

privately in all chapters. That said, having the Chinese view is valuable. Important issues, such as human rights concerns, the then detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, the large number of political prisoners and the prospects of integration of the current military junta into a civilian government are not discussed adequately; these are major shortcomings. Finally the *Prospect for Change* of the title could have been discussed more thoroughly. Suggestions for “change” are presented in relation to the approach of the Western powers only, assuming that the Chinese approach is the most successful model of engagement with Burma.

Despite these limitations, the collection offers valuable insights. This book is particularly useful for scholars of Southeast Asian studies wishing to broaden their horizons on current realities and future scenarios of Burma and for understanding the Chinese perspective on Burma.

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Tracks and Traces: Thailand and the Work of Andrew Turton

Philip Hirsch and Nicholas Tapp (eds) (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, ICAS Publications Series, 2010)

This volume contains nine short essays reflecting on the work of anthropologist Andrew Turton. Most of the essays address Turton’s work on rural Thailand but there are two focused on his more historical writings on slavery (Craig Reynolds) and British diplomatic missions to the Tai states (Volker Grabowsky). Like all edited collections born out of conference sessions, this volume is an idiosyncratic mix and there is some lack of focus, apart from Turton himself. Nevertheless, two basic questions are never far from view in most of the chapters: how has rural Thailand changed since Turton’s most influential writings of the 1970s and 1980s? And, given these changes, how useful are Turton’s ideas in interpreting contemporary Thai society and its contests over power?

The volume deals with the second question quite easily. Reading the various essays, it is clear that Turton’s ideas about power, state-society relations, rural stratification, ideology and even slavery continue to help scholars think about Thailand’s socio-economic differentiation and its political management. In particular, Turton’s influential argument that there are limits to the effectiveness of ideological domination and physical coercion continues to inspire scholars who explore Thailand’s geographical, cultural and conceptual margins where mainstream ideas about modernisation and development are contested. These “margins” range from young gang leaders in Chiang Mai who draw on subaltern notions of masculinity and invulnerability (Paul Cohen, p. 44) to the royal palace itself where the king’s sufficiency economy theory is said to represent an anti-capitalist concern with “frugality and modesty” (Jamaree Chiangthong, p. 86). Turton would surely be delighted to find subversion in such socially diverse places.

The first question, about the changes that have occurred in rural Thailand since the tumultuous 1970s, proves much more difficult for the volume to handle. Naturally, there is a consensus that the countryside has changed a great deal since Turton conducted his fieldwork in Chiang Rai province in the early 1970s. However, the process of change is often described in terms that sit a little too comfortably with Turton's work.

This is well illustrated in the four chapters by Anan Ganjanapan and Philip Hirsch, Jim Glassman, Nicholas Tapp and Jamaree Chiangthong (three of whom – Hirsch, Tapp and Jamaree – were Turton's students). It is hazardous to lump separate contributions together but, to my reading, there is a common vision in these chapters which runs something like this: the disruptive penetration of capitalism into the countryside (which Turton observed at a relatively early stage) has now become virtually universal. This has resulted in worsening social differentiation and the commodification of natural resources, agricultural products and labour. Livelihoods have become more vulnerable as agriculture has been integrated into regional and global markets and as rural households have taken up off-farm employment. The ideological domination of the state has produced new market-friendly subjects who are preoccupied with commerce. State surveillance, censorship, coercion and intimidation help to produce compliance and fear when market-friendly subjectivities falter. However, as in Turton's time, this domination has its limits and alternative forms of consciousness, knowledge and academic discourse continue to challenge the dominant mode of rural development.

In brief, while these authors emphasise the changes that have occurred within the Thai peasantry, they remain rather loyal to a Turton-esque vision of rural development as a process of capitalist penetration, state domination, social conflict and livelihood vulnerability. The volume's failure to grapple more critically with this vision is its main weakness. Consider the comment of Anan and Hirsch, two very seasoned observers of rural Thailand, about the impacts of economic transformation:

[T]he ongoing rural restructuring in Southeast Asia can be seen more as a contradictory process than a golden road to modernity because of its many unintended consequences. . . . In fact, it can be considered more as a "politics of exclusion" because of the marginalisation of livelihoods of the majority of the rural population whose life has become increasingly insecure and fraught with environmental risk (pp. 34–5).

Are they correct? Are the majority of the rural population in Thailand now more insecure than they were in the 1970s? Has the reduction in official rural poverty rates from over 80% to about 10% really made farmers more anxious about their future? Has the diversification of rural livelihoods away from subsistence rice cultivation really increased exposure to livelihood risks? Even a cursory examination of any set of human development indicators will make it abundantly clear that livelihoods in rural Thailand have improved dramatically since Turton's time. Of course, Anan and Hirsch are rightly concerned about the fate of some of Thailand's most marginal rural dwellers, but to confuse the fate of the margins with that of the mainstream is to end up advocating development alternatives, such as shifting cultivation (p. 37), which are niche remedies at best and socio-economic culs-de-sac at worst.

Recognising the positive socio-economic developments in rural Thailand is not a matter of adopting the conservative triumphalism that Glassman rightly attacks (p. 52). Rather, recognising the rise of what I call Thailand's "middle-income peasantry" is essential for understanding the new political dynamics that inform a new era of rural activism. Put simply, the political orientation of Thailand's modern peasantry is very different to what it was when Turton documented the "roots of conflict" in the 1970s. Central to this transformation is the change in the role played by the state, partly in response to the rural discontent that Turton helped to document. As Anan and Hirsch point out (p. 30), the state that Turton described was a predatory state working alongside rural elites on various projects of surplus extraction. However, since the mid-1970s state support for the rural sector has expanded dramatically and massive government investments in irrigation, roads, electricity, price support, credit provision, health, welfare and education have underpinned the expansion of capitalism and the viability of the agricultural sector and, as a result, have helped maintain a relatively large rural population. In my view, this shift from predation to subsidisation has produced a new political dynamic in which peasants seek to maximise state largesse rather than minimise its extractions.

Two chapters in the volume do attempt to grapple with the political implications of this profound transformation. In his overview of political development in the north-east, Charles Keyes argues that populist democracy (combined with strong loyalty to the monarchy) has replaced millenarian revolt as the preferred channel for ethno-regional political expression. Representative democracy, though much decried by some commentators as being vulnerable to what Tapp dismisses as "local ideological misapprehensions" (p. 69), is the vehicle through which rural Thailand has been able to secure its social contract with the modern Thai state. In another very useful chapter, Jonathan Rigg critically engages with Turton's less well-read work on participation. Rigg shows how participation has lost its radical edge and been transformed into a standard component of the rural development apparatus. Rigg is a little too inclined to adopt the contemporary academic orthodoxy about the technical and anti-political force of development participation – in my experience it is enormously productive of division and contention – but, more than any other paper in the volume, he succeeds in documenting the revolutionary shift in state-society relations that has occurred since Turton's time. Participation is now a common symbolic language that facilitates negotiation and transaction between peasants and the state about rural development and political inclusion. This is a modern context of state-peasant synergy that is very different to the political environment that Turton documented so effectively. Taken as a whole, the volume could have done more to explore these very important shifts in rural Thailand's political economy.

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