has been fixated on traditional art forms; this book might on one level redress that balance and situate Southeast Asian contemporary art practice at the centre of theoretical and critical art practices that are attempting to negotiate the global experiences of the 21st century and consider what Southeast Asian art practices might mean within this context. These issues form the broader remit of the book.

Opening with a luminous introduction by Nora Taylor linked by essays from a diverse group of scholars, the book brings to the fore the subtlety of Southeast Asia's hybrid artistic imagination and heterogeneous layers of discourse. Within this context, the analogical approach provides multiple and, at times, diffuse points of entry into the history of ideas and the dimension of experiences as they illuminate commentary on contemporary art.

The twelve essay contributors come from different vantage points, with some decidedly old school. This is not meant as a negative as the academic scrutiny of scholars such as John Clark, Kenneth M. George and Patrick D. Flores is highly regarded; they do come over as educational, though never overtly didactic. On the other hand, non-traditional voices such as Lee Weng Choy, Ashley Thompson and Việt Lê offer very different and a more contemporary approach to their subjects.

The book takes as its starting point John Clark's essay "The Southeast Asian Modern: Three Artists" that covers the emergence of modern painting practices in Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia. Clark examines the works of artists who embraced European tendencies and whose art has been a turning point in Modernist painting practices as he explores specific periods and the works of selected artists. Clark's emphasis on art practices during the 19th century is particularly relevant as his views illustrate the extent to which art developed along specific colonial connections.

On another level, the essay "Vietnamese Modern Art: An Unfinished Journey" by the late Boitran Huynh-Beattie repositions Vietnamese modern art practice within a more specific context, one that encompasses Vietnam's own self-conscious modern art practices and political legacies.

Clearly, Kenneth M. George is comfortable with Indonesian and knowledgeable about the influences of Islam on the aesthetics and art practices in the Malay Archipelago. The intimacy with which he addresses the nature of the Islamic faith through the complexities that have emerged as a result of the global resurgence of Islam in the 1980s and its impact on the contemporary Southeast Asian art scene may be attributed to his close academic relationship with some of Indonesia's most important artists. But just as he makes these artistic connections appear serendipitous, Clark's essay "The Cultural Politics of Modern and Contemporary Islamic Art in Southeast Asia" is open to further dialogue as he encompasses Southeast Asian Islamic art in a much more specific context: one that repositions Indonesia and Malaysia's own self-conscious art practices and cultural nuances.

Thailand is the one country in Southeast Asia that was never directly impacted by colonialism; nevertheless the relationship between place and identity is deeply rooted. Sandra Cate's contribution "Thai Artists, Resisting the Age of Spectacle" examines shifts in material practice and art's relationship with form, material and political agency in Thai contemporary art practice over the past twenty years; and importantly, the relationship of art with democracy.

Việt Lê, on the other hand applies a very different approach to his subject as he addresses the artistic practices of Sandrine Liouquet and Tiffany Chung (each being representative of diasporic Vietnamese and women artists) as examples of Vietnamese artists whose international profiles are closely linked to Vietnam's socio-political and cultural history through his contribution titled "Many Returns: Contemporary Vietnamese Diasporic Artists-Organizers in Ho Chi Minh City". Việt Lê's awareness of the relationship between art and politics is impressive.

Through his essay "Of Trans(national) Subjects and Translation: The Art and Body Language of Sopheap Pich", Boreth Ly seamlessly connects the contemporary works of Sopheap Pich - Cambodia's most profiled contemporary artist - with everyday objects and situations as he relates his personal encounters with the artist. Boreth Ly's contribution clearly presents self expression as a gesture important in its own right, as it becomes the background to his essay while informing on politically and socially charged fields of identity.

"Titik Pertama, Titik Utama—First Dot, Main Dot: Creating and Connecting in Modern/Indigenous Javanese/Global Batik Art" by Astri Wright is a lengthy but in-depth essay on the relationship between 'craft and art' through the collaborative art practice of Agus Ismoyo and Nia Filam. Wright addresses broad aspects of their art that initially employed the 'craft' of Batik as a component of their expression, which ultimately resulted in more universal inclusions, such as their collaborations with indigenous groups from Australia. For the reader interested in the real position of Batik within Indonesia's modern culture, Wright's essay is a case in point.

Patrick D. Flores is one of Southeast Asia's most esteemed art historians. Through his essay "Turns in Tropics: Artist-Curator", he traces the artistic paths of four of Southeast Asia's most important art luminaries. The artistic careers of Redza Piyadasa, Jim Supangat, Raymundo Albano and Apinan Poshyananda from the 1960s through the late 1980s have been at the forefront of contemporary Southeast Asian art practice, sequencing the foregrounding of context for the work of younger artists. Moving from creative art making to curatorial practices, their contributions have been significant to current structuralist means of perceiving and interpreting the creative process.

Lee Weng Choy is one of Singapore's non-traditional voices. Known for his association with The Substation, Singapore's first independent contemporary arts centre, Lee's presentation on the Singapore contemporary art scene clearly defines

the conditions of modernity, particularly with relationship to modern art. He has written about and organised exhibitions that deal with contemporary issues relevant not only to Singapore, but identify the cultural psyche of Southeast Asia as a region. “The Assumption of Love; Friendship and the Search for Discursive Density” is clearly one of the most interesting chapters of the book.

Flaudette May V. Datuin looks at the art of Thai artist Phaptawan Suwannakudt and of Filipina artists Rowena Seloterio and (California-based) Gina Osterloh. She examines through her essay “Uncommon Sense: ‘Empty the Visual from Eyes of Flesh’” their feminist art practices with a similar sensitivity that defines their art. Further, she seeks to define their art under conditions of modernity, particularly in relationship to emotions that often impact artistic practice.

Ashley Thompson, on the other hand deals with the situation of emotions in a totally different vein. “Mnemotechnical Politics: Rithy Panh’s Cinematic Archive and the Return of Cambodia’s Past” is at once an academic and poignant documentation of Cambodia’s recent political history.

The final chapter in the book is a transcript of an interview by Grant Kester of Jay Koh and Chu Yuan, who have initiated and developed a series of art and cultural initiatives in Myanmar and other locales. While this narrative differs greatly from the other chapters in the book, it does address the conditions within which professionals contend, in this instance Myanmar.

The book clearly straddles a variety of artistic experiences that have emerged in Southeast Asia’s contemporary and modern art history as it engages in dialogue that stresses the region’s artistic wealth and ambitions that cut a broad swath through the region. Borders can never be fully crossed; but understood and studied together, this anthology depicts Southeast Asia as socially and politically charged fields of artistic action, and illustrates how the reality of place and its cultural associations take on deeper meanings.

Shireen Naziree

Creolization and Diaspora in the Portuguese Indies: The Social World of Ayutthaya, 1640-1720 by Stefan Halikowski Smith (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011). Hardbound: ISBN 978 90 04 19048 1

Compared to the other Europeans at Ayutthaya, the Portuguese are relatively understudied, especially in English-language works, and especially beyond their early presence in the 16th century. The Campos article on “Early Portuguese Accounts of Thailand” in the *JSS* seventy years ago is the only broad survey in English and limited to the 16th century. Pinto is the only travel memoir available in English translation. Suthachai Yimprasert, possibly the only Thai scholar who has learnt to read Old Portuguese, failed to concentrate his doctoral research on Siam or

publish his thesis before shifting his interests elsewhere.

This fat book by Stefan Halikowski Smith is thus a major event. The bibliography contains around six hundred entries, around half of which are old memoirs and travel accounts, many by Portuguese authors totally unknown to most scholars. Smith concentrates on the 17th century, and especially on Ayutthaya, though within the context of the Portuguese diaspora from Goa to Macao.

Smith situates his study within the debates over the role of Portuguese *mestiço* or creole communities in various parts of the world in this era. He adopts Leonard Andaya's idea of a "Portuguese tribe" to emphasize the informal and largely non-institutionalized nature of these communities, and notes that the story of this community has "very little to do with empire".

Portuguese were present in Ayutthaya from the early 16th century when they had roles as mercenaries and arms suppliers. By the end of that century, however, they had dwindled in number to a handful, lost their niche as military experts, and were spurned by other Europeans as "the worst and most lewd livers in Siam" (p. 73). After the Dutch expelled the Portuguese from Malacca in 1641 and from Makassar in the 1660s, the "Portuguese tribe" in Ayutthaya swelled to five or six thousand. Among these, there were only eight or nine true Portuguese families. Others were creoles along with Indians, Japanese, Africans, and Makassarese.

Most seem to have been poor. Only two Portuguese are visible as entrepreneurs in ocean-going trade, and a few others as sea captains. Smith surmises that most others were engaged in petty local trading. Their status seems to have been similar to the Japanese, another community which lost status once its martial expertise declined in value. The Portuguese "camp" to the south of Ayutthaya island was something of a "ghetto", where people were confined during political crises. Whereas the heads of the Dutch, French and other communities were adopted into the Siamese nobility with official titles, the head of the Portuguese was dubbed only *Capitão-Mór* and rarely invited to court. The incumbent at the time of the Siqueira mission in 1684 was 70 years old and in "severe poverty".

In what way were the members of this tribe "Portuguese"? On the basis of studies from other regions, Smith assumes that they spoke a creole language of Portuguese with additions from other languages, but he regrets that he has found no evidence to reconstruct this tongue. By surveying temple murals in Siam and Pagan, he examines how the Portuguese looked to others. They seem to have worn cotton pants, a neckerchief, no shoes and a black hat. This rig clearly differentiated them from the British and French, who clung to something more originally European, but also set them apart from the Siamese.

Smith contrasts the poor situation and status of the Portuguese in Ayutthaya with their counterparts in Cambodia and Burma, and wonders why there was such a difference. He argues that the Siamese court kept a close control on trade and only the Dutch (and later the French) had the diplomatic weight to gain access. He might

also have added that the Portuguese, because they had few infusions from Europe, had little expertise in the way of the new technologies that intrigued the Siamese court. The single exception seems to have been the Jesuit Tommaso Valguarnera, who had engineering skills to strengthen the city walls and build a fountain. But this scarcely compared to the architects, engineers, marine experts, and astronomers supplied by other European nations.

The Dominicans were probably the first churchmen to arrive, possibly building in 1555 the church which has recently been excavated. They were followed by the Jesuits, who built a church and college, and later by Augustinians and Franciscans. Their efforts at conversion bore very little fruit. They were most successful with orphans or abandoned children of peripheral communities, and converted almost no Siamese. Perhaps because of this disappointment, they bickered vituperously. The Dominicans sneered at the Jesuits for eliding the story of Jesus Christ from their teachings because they felt it was not appealing to their audience. Particularly once the French missionaries arrived, the various sects seem to have put most of their efforts into slandering their opponents as lazy and sinful, calling on their overlords to intervene, appealing to King Narai for help, and occasionally resorting to murder.

The Portuguese community survived the ructions of 1688 rather well because they had no association with Phaulkon. With the removal of the British and French, some Portuguese fared rather better in the early 18th century, though most of the new opportunities were captured by the Chinese and the Dutch. The reputation of the Portuguese improved very little. In 1718, Alexander Hamilton called them “the most dissolute, lazy, thievish rascals that were to be found in the country” (p. 175).

The subtitle of the book, *The Social World of Ayutthaya*, is a little misleading. The focus is very much on the Portuguese who were a very small part of the society of Ayutthaya. Smith offers a nice sketch of the other foreign communities in the 1660s, but has virtually nothing on the Siamese.

Smith has read very widely (the books in the bibliography are in at least eight languages) and has deftly reconstructed his picture of the Portuguese in Ayutthaya from rather fragmentary references. But much is missing from the picture and probably will be for ever. On many issues, such as the design of the various churches and colleges built by the Portuguese in Ayutthaya, Smith draws our attention to examples elsewhere in the Portuguese diaspora because there is no trace of the Ayutthaya buildings in the sources. He seems to have found no Portuguese-language account of the Ayutthaya Portuguese community, nor any Portuguese-language description of Ayutthaya to set beside those of Van Vliet, La Loubère, Mohammed Ibrahim, and others. It is not difficult to guess why. These authors were either writing for the benefit of their official superiors, or writing for a public audience after their return to Europe. But the Ayutthaya Portuguese were an informal community without any institutional superstructure, and they were permanently settled in the east. Their visiting missions came from Goa and Macao rather than Lisbon, and

seem to have taken little interest in matters beyond their religious duties. The Jesuit Valguarnera compiled the first dictionary of Siamese in the mid 17th century, but no copy has survived. Any hope that our knowledge of 17th-century Ayutthaya will be expanded by a Portuguese account to put aside those of the French, Dutch, Chinese, and Persians seems to be forlorn.

Smith makes a couple of rather bizarre errors, such as displacing Prince Prisdang's mission by two centuries, but otherwise this is a very thorough work of research and a fascinating analysis which will undoubtedly stand the test of time.

Chris Baker

30 Heritage Buildings of Yangon: Inside the City that Captured Time by Sarah Rooney (Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2012). ISBN 978-1932476620 (hard)

Few visitors to Myanmar are not struck by the wealth of surviving colonial architecture in Yangon, preserved, for better or worse, by the country's long isolation and stunted economic growth since Independence. Indeed, Yangon, formerly Rangoon, is likely the choicest spot in all of Asia to appreciate an urban colonial setting which has virtually vanished everywhere else. The very character of once regal cities, from Colombo to Saigon to Hong Kong, has been irrevocably fractured by thoughtless and unbridled urban development. Only has old Yangon been spared such a sorry fate, but the city's future now hangs in the balance by the rapid economic changes anticipated in Myanmar.

Sweeping new political progress and the concomitant relaxation of international sanctions have indeed triggered a race by rapacious foreign and Myanmarese investors keen to erect shopping malls and business parks in the wake of the wrecking ball. The prognosis for Yangon is not a happy one, since commercial pressures too often trump the goals of preservation, as history amply demonstrates in Asia and throughout the world. The single overarching thrust of this compelling book is the need to respect, protect and nurture Yangon's rich architectural heritage in light of these new threats. Like endangered species, these heritage buildings can never be replaced.

The book opens with a tribute to old Yangon by U Thaw Kaung, a well-known savant who for decades served as the Chief Librarian at the Universities Central Library. His first-hand experiences, such as shopping at the now-closed Rowe & Company department store opposite the City Hall, provide poignant reminders that the city's boarded up landmarks were once centers of urban life.

The Association of Myanmar Architects selected the thirty buildings that are treated by the book's author, Sarah Rooney. The thirty are mostly public structures

in the city's central district and ones that long-time visitors to Yangon will recognize immediately. The earliest is the derelict Pegu Club (1882), while the most recent is the Chartered Bank (1941). The text divides the monuments into six clusters, based on their location, such as "Around the Secretariat" and "Along Strand Road." Each building is assigned a number which is tagged to a two-page map of Yangon at the beginning of the text.

A handful of the buildings are still used for their original purposes, such as the Strand Hotel, but the majority have witnessed multiple uses throughout their long lives. For example, the imposing British Embassy facing Strand Road was originally the home for a Scottish insurance and shipping company. Another is the neo-Classical Inland Waterways Department building, also facing Strand Road, established in 1933 as the new headquarters for the venerable Irrawaddy Flotilla Company.

A number of former official buildings are now abandoned, occasioned in some cases by the government's move in 2005 to Nay Pyi Taw, notably the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Pyay Road. These disused structures were especially vulnerable to damage wrought by Cyclone Nargis in 2008.

The Introduction sketches the modern history of Yangon, beginning with the annexation of Lower Myanmar at the end of the Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852-1853). A grid plan adopted in 1853 has remained largely intact, with the Sule Pagoda serving as a central hub. The area encompassing the city center was originally a vast swamp which was filled in by shifting millions of cubic feet of earth from higher ground. The observer Colesworthy Grant wryly noted in the 1840s that the area resembled "a Dutch village half under water."

For each building, the architect's name, the construction firm and important dates are provided, to the degree that this information is known. Old black-and-white photographs documenting the buildings under construction enhance the text, together with a handful of architectural drawings and page after page of crisp color photographs that were taken recently, mostly by Natthaphat Meksriwan, who is also credited with the handsome book design.

A handy single-page synopsis telescopes the careers of six major architects who shaped early Rangoon, such as James Ransome, who designed the High Court facing Mahabandoola Park. Another Yangon architect, Henry Hoyne-Fox, even directed the rebuilding of the Mahamuni Temple in Mandalay, reducing the weight of its tower by drawing upon Brunelleschi's solution for the dome in Florence.

Concluding each section is a short essay touching on facets of the city's history. The first, "World Famous Residents of Dalhousie Road", recounts Pablo Neruda's time in Yangon and his love for a local woman; one fictitious Yangon resident was a local "Sherlock Holmes", created by Shwe U Daung in the 1930s. The last essay, "Yangon Renovations: Successes and Challenges", details the restoration of several smaller downtown properties, such as a restaurant named Monsoon whose ambiance

is meant to “recreate the atmosphere of the colonial era”, in the words of one of its owners. The wicker-look of the Strand Hotel lobby also exemplifies this aesthetic trend in interior design, a style one might dub “raj-chic.” While “colonialism” has earned a bad name in general, it seems, somewhat paradoxically, that colonial décor is in vogue.

The book’s compact format makes it an ideal companion on a walking tour of Yangon. To comfortably cover the majority of the monuments on foot would likely require two full days, perhaps with leisurely lunch-breaks at one of the *biryani* restaurants on Anawrahta Road.

The unsightly glass-faced, high-rise office blocks built in the late 1990s on the west side of Mahabandoola Park are dramatic testimony to the dangers of urban blight. Moreover, Yangon’s core is comprised largely of stately but derelict apartment buildings from the colonial era, now home to everyday Yangon residents. The day may come when these desirable, magnificent older neighborhoods face gentrification, forcing longtime residents to the city’s peripheries in order to make way for Myanmarese elites and expats employed by multinational companies. This phenomenon has occurred in cities worldwide, and there is no reason that Yangon’s trajectory will be any different. Finally, if the government’s abysmal and notorious record of preservation and renovation at Pagan, starting in the 1990s, is a harbinger of the city’s future, then Yangon’s fate is truly sealed.

The hope is that Serindia Press will be encouraged by the reception of this outstanding book to produce other volumes with a similar format, with perhaps a focus on the many other architectural gems in Yangon and also the rich architectural traditions of Myanmar’s other major cities, such as Mandalay, Moulmein and Sittwe.

Donald M. Stadtner

Lacquerware Journeys: The Untold Story of Burmese Lacquer by Than Htun (Dedaye) (Bangkok: River Books, 2013). ISBN 978 616 7339 238

This important addition to the literature on Burmese lacquer will be welcomed both by the enthusiast and those new to the subject. It is well designed and profusely illustrated, with over 650 photographs, the vast majority of lacquer objects, and most of high quality. Adequate space is allotted to the better known centres of manufacture, such as Bagan [Pagan], Kyaukka, and Mandalay. But the book’s particular strength is the author’s documentation and revival from obscurity of a number of neglected and almost forgotten lacquer industries. U Than Htun comes from a family of goldsmiths, but suspects that his great grandmother, a trader in the town of Dedaye, had ancestors connected to Bagan, who may have been lacquer artists. He brings a

deep emotional commitment to his subject, and his book is permeated by respect and affection for the lacquer craftsmen.

We must be grateful to the author for undertaking arduous journeys to reach remote regions in very rough travelling conditions to track down descendants of lacquer masters long dead and relics of almost forgotten lacquer industries. Very few of his readers will have the strength needed to cling to a bucking motorcycle for hours on end. The result is a rich harvest of anecdotal and interview material: we listen in on his conversations with U Sanda “the only living lacquerware artist in Mongnai”, and with “Daw May Lwe Yone, one of the last surviving lacquer artists of Laikha”; we hear him appeal to the owner of an unrecorded masterpiece from the small village of Nyaunglaypin to donate the piece to a museum; and we hope some readers respond to his appeal for news of a family of lacquer distributors who sold Inwa wares on 25th St. in Rangoon in the 1920s. U Than Htun has rescued as many pieces as he can afford, but laments the inability of local collectors to compete with foreign buyers. More generally, and ominously, he fears that unless lacquer trees are planted, which has never been the case, the price of lacquer sap, the raw material of all lacquer crafts, may continue to rise until all lacquer makers are put out of business.

The author poses many questions for further research, but some he investigates himself. He has arranged the exploratory removal of part of the surface lacquer layer on old pieces to inspect the woven bamboo or rattan basketry beneath, and has established that Mandalay makers often used old Bagan pieces as the base for their gilded and glass-inlaid relief-decorated gilt offertory vessels.

Illustrations and Diagrams

The numerous photographs of lacquer objects are a credit to the author, his son Nay Lin Tun, and other contributing photographers; and the book designer has exploited them to produce a visually stunning book. One particularly effective choice is solid glossy black—the colour of lacquer itself—as the background colour for many of the illustrations of lacquer objects. Town gatepost signs to introduce the wares made in each township area are another happy choice. Just as good to look at as the images of lacquer objects are the faces of elderly artists who created them, working in an old tradition, like U Pho Myae of Inle and U Seinda and Daw Pau Nu Han of Laikha.

Photographers have had a field day. Large blow-ups of pictures and patterns in yun (incised and colour-filled) work provide the end-papers and spacer pages between major sections of the book. As art work, these are decorative if lavish. But in the main text of a book like this the fine photographs of actual lacquer pieces must combine with their captions: together they should be consistently informative. A few slips are forgivable, but there are too many captions lacking the dimensions of a piece or the letters indicating its location in a collection. The very first full

page illustration (p. 8) shows five splendid lacquer pieces, with a caption stressing their exceptional rarity, but giving neither dimensions nor location. The first double page of illustrations (pp. 10–11) is equally impressive as art photography, as sheer display, but has only a single caption to cover over 50 objects. This is very brief, gives no dimensions, and refers to “short soon-okes with or without lids”, leaving the inexpert reader wondering which these are.

A fine early photograph (p. 20) shows lacquer makers and their tools and materials, but the caption misses the opportunity to identify these and explain their use. A fine colour plate (pp. 40–41) shows the Shwe Sandaw pagoda at Pyay [Prome] in the mid 19th century, but lacks an attribution.

In a book with almost 700 illustrations, it may seem ungrateful to complain of omissions. Both the htanaung tree and the tamar tree are beautifully illustrated, and the role played by the resin of each vividly described. But regrettably and inexplicably absent from this section is any illustration or description of the lacquer sap tree itself. (pp. 32–36)

The text describing some Laikha betel boxes (p. 186) refers to “a false bottom” and to a “secret compartment”, but they are not clearly located nor illustrated, so remain secret. A pity too that a Kyaukka bowl “the largest I have ever seen” is illustrated by one of the smallest photographs in the book (p. 123, pl. 287) and that the relevant descriptive text is seven pages away (p. 130).

Such omissions, though minor, can leave the reader frustrated. “Lacquer saucer and bowl from the collection of Ma Ma Hnit (Plate 206)” is the heading for a paragraph at the top of page 89. We learn of the munificent Ma Ma Hnit, who commissioned super quality pieces in Bagan in the 1900s, confidently inscribing one of the best “If a competitor can find any piece of comparable quality, this piece is yours gratis!” In eager anticipation, we turn back a page to look for Plate 206. But it depicts a betel box by Saya Nwe, and we look in vain for any image of Ma Ma Hnit’s saucer and bowl. Perhaps a competitor claimed them gratis!

The lists of lacquer makers at each of the main manufacturing centres, with the approximate dates when each was active, could be very useful for investigating objects in other collections. But estimated dates offered for pieces without an inscribed date can be open to question. Unfortunately, U Than Htun’s list of Bagan makers is headed by Hsaya Ngwe, maker of a bowl depicting the British deposition in 1885 of the last Burmese monarch Thibaw. U Than Htun claims this was made in 1886. From a study of this piece, its style of drawing and its many inscriptions, I would date it to the 1930s, almost half a century after the events depicted. This was the time of the rise of Burmese nationalism, and the “clear background” style was in fashion. (It is really very “deco”). True, a caption on the bowl records the date of the events depicted, 1885, but other captions name the English Col. Sladen and his Burmese interpreter Maung Ba Than, information most unlikely to have been available to any Bagan lacquer master in 1886. In another caption the lacquer master

Hsaya Ngwe not only gives his name, but names his price—ten units of currency, surely rupees.

Corrections to Published Accounts

The author offers several useful corrections to published accounts of Burmese lacquerware. He proposes Pyay as the place where the great gold-leaf shwezawa panel in the British Museum (see “Visions From The Golden Land: Burma And The Art Of Lacquer”, Cat 102) was made, instead of Bago [Pegu] where it was found and acquired by a British army officer in the 1850s. His argument is based not only on the fame of Pyay for its shwezawa work, but on an inscription at the head of the panel naming the donor’s village: a “Hpo Thein Tan” exists near Pyay, whereas no such village is known near Bago.

But similar concentration is required when reading published literature. Again, the object is an important example of shwezawa work, a fine flat betel box acquired by the National Trust from Lord Curzon and described and illustrated in “Visions From The Golden Land: Burma And The Art Of Lacquer” (p. 125, Cat 69). U Than Htun notes that the authors “do not mention whether the name of the lacquer master was inscribed on his pieces”. But the authors (p. 125) specifically state that (apart from the story caption on the top lid) “there is no other inscription, and thus no maker’s signature”.

U Than Htun doubts if fine quality yun lacquerware was ever made in the town of Salay, some 100 km downriver from Bagan. A lacquer water bowl in the Munster Museum in Germany described and illustrated by Dr. Uta Weigelt in her “Birmas Lackkunst in deutschen Museen” (object No 17, pp. 51–52) is inscribed with the name of the town of Salay. Is this, as U Than Htun believes, “the only known lacquerware piece with the word ‘Salay’”? He illustrates this bowl (p. 94, plate 224), and assumes it is the same as that in the British Museum, illustrated in “Visions From The Golden Land: Burma And The Art Of Lacquer” (p. 119–20 Cat 62) where its inscription is transcribed and translated “The craftsmen who made this article are Hsaya Ba and Ma Ma Aung”. U Than Htun argues that it may not have been made in Salay itself, but in Bagan, and simply shipped downriver to Salay by Hsaya Ba and Ma Ma Aung, a couple resident there. But comparison of two books, both listed in his bibliography, shows there are two lacquer objects carrying the place-name “Salay”, not just one; they differ in size and in the subject matter of their story-scenes. (The British Museum bowl measures 23.4 cms in height by 28.3 cms in diameter, that in the Munster Museum 22.5 cms by 28.7 cms. The story scenes on the bowl in the British Museum are from the Mahodhata Jataka, those on the Munster Museum from the Vessantara Jataka.)

So the name of the town of Salay appears not on “a single bowl” but on at least two similar bowls, which bear the names of the same makers, the married couple Hsaya Ba and Ma Ma Aung. This suggests, but does not prove, that quality lacquer

was indeed made in the town of Salay. Further research might establish whether in fact the makers lived and made lacquer in Salay, or in Bagan as U Than Htun thinks more likely. A case for Bagan may still be made, but without using the argument that only a single lacquer object exists inscribed with the name of the town of Salay.

Some names given to lacquer objects are confusing. U Than Htun uses the term “soon-oke” very freely in the book text and picture captions, without adequate explanation for the non-Burmese reader. In the index the term is defined by its use alone, as a carrier of gift food to the monks. So tall vessels with pinnacle shaped lids, tiered rounded vessels with an upturned cup finial, and smooth flat bowls with a low smooth lid are all “soon-okés”. This makes it hard to identify some vessels in groups. Can a domestic “meal-carrier” also be a “soon-oke”? The English term “tall tray” (p. 211) may puzzle the native English speaker, before he works out that it probably is meant to mean “dumb-waiter” (Burmese “kalat”).

Useful Additions to Knowledge

The great strength of this book is the author’s dedication to charting and illustrating many of the neglected and often virtually forgotten lacquer manufacturing industries. Some, such as those of Bago and Pyay, went into decline after World War II, others like Gadu-Ganan were probably defunct even before the Burmese monarchy.

The author confesses in his introduction that his book had its genesis in his chance acquiring of a strangely shaped box with incised work of incredible complexity. He later traced this kind of artefact to the remote Banmawk / Monyin / Wuntho region whose people are called Gadu-ganan. They produced thick-walled, very durable vessels, with convex base and lid, and distinctive style of decoration; and they did so a very long time ago. A few hoary old examples turn up at the Inle Lake markets, where the present reviewer purchased in 1991 a box (now in the British Museum) practically the same as a much better preserved specimen bought by Herr Blume in the 1840s at Moulmein, and now in Berlin. For lacquer objects that is a long life. But although these pieces have endured, the industry that made them may have been extinct for more than a century.

The author hopes his book will “encourage local lacquer enthusiasts” from several regions of Myanmar “to discover new information about old lacquerwares and forgotten lacquer masters”. It ought also to lead collectors of Burmese lacquer and foreign museum curators to reassess many pieces previously vaguely assigned to the lacquer industries of Bagan, Kyaukka, or Shan States. They will be grateful to U Than Htun for the dedication, the hard work, rough travel and careful study which have produced this splendid book.

Ralph Isaacs

50 Years of Archaeology in Southeast Asia: Essays in Honour of Ian Glover edited by Bérénice Bellina, Elisabeth A. Bacus, Thomas Oliver Pryce and Jan Wisseman Christie (Bangkok: River Books, 2010). ISBN 978-616-7339-02-3

The twenty-one essays in this richly illustrated volume honour the research and mentoring of Ian Glover to his many students and colleagues. The topics and approaches are varied, and reflect well Ian's extraordinary breadth of knowledge as well as his active collaborations with others.

The book opens with homage by the editors where they acknowledge that despite the diversity of topics covered by the essays in the book that themes addressed by Ian merit further articles, including the definition of the Dvaravati culture of central Thailand, the transfer of animals and cultures between South and Southeast Asia, and the bronzes of Đông Sơn. While the animal transfers are not well represented, the cultural relationship between South and Southeast Asia that Ian knows so well comes up repeatedly in the volume.

The editors and River Books deserve praise for the presentation of this book: it is well laid out, with a thoughtful placement of images and text divided into five parts and accompanied by a very usable index. There are also a number of clear tables and maps inserted well to link to the accompanying text.

The first section contains overviews by David Bulbeck on 'Glover's Contribution to the Development of Archaeology in Island Southeast Asia' and Charles Higham with 'Ian Glover's Contribution to the Prehistory of Mainland Southeast Asia'. Bulbeck reminds the reader of Ian's work to facilitate chemical analyses for early bronzes from Bali and from Malaysia, his collation with Bronson of radiocarbon dates for Indonesia and his consideration of pre-human inhabitants in Wallacea presaging the recent finding of an archaic hominid, *Homo floresiensis* in Flores. Higham reviews the equally diverse record of Ian's research on the mainland where his interest in periods of transition and in metallurgy can be seen in his attention to the bronzes of northern Vietnam and his excavations at the rich Iron Age site of Ban Don Ta Phet, with its high-tin bowls with a gold sheen. In his excavations at Trà Kiêu, Ian's research into the life of the architect and archaeologist Jean-Yves Claeys uncovered a rare film archive giving vivid life to the colonial legacy of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient. These overview essays profile not just the legacy of the scholarship of Ian and others, but the way these have contributed to the new issues that have emerged in both parts of the region.

The second part, titled 'Subsistence Strategies: Hunter-Gatherers to Early Agriculture' contains four articles that reflect Ian's work on this vital transition in settlement and subsistence patterns. All the essays use different regions to highlight the changing perspective on this period. Rasmi Shoocongdei, in her 'Subsistence-Settlement Organisation during the Late Pleistocene-Early Holocene: The Case of Lang Kamnan Cave, Western Thailand' shows how the occupation of Kamnan cave

was most probably seasonal, with hunting and collecting shifting between a range of upland and lowland habitats. In the following essay, Ryan Rabett and Graeme Barker on 'Late Pleistocene and Early Holocene Forager Mobility in Southeast Asia', extend this seasonal mobility to a 'locally-contingent' subsistence demonstrating the manner in which flexibility facilitated adaptivity in tropical foraging strategies. Both of the final essays in this section, 'From Bui Ceri Uato to Bui Ceri Uato Mane: a new archaeobotanical assemblage from East Timor' by Nuno Vasco Oliveira and 'Still too fragmentary and dependent upon chance? Advances in the study of early Southeast Asian archaeobotany' by Cristina Castillo and Dorian Q Fuller, highlight the important contributions being made in this field.

Ian brings to his scholarship a regional view that carries Southeast Asia to its eastern limits and also a keen insight into the complex relationships between South and Southeast Asia. Despite the caveat of the editors in the introduction, this theme underlies many essays and is particularly addressed in the third and fourth sections.

The third and longest part of the book, 'Social Complexity and Early States', contains seven articles, five on the mainland versus two on island studies and an overview of Southeast Asian adaptation. The titles of the essays highlight the balance between detailed site studies and regional considerations: 'The Jar-Burial Tradition in the West Mouth of Niah Cave, Sarawak: Burial histories, social identities, and changing perceptions of pottery and death' by Lindsay Lloyd-Smith and Franca Cole, 'The Iron Age of Thailand: Trends to Complexity' by Charles Higham 'The Archaeological Textiles from Ban Don Ta Phet in broader perspective' by Judith Cameron 'Uneven Development in Southwest Sulawesi, Indonesia, during the Early Metal Phase' by David Bulbeck 'Pan-Regional Responses to South Asian Inputs in Early Southeast Asia' by Pierre-Yves Manguin 'History and Archaeology at Trà Kiêu' by William Southworth and Ruth Prior, 'Ancient Roof Tiles Found in Central Vietnam' by Mariko Yamagata and Nguyen Kim Dung 'Interactions between Uplands and Lowlands through the 'Riverine Exchange Network' of Central Vietnam - A Case Study in the Thu Bon River Valley' by Tran Ky Phuong.

Virtually all these essays query previous assumptions, not all of which are resolvable into simple paradigms. Manguin for example shows how the persuasive argument of Sheldon Pollock (2006) on two phases of Sanskritization – a cosmopolitanism in the first millennium CE followed by a 'vernacularisation' at the start of the second millennium CE – is viable but could be widened to recognise the presence of a shared aesthetic in Southeast Asia. He cites in support of this the links between burial customs in central Thailand, central Vietnam, West Java and north Bali in the late first millennium BCE and early centuries of the Christian era. Further reinforcement for this shared sensibility is seen in the similarity between the *circa* 7th century CE plan and stucco decorations of Wat Phra Men, Nakhon Pathom (incorrectly labelled and described as U-Thong, p. 176), Thailand and Candi

Blandongan, Batujaya.¹ The comparable structure at Si Thep could be added to this list. Manguin convincingly argues that long-existing contacts sustained a regional ‘interaction sphere’. Together with tandem absorption of both Buddhism and Vaisnavism, this highlights chronological and cultural complexities drawing into question Pollock’s two clear phases.

The fourth part of the volume, ‘Craft Production and Exchange’ is more evenly distributed than the third in relation to mainland and island studies: ‘Continuity in Shell Artefact Production in Holocene East Timor’ by Sue O’Connor, ‘Movement of raw materials and manufactured goods across the South China Sea after 500 BCE: from Taiwan to Thailand, and back’ by Hsiao-Chun Hung and Peter Bellwood’, ‘Glass in Southeast Asia’ by Laure Dussubieux and Bernard Gratuze, ‘Megalithic High-Tin Bronzes and Peninsular India’s ‘Living Prehistory’” by Sharada Srinivasan and ‘Pottery manufacture and trade in Maluku Tengah, Indonesia: 35 years after Ellen and Glover’ by Matthew Spriggs and William Dickinson. Many of these testify to cultural continuity and Southeast Asian production centres, although the ethnographic study of Sharada Srinivasan documents an Indian tradition of metalworking and specialised copper alloys indicating that South Asia may have been the source of the technology seen in the high-tin bronze bowls found at Ban Don Ta Phet and Khao Jamook.

Ian also has incisive views on the interface of politics, nationalism and cultural heritage, an interest covered in two very pointed articles in the book’s final section, ‘Colonialism and Archaeology’. The first is ‘From Centres of Pilgrimage to World Heritage Sites: Religious Travel Between India and Indonesia’ by Himanshu Prabha Ray, who contrasts the universalist view of Rabindranath Tagore in a 1927 voyage and the 1912 thesis of Radhakumud Mookerji on Indian colonisation of Southeast Asia. Ray goes on to describe the mutability and pervasive appeal of the textual traditions of Buddhism transcending national borders in examples ranging from the edicts of Aśokan sites to late first millennium CE terracotta and stone depictions of the eight scenes of the Buddha’s lifetime. This bridges to a discussion of colonial interventions at Borobudur and Sanchi and finally a 7th century CE Chinese Buddhist temple at Nagapattinam destroyed in 1867 to allow Jesuit priests to construct a church. The article ends with this event to highlight the destabilisation of millennia-old patterns of maritime interchange pilgrimage sites through colonial interventions. This rather grim picture contrasts to the final article of the book, ‘We Should Remember with Gratitude: Reflections on Archaeology in Laos’ by Anna Källén and Anna Karlström, an emphatic and lively call for an ongoing critique of nationalist discourse embedded in post-colonial approaches to Southeast Asian archaeology.

This volume provides an unusual mix of articles, from specific technical studies

¹ Revire previously noted this error (2011: 207, fn. 28).

to significant summaries of the changing paradigms of Southeast Asian archaeology. As with the scholarship of Ian Glover whom it honours, it considers interchange within and beyond the region. The overall structure and purpose of the book, apart from a common valuing of Ian's research and mentoring is at times unclear. The editors could have provided a clearer template explaining the order and rationale of the articles included, or broken them down into smaller thematic groups. They do explain that the idea for the book arose from a panel honouring Ian that was organised by Bérénice Bellina for the 2008 International Conference at Leiden of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeology in which Ian played a founding role in the mid 1980s. Some of the book's articles were presented at the Leiden conference, with others selected from the many pieces received following a solicitation for contributions. These panel papers and the essays accepted from the solicitation provided a thematic framework aptly mirroring Ian's many areas of research and publications: Late Pleistocene/early Holocene, hunter-gatherers, Neolithic societies, craft production, Iron Age social complexity, exchange/trade systems, early states and colonialism and archaeology.

As it stands, this is a volume to consult for a parallel comparison, or source, more than a sequential exploration of the current views on issues affecting our perception of the past and present in Southeast Asia. It complements, for example, the 2004 publication *Southeast Asia: from Prehistory to History* (London: Routledge) edited by Ian Glover and Peter Bellwood, with articles by different scholars covering the prehistoric to historic transition across the region. That said, *50 Years of Archaeology in Southeast Asia: Essays in Honour of Ian Glover*, offers an extraordinarily informed set of essays with valuable reflections on the history of archaeology in Southeast Asia and the data supporting new issues and hypotheses. The editors, contributors and publisher are to be commended for their joint efforts to produce this handsome volume giving a clear perception of the breadth of on-going research contributing to our understanding of Southeast Asia as a coherent cultural region.

Elizabeth Howard Moore

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A Traveler in Siam in the Year 1655: Extracts from the Journal of Gijsbert Heeck translated and introduced by Barend Jan Terwiel (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2008). ISBN: 978-974-9511-35-0

The Dutch physician or “medicinal specialist” Gijsbert Heeck, in the employ of the Dutch United East India Company (VOC), visited Siam during 1655, late in the reign of King Prasat Thong (r. 1629-1656). These published journal extracts take us from the author’s departure from Holland, via a naval skirmish with the Portuguese in the roadstead of Siam, a minutely-observed journey up the Chao Phraya River to the Dutch settlement in Ayutthaya and, finally, the royal city itself, with its grand gilded monasteries and myriad waterways.

Heeck was on a longer voyage, also visiting other parts of the East Indies. The translator, Barend Jan Terwiel, has chosen to translate only the parts of the journal which directly concern Heeck’s time in Siam, this volume being the first in a planned series of publications aimed at introducing hitherto unknown or unpublished VOC material on Thailand to the general public. The Heeck text, as transcribed and published in *Marineblad* by S.P. L’Honoré Naber (at least the part concerning Siam), is incomplete because L’Honoré Naber left out some substantial segments which he thought would probably not be of interest to the readership of a journal mainly concerned with maritime matters.¹ Professor Terwiel has translated these excised pages, putting all of us in his debt, because many of the omitted lines are of potential interest to scholars of Thailand. They describe, among other things, monasteries in Ayutthaya and native vegetation near the mouth of the Chao Phraya.

A major feature of the Heeck document, and one of its main assets, is its information on the Dutch settlement in Ayutthaya. Indeed, Heeck provides the most detailed account of the VOC’s Siam “comptoir” in existence. The main building, as described, was of course suitably grand as befits a VOC “lodge”, with its double staircase and high-ceilinged rooms. An equally interesting part of the journal entry concerns the Dutch cemetery, with its Siamese-style *stupa* covering the graves of former directors or *opperhoofden* of the VOC factory. Heeck mentions a broad bridge which led from the area of the VOC “lodge” to the house of the trader Chao Sut (or Osoet), followed by an explanation of why the Dutch had to deal with, or even depend upon, this Mon woman as an intermediary (and supplier of goods) in their trade in Ayutthaya. Heeck’s is also the most trenchant summary of the relationships between VOC employees and local women, which resulted in the birth of several “half-breed” children, many of whom were left behind in Ayutthaya by their fathers, who went home to Europe or on to other company postings.

In his lively and informative Introduction, Terwiel rightly points out that Heeck’s account of Siam is an amalgam of sharply observed descriptions and pious

¹ S.P. L’Honoré Naber. “Derde Voijagie van Gijsbert Heecq naar Oost Indien” in *Marineblad* 25 (1910-1911).

Protestant moralising. Although he has a strong distaste for Buddhist idol-worship (as he obviously had for papist idolatry), Heeck should nevertheless be commended for his factual descriptions of monasteries in Siam, full of vivid details. On his way upriver to Ayutthaya, Heeck related that in one wat he saw Buddha images in a posture with the left hand lying “on the thigh, the palm turned upwards and the right [hand] straight down to the right thigh near the knee.” Thanks to this plain but accurate reporting, we are able to conclude that these Buddha images were in the posture of calling the earth to witness, or subduing Mara.

Heeck could of course get it all terribly wrong, as when he misinterprets the great Buddha image known as the “Great God of Soest” as being the depiction of a Siamese Noah. Since it was said to be near the Dutch settlement, this was obviously a reference to the large Buddha image at Wat Phananchoenng. Terwiel offers an explanation that Heeck, misinformed by someone in Siam, was probably confusing the image with a version of the flooding caused by the divinity Ganga (the Earth goddess surely?) washing her hair, drowning all the forces of Mara as the Buddha was about to attain Enlightenment.

Another extremely informative aspect of the journal entries, on account of Heeck’s attention to detail, is the clear depiction of a sophisticated economy in the Chao Phraya River valley, with Chinese communities, the regular use of money in commercial transactions, and certain villages dedicated to particular occupations.

Heeck was somewhat puzzled by the deterioration in the relationship between the VOC and the court of King Prasat Thong in 1655. The answer is partly in his text. Towards the end of his stay in Siam he witnessed the departure of a fleet of armed vessels going to fight Songkhla (11 October entry). The decline in the good relations between king and company was largely to do with this very war. The Dutch had, from the mid 1640s onwards, helped Ayutthaya in its wars against Songkhla, but by the early 1650s company policy had changed to one of non-interference in the domestic affairs of native states. A misunderstanding between the two parties occurred when the Siamese court claimed that the *opperhoofd* Hendrick Craijers had promised the Ayutthayan king a fleet of twenty vessels to help attack Songkhla, which of course the next VOC chief in Siam strenuously denied.

Heeck came to Siam at a time when King Prasat Thong was nearing the end of his reign – but neither the Dutchman nor the monarch was to know that. The king seems still to have been very much in command of his court. The journal includes an anecdote about how the Okya Phrakhleng, minister in charge of foreign affairs and the treasury, was chastised by the king for allegedly “conniving with convicted criminals”, barely escaping execution by the royal elephants before he was released. The severity of King Prasat Thong’s rule was indeed a feature of many Dutch documents, from the writings of Jeremias van Vliet to the unpublished archival material written by the various *opperhoofden* in Ayutthaya.

On a matter of detail, I am not totally convinced that the monastery referred

to as the large “Abbentak” necessarily refers to Wat Chai Watthanaram. Heeck does not specify that this place was situated by the river, outside the city walls (9-12 September entry, pp. 61-62). The description could therefore easily apply to Wat Mahathat, Wat Phutthaisawan or any other large royal monastery with a presiding *stupa* of the *prang* type and surrounding galleries filled with Buddha images. A couple more minor points: “ammerac” (pp. 66, 113) was probably a misspelling or scribal error for “namrack”, a type of lacquer and a regular VOC export from Siam. It was used to make Japanese lacquer ware. Also, contrary to the claim made in the Introduction, the Heeck journal has been used by historians other than George Vinal Smith and Han ten Brummelhuis, although those two scholars were certainly the pioneers.²

Annotations are learned, detailed and at times intriguing in their speculative nature. The careful editing by Han ten Brummelhuis contributes to the finished product, a publication and translation of one of the best western sources on seventeenth century Siam. The original Dutch text of these extracts, transcribed from the original seventeenth century handwriting by Renée Hoogenraad, forms the last part of the book.

The inclusion of several well-chosen illustrations and maps, several in colour, add much visual appeal to this little book. The exquisitely drawn VOC manuscript maps of Ayutthaya and the Chao Phraya River are particularly welcome, as is the long Valentijn map showing the course of the Chao Phraya (and much beyond), with a very useful key to the place names shown on the map provided too. In sum, this is a publication which should prove to be of great value to anyone interested in Thai history, the Ayutthaya period or European “travel literature”.

Dhiravat na Pombejra

Mediums, Monks, and Amulets: Thai Popular Buddhism Today by Pattana Kitiarsa. (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2012.) ISBN: 978-616-215-049-4 (soft)

Sensationalistic accounts of Buddhist monks’ involvement in magic, fortune telling, spirit worship, protective amulets, lottery number selection, and other practices aimed at bringing worldly rewards appear daily in the Thai media. Many Thai social commentators contend that these practices are not “real Buddhism”, but examples of the degeneration of Buddhist morality in a modern, globalized

² See for example Remco Raben and Dhiravat na Pombejra (eds.). *In the King’s Trail*. Bangkok: Royal Netherlands Embassy, 1997, p.85; Alfons van der Kraan. “On Company Business: The Rijckloff van Goens Mission to Siam, 1650” in *Itinerario* Vol.XXII (2/1998), pp.59-61; Bhawan Ruangsilp. *Dutch East India Company Merchants at the Court of Ayyutthaya: Dutch Perceptions of the Thai Kingdom, c.1604-1765*. Leiden: Brill, 2007, pp. 37, 42.

environment. To such critics, Pattana Kitiarsa's *Mediums, Monks, & Amulets: Thai Popular Buddhism Today* is a thoughtful, informed response.

Pattana brings his unique perspective as one who is both a follower of the beliefs and practices he is studying and "an ethnographer observing [his] own participation in them." This is apparent right from the preface where he shares aspects of his brief term as a monk. One particularly poignant moment is his spiritually transcendent experience of communicating with his deceased mother. Another eye-opening one is the abbot's urging of the monks, "to find some tricks (*ubai*) to attract devotees." The abbot explains, "We cannot survive without patronage from laypeople. Magic is not encouraged in Buddhist teachings...., but sometimes it is quite necessary when we have to deal with popular expectation" (pp. xviii-xix).

Following the book's preface, the first two chapters are devoted to the theoretical concepts underpinning Pattana's approach. The first is agency, with the "agents" of Thai popular Buddhism identified as the monks, mediums and laypeople who consider themselves Buddhists. It is these people, rather than texts or institutions, who are the focus of this book. The second concept is hybridization, a term from postcolonial discourse, used here to refer to the new amalgamation of diverse beliefs, processes, agents, deities, and practices that have cropped up in recent decades in Thailand's religious landscape. The old model of syncretism, with popular religion seen as existing "under the umbrella of a dominant, mainstream, institutional Buddhism" (p. 13), is rejected as no longer valid.

The chapters that follow are vivid accounts of specific practitioners, their circumstances, practices, and followers. "Magic Monks and Spirit Mediums" (Chapter 3) juxtaposes the personal and professional lives of two types of popular religious specialists: a financially successful forest-dwelling magic monk and a strapped-for-cash urban female spirit medium. Despite differences in their present circumstances, the backgrounds of these two agents are not too dissimilar. Both came from poor rural backgrounds and endured periods of hardship on their respective paths toward their current positions.

The process of creating a new deity is described in Chapter 4, "Phumphuang: a Singer's Spirit and Lottery Luck," which relates the rags-to-riches tale of a talented, hard-working girl, who became one of the country's most beloved superstar singers. The events following her untimely death at the age of 31 were even more remarkable than those of her life. After being granted the rare honor of a royal funeral attended by a record-breaking number of mourners, the media promoted a cult connecting her spirit with winning lottery numbers, and fortune seekers began presenting donations of gold and money to wax statues of her at the wat where she had been cremated.

"Luang Pho Khun: A Postmodern Monk" (Chapter 5) features Thailand's most famous superstar magic monk, seen in photographs as a wizened, skinny figure squatting with bank notes in his hands. His amulets and blessings are sought by devotees ranging from poor villagers to the nobility. Ironically, while magic

monks are sought after for their perceived ability to bring wealth to their devotees, these very powers are believed to have been acquired during extended periods of asceticism wandering alone in the forest. It might come as a surprise to some readers that temples affiliated with the Thammayut sect, known for its adherence to strict practices, are no less likely to be the venue of magic and commercial practices than are Mahanikai temples. In fact, the three monasteries mentioned in the book are affiliated with the Thammayut sect.

Chapter 6, “The Rise and Fall of the Chatukham-Rammathep Amulet”, follows the saga of efforts beginning in 1987 to deal with the oversupply of an unusually large and unattractive amulet that transformed it into a mega-commodity. A decade later over 80 million were in circulation. There is no easily understood connection between the amulet’s symbolism, the circumstances surrounding its role in raising funds to erect a protective city pillar, and the bizarre campaigns used to market it, including making a batch of the amulets on a commercial plane flying over a sacred stupa and including bits of human flesh and ash in their composition. Pattana’s analysis of the craze is multifaceted and includes the changing character of Thai Buddhist piety as well as anxiety arising out of political and economic circumstances.

Chapter 7, “Mediumship in Focus”, explores the authenticity of mediums and describes the efforts of certain rationalist thinkers to discredit them. Curiously, one of the persons who exposed spirit possession as a sham was the chief practitioner of a Sino-Thai cult who revealed the secret of his act on a TV talk show. Nevertheless, many highly educated people regularly consult mediums and fortune tellers, and as Pattana points out, question the ability of the particular medium rather than the credibility of mediumship itself.

The final chapter, “Concluding Remarks,” sums up the changes in Thailand’s religious landscape as a consequence of the country’s rapid transformation from a predominantly rural society to one that is significantly urbanized. In this new society that is ever evolving of modern highways, high-tech communications, urbanization, and changing concepts of female gender, people are able to travel to religious sites, be in touch with new religious trends and technologies, and invest in experimenting with new practices. What they seek is financial, personal, professional success as well as emotional well being. The practices they engage in often demand no more than a belief in luck and in the ability of the agent or object to tap into the powers that can grant these desires. While the specific techniques might be new, similar approaches to dealing with uncertainty have long existed alongside canonical Buddhism, as can be seen in laws dating from the Ayutthaya Period, and reiterated by King Mongkut. One of the main differences is that the range and number of practices has increased exponentially, which to Pattana, is evidence of “the health and wealth of popular Buddhism in Thailand today” (p. 149). Critics dismayed by this conclusion may find solace in remembering that Pattana is limiting his analysis to “popular” Buddhism, and that orthodox Buddhism is still strong.

Despite the book's brevity, assimilating it requires more than a single reading because of the complexity that emerges in Pattana's examination of the sources of cults and their relationship to earlier beliefs, royal ceremonies, prophetic movements, ethnic assimilation, and social change, and the emerging religious piety of Thai Buddhists. The reader may find fault with the book's organization into what seems a progression of separate articles rather than an integrated whole, and in fact, earlier versions of some of the chapters can be found on the Internet. Nevertheless, the integration of these rich ethnographic sources under one cover makes this book a valuable resource for anyone interested in the ever-changing nature of Buddhism in Thailand.

Tragically, Pattana, an Isan village-born anthropologist with a doctorate from the University of Washington, died of cancer at the age of 45 shortly after the publication of this book. His unique perspective and ability to engage in diverse facets of Thai popular culture will be deeply missed as will the energy and enthusiasm he devoted to his work.

Bonnie Pacala Brereton