<Book Review>
Kevin Hewison


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Party System Institutionalization in Asia: Democracies, Autocracies, and the Shadows of the Past

Allen Hicken and Erik Martinez Kuhonta, eds.

In pluralist and conservative perspectives, political parties in democracies are important as essential representative links between citizens and the state. In these perspectives, political parties provide a means of collecting, interpreting, and channeling citizen’s interests into the political system. Where they fail, democracy is threatened. Yet parties may also be important for authoritarian regimes as many of these hold elections. Authoritarian leaders may also use parties to mobilize people in support of the regime. By all accounts, then, parties are politically significant. That being the case, understanding party and party system institutionalization allows for analytical distinctions to be drawn between regimes, sometimes being used as a proxy measure of political development.

Allen Hicken and Erik Martinez Kuhonta take on party and party system institutionalization in an ambitious and rich collection of 12 country case studies and two theoretical chapters. With an analytical lens focused on Asia, the editors begin by challenging the abovementioned presumed link between democracy and the institutionalization of political parties and/or party systems (pp. 4, 17). They define institutionalized parties as “coherent, adaptable, and complex institutions” that channel citizen demands and hold government accountable (p. 3), and they consider nondemocratic regimes as “particularly important in shaping party system institutionalization” (p. 4). It is because it “provides a sharp contrast” that they see Asia as a useful testing ground for assumptions about institutionalization (p. 4).

The Asian cases presented in the collection suggest several conclusions to the editors. First, that more elections do not necessarily mean enhanced institutionalization (pp. 11–12). Second, they consider the cases in the collection do not suggest any “straightforward general relationship of macro political institutions . . . with institutionalization” (p. 12). Third, they conclude that the assumed relationship between fractionalization and party and political volatility is much more mixed for the Asian cases (pp. 12–13). Fourth, they found that parties that institutionalized earlier tend to have greater longevity and higher institutionalization than parties that were formed later. While this might seem like a tautology, the institutionalist claim is that “path dependence” is critical (p. 13). Fifth, the Asian cases tend to suggest that institutionalization has been greatest where authoritarian “legacies” are strongest (p. 14). This leads to the “somewhat . . . troubling conclusion” that authoritarian antecedents are important (pp. 15–16). These points suggest a need for a reconsideration of party and party system institutionalization to account for the findings on authoritarianism and party system institutionalization (p. 17). These conclusions are taken up in the final, reflective chapter 14, by Scott Mainwaring.
Each of the country cases is crafted by area and country specialists. This might seem logical, and yet it is of some significance when considering the nature of political science research in recent years. Hicken and Kuhonta were both involved in the production of *Southeast Asia in Political Science: Theory, Region, and Qualitative Analysis* (Kuhonta et al. 2008), which made a case for area expertise in a discipline that was increasingly dominated by big, comparative, statistics-driven studies. In many ways, this book is meant to demonstrate the insights and learning that are achieved when country specialists bring their in-depth knowledge to bear on a “big” political science question, in this case, party system institutionalization. The overall result is a set of thoughtful and insightful studies influenced by historical institutionalist perspectives that, as noted above, suggest conclusions that might not have been seen if each of the cases had been quantified and manipulated in a large multi-country study.

More than this, each chapter also reflects on shortcomings in the theoretical literature on and conceptualization of party and party system institutionalization. Indeed, in the first country case, on Malaysia, Meredith Weiss points out that the country’s political parties bear all the hallmarks of institutionalization, including considerable competition between parties (p. 25). Yet knowing this tells us remarkably little about the forces that shape Malaysian politics. It is remarkable that, for several decades, competitive parties have persisted, yet post-colonial Malaysia has seen no opposition party win an election. The constraints placed on opposition lead Weiss to a call for the deinstitutionalization of parties, seeing institutionalization as an obstacle for democratic development (pp. 26, 45).

Likewise, when Netina Tan looks at Singapore in chapter 3, she sees nothing but People’s Action Party (PAP) domination. As a result, her focus is on internal structures of the party and its leadership succession. So hegemonic is the PAP that its “institutionalization” squeezes out other parties to the extent that they become irrelevant to the analysis of party institutionalization. Opposition parties have been unable to institutionalize but this observation is trite without recognizing that their lack of institutionalization and processes of deinstitutionalization have been PAP strategy. The PAP’s longevity also allows it to monopolize the state apparatus and manage the law (p. 55).

In limiting dissent and constraining and controlling competition, the PAP has similarities with the communist parties of Vietnam (chapter 6 by Tuong Vu) and China (chapter 7 by Yongnian Zheng). While Vietnam and China are single-party dictatorships, in terms of organizational structure, recruitment, repression, and party institutionalization, the commonalities with the PAP are strong, prompting both Vu and Tan to draw on theoretical concerns first developed by Samuel Huntington. Zheng might easily have drawn on Huntington as well, but prefers to focus on claims that the party has “hegemonized” and institutionalized while managing to accommodate elements of “rising civil society” (pp. 183–185) and still holding onto power (p. 166). These processes, Zheng suggests, make China an evolving political system that is different from the West (p. 185), but
shows “strong parallels” with other Asian cases with dominant parties, mentioning Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Taiwan (p. 168). On Vietnam, Vu considers this variety of single-party accommodation as a struggle to maintain party dominance while also deinstitutionalizing and liberalizing (pp. 142, 158).

Zheng mentions Taiwan as a comparator for China, perhaps thinking of the period of Nationalist/Kuomintang dictatorship. Yet Taiwan is different in that it has achieved a competitive two-party system. In chapter 5, Tun-jen Cheng and Yung-min Hsu explain this process while also observing that this results in challenges, warning that the “highly institutionalized party system seems to have reinforced political polarization . . .” (p. 109). Other examples of recent democratization are discussed in the book. In chapter 11, Joseph Wong hails South Korea as an economic and political success story while noting that there have been and remain challenges for democratization. Not least, the party system is said to remain “uninstitutionalized” (p. 261) and with voters exhibiting little loyalty to parties. Indonesia (chapter 10, by Paige Johnson Tan) is usually considered to be one of the electoral democratization success stories despite a lack of institutionalization (p. 236). The Philippines (chapter 13, by Hicken), has a long history of parties and elections, yet is considered “under-institutionalized,” and subject to elite domination, poor governance, and public disillusionment. Taiwan, South Korea, and Indonesia might have problems, yet each has had some democratic successes. Less successful in these terms is Cambodia, discussed by Sorpong Peou (chapter 9), who says that “democratic institutionalization . . . has now given way to authoritarian institutionalization” (p. 232).

The two countries usually identified as resilient and long-standing democracies are Japan and India. Writing on Japan, Kenneth Mori McElwain (chapter 4) emphasizes changes over the long history of political parties in the country. He suggests that party program differences are becoming more significant for voters, meaning that personalism is being reduced. Despite this, the conservative Liberal Democratic Party has held power for all but two relatively brief periods since 1955, suggesting that it has successfully adapted to the changes over the post-War period. Chapter 8 on India by Csaba Nikolenyi begins by engaging in a little debate with the editors. Nikolenyi argues that authoritarianism in India resulted in deinstitutionalization for the leading party; voters are losing confidence in parties; and that India’s voting system and anti-defection rules has seen decreased electoral volatility despite an increased number of parties.

The perennial failure in this set of countries—in terms of party and party system institutionalization and democratization—is Thailand, as discussed by Kuhonta (chapter 12). In May 2014, Thailand reverted to a military dictatorship for the second time since 2005. Thailand’s 12th successful coup saw it developing its 20th constitution since 1932. In this context, it is hardly surprising that Kuhonta refers to Thailand’s political parties as “feckless.” Oddly, military intervention is only considered one of five possible explanations for low institutionalization, with Kuhonta favoring an explanation that sees parties as failing to entrench social cleavages in the party system.
(pp. 281–282). He locates the “critical junctures” that have allowed the control of parties by elites. Examining the 1930s and immediate post-World War II periods, Kuhonta explains that parties have been dominated by “personalism, factionalism, and feckless organizations” (p. 283).

With such a divergence of experience across the Asian cases, Mainwaring’s concluding chapter should be a welcome addition to the collection. However, his conclusion that the main differences in the cases are between competitive, hegemonic, and party-state systems (p. 328) left this reader underwhelmed. While he reasserts the significance of studying party institutionalization, this reader was struck by some of Hicken’s words at the end of his chapter on the Philippines: “Why should we care about the level of institutionalization? We can observe differences in the level of institutionalization from country to country, but does it really matter for things we ultimately care about?”

Hicken’s answer is that it does matter, for democratic consolidation and good governance (p. 324). After reading this collection, however, I am not so easily convinced. Institutionalists study institutions with such intensity that they sometimes risk losing sight of the societies that give rise to the institutions they scrutinize. This risks missing the ways in which institutions are structured and their relationships with each other. While this is not a criticism of all of the country cases in this collection, it is true that there are too few references to institutions as sites of political struggles. The power of oligarchs and elites are mentioned in several papers and some authors do consider social cleavages, historical trajectories, and critical junctures. Yet the notion that institutions are sites of intense struggle and are shaped by conflicts over social, political, and economic power is curiously lost in discussions of institutionalization.

That basic criticism aside, the country studies of political parties in the Asian region will be useful for readers, especially as there is a theoretical coherence to the chapters, unusual in an edited collection. This adds weight to the idea that country expertise is invaluable when dealing with socially-embedded institutions. The theoretical chapters are likely to be of great interest to party institutionalization aficionados while adding Asian cases to a theoretical literature dominated by Europe and Latin America is as necessary as it is welcome.

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Porphant Ouyyanont, *Crown Property Bureau in Thailand and Its Role in Political Economy*

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In 2008, Porphant Ouyyanont published “The Crown Property Bureau in Thailand and the Crisis of 2007,” in this journal. It was a seminal contribution, being the first English-language account of the organisation that manages the crown’s institutional wealth. That article changed the ways in which authors and journalists have considered the Crown Property Bureau (CPB) and how it has been reported since then. By calculating the assets of the CPB he made more accurate earlier guesses at its worth. Even allowing for some errors in estimating the secretive CPB’s assets and its unique legal status, his estimate of US$27 billion meant that the CPB was Thailand’s largest conglomerate.

In the ongoing political struggle between supporters of Thaksin Shinawatra on the one side and royalists on the other, the military intervened twice, in 2006 and again in 2014, to oust governments said to be threatening to the royalist state and the economic, social and political power associated with it. Porphant’s article, famous for its use in the Forbes estimate of royal wealth, assessing Thailand’s as the world’s wealthiest, was eye-opening for those who viewed the monarchy as resisting necessary political and economic change in the country.

Since that 2008 article, Porphant has also contributed a chapter on the CPB to the palace-promoted King Bhumibol Adulyadej. A Life’s Work (Singapore: EDM, 2011) edited by Nicholas Grossman and Dominic Faulder. This giant and largely hagiographical book was a response to Porphant’s revelations and, more importantly, to Paul Handley’s masterful and critical The King Never Smiles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). Porphant’s contribution to A Life’s Work was an updating of the earlier journal article, adding material gained from the CPB and its senior officials.

This new booklet, of 47 pages, and number 13 in the Trends in Asia Series from the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, is quite similar to the earlier works and draws heavily upon them. In this context, it might be asked why another piece on the CPB? My guess is that the publisher wants a title on a hot topic, and with an executive summary, it seems there is a notion that the likely reader is in government or business. There is also Porphant’s penchant, as economic historian, for adding historical detail. Finally, in this space analysing the Thai monarchy, there is a case for repeating and highlighting some of the points made earlier.

This booklet generally follows the format of the 2008 article, with the major addition being the economic context that gave birth to the CPB’s predecessor, the Privy Purse Bureau or PPB (4–6). The PPB is said to have been formed to deal with the expanding expenses of a modernist and absolutist royal family and to “counter-balance the influence of foreign investment…” (4). This latter nationalist emphasis, also made in 2008, has little evidence to support it. Rather, the discussion is of a royal family recognising the impact of economic change and accommodating foreign investment to produce ever more wealth for the royal family. The monarchy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lived lavishly, in the manner of royals in other parts of the world and the PPB supported this. At the same time, royal demands often exceeded the PPB’s budget.
“Nationalism” did not prevent the use of foreign managers in royal investment activities, lending to Chinese investors or joint investments with both Chinese and European businesspeople (7). In part, the PPB prospered from what we might today call “insider knowledge,” buying up (7). The PPB did well from this knowledge, buying up land in areas where values would skyrocket following road construction (7). Various estimates suggest that the PPB controlled 25% to 33% of all land in Bangkok (9).

As in his earlier article, Porphant says little about the impact of the 1932 Revolution, expending just two paragraphs on it (16, 18). He spends more time on the 1948 Crown Property Act, noting its significance for the (now) CPB, but saying nothing about the “political intrigues and factional infighting” that allowed the princes to regain control of crown property (18).

The significance of the Act and the favours granted to the CPB are seen in the data Porphant adds to his earlier story of the expansion of the CPB’s assets into the 1990s (18–24). Like other conglomerates in this period, the CPB diversified its business activities and grew substantially. This growth was spurred along by the industrialisation of the economy that saw a period of several decades of uninterrupted growth, often at very high rates.

Like other sprawling enterprises in this boom period, when the crash came in 1997, the CPB was in serious trouble. Porphant, extending on the data in his earlier story of the 1997 crisis, explains that the CPB borrowed – from undisclosed sources – up to US$222 million “to cover royal household expenses” (24). The tale of the CPB’s recovery is remarkable, and Porphant has told it before; in this booklet he essentially repeats the ways in which the state supported the CPB while the bureau shed some of its diverse holdings and concentrated on its property portfolio, the Siam Commercial Bank and the Siam Cement Group (26–27). Interestingly, these are the main assets established under the absolute monarchy.

Porphant concludes with an updated assessment of the value of the assets of the CPB in 2014. With $27.4 billion in 2005, Porphant estimates the CPB’s worth in 2014 is $43.8 billion (31). Yet this appears an underestimate for Porphant does not alter the land values used to calculate the 2005 and 2014 assets; this is odd as media reports suggest very large price rises for sales and rentals in prime areas during this period.

There are several problems with this revised account of the CPB, mostly where new material is not well-integrated. For example, King Vajiravudh, as well as being a spendthrift and a dilettante, is criticised as being “uninterested” in business (14). In fact, though, Porphant’s data indicate that five of the PPB’s 14 “major investments” between 1887 and 1929 are during his reign (17). The claim in the executive summary that the CPB is Thailand’s largest landowner is corrected to being “one of the largest” (34), and recent data suggest that there are larger landholders in Thailand, although the value of the holdings has not been calculated (see Bangkok Post, June 18, 2014).

Also of concern is the uncritical use of material gleaned from interviews. CPB Director-General Chirayu Isarangkun Na Ayuthaya is one of Porphant’s informants, and the discussion of his role following the 1997 crisis is wholly uncritical (26). This naïve approach is also seen in his discussion of royal projects, which appears to little more than reproduce CPB public relations statements (34–37). Likewise, controversial accounts of the monarchy and its wealth – such as Handley’s book and Serhat Ünaldi’s 2014 article (“Working towards the Monarchy and its Discontents: Anti-royal Graffiti in Downtown Bangkok,” Journal of Contemporary Asia 44(3)) are ignored.

As a mercifully cheap booklet – about $5 – Porphant’s clearly written account of the CPB is probably of most use to those without access to this journal or A Life’s Work. For those who have these, this account fills a small gap in historical knowledge. That said, this booklet
is likely to be a best seller when the current king passes, and there will be a thirst for information on the CPB.

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This is as much a popular introduction to Myanmar history, politics and culture, as an in-depth academic study. Richard Cockett nevertheless provides a number of important insights into this beautiful but troubled country, and along the way develops an important hypothesis regarding the problems and potentials of Myanmar (or “Burma,” as Cockett maintains).

Cockett has worked for The Economist, and before that was an academic. Like Robert Taylor’s recent General Ne Win: A Political Biography (Singapore: ISEAS, 2015), Cockett frames the dilemmas and problematic history of Myanmar/Burma since independence – and possibilities for a better future – through the work of the British colonial administrator and scholar, J. S. Furnivall, and particularly his concept of the “plural society.” Furnivall, for whom Cockett provides a useful biographical sketch, argued that colonial Burma – or at least the then capital, Rangoon – was a diverse society, the sum of which was less than its parts. Plural Burma had no common national identity, but rather various ethnic communities which engaged with each other only in the marketplace (24–25, 44). For Taylor, as recently reviewed in this Journal (DOI: 10.1080/00472336.2015.1126758), Ne Win’s quarter century of dictatorial rule can be excused, in part at least, by the challenge to unify the country around a coherent and compelling national idea, transcending the divisive particularities of ethnicity or social class.

Cockett takes the “plural society” concept in a different direction, as descriptive of the large influx of migrants from South Asia (today’s India, and particularly Bangladesh), entering Burma during the British colonial period. He identifies the question of how the descendants of these people, and more recent arrivals from the subcontinent, should relate to Burma/Myanmar as perhaps the greatest challenge to a country undergoing multiple transitions. Recent waves of violence against Muslim communities have broken out in many parts of the country, not only against the much-oppressed Rohingya population in northern Rakhine State. Although the October–November 2015 election campaign, which resulted in a landslide victory for the National League for Democracy, did not feature the widespread anti-Muslim violence which some observers feared, intercommunal tensions nevertheless represent one of the most intractable problems facing the country during a period of profound, uneven and still contested transition. Cockett argues that the situation could be turned around, by embracing the multicultural richness of Myanmar’s diverse heritage.

In addition to those of South Asian origin, Myanmar is also home to several dozen ethnic minority groups (or “ethnic nationalities,” as elites within these communities prefer to be called). Cockett rightly identifies the need for national reconciliation between the Bama (Burman) majority, making up some 60% of the population, and diverse ethnic nationality groups as the key to achieving a so far elusive peace and political maturity. He cautions
Edith W. Clowes and Shelly Jarrett Bromberg (eds.), *Area Studies in the Global Age. Community, Place, Identity*

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contribution. Kazi Fahmida Farzana’s chapter returns to the Rohingya, again using drawings and songs to evoke the plight of this community stranded across the border in Bangladesh and returns to the theme of inter-communal “othering.” Amporn Jirattikorn looks at the plight of a displaced community on the other side of the country, studying Shan migrant workers in Chiang Mai, and exploring their complex and contrasting senses of “home,” in exile in a sometimes unfriendly Thailand, and in the rural settings from which many have long been absent, having been forced to leave during brutal Myanmar Army counter-insurgency operations in the 1990s. Grundy-War and Chin Wei Jun explore the situation of Karenni refugees in Thailand, asking if, how and when some might choose return to Kayah State across the border in Myanmar, in the context of recent (but still contested and problematic) ceasefires. This chapter is useful also for its nuanced assessment of the roles of – and constraints on – local civil society actors in the borderlands.

This diverse and interesting set of essays concludes with two further studies of ethnic communities across borders. The late Bianca Son, together with N. William Singh, provides a fascinating and sadly insightful account of intra-ethnic relations across the India border, and the unfriendly reception which Chin from Myanmar often receive among their Mizo “cousins” to the west. The chapter is particularly valuable for its fine-grained analysis of social, political and economic dynamics across and on both sides of the border. The final essay by Takahiro Kojima explores the dynamics of ritual and recruitment among Buddhist monks from Myanmar, in the context of the revival (or at least maintenance) of Buddhism in southwest China.

These richly diverse chapters demonstrate the editor Oh’s contention “that mountain and maritime Myanmar have more in common with each other than with the lowlands” (27); and that, as Grundy-War and Chin Wei Jun put it: “borderlands are not ‘margins’” (330). Overall, the book demonstrates the value of exploring Myanmar through the lens of “borderland studies” – although further studies are required to definitively establish this perspective as being more than the sum of its parts.

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There’s a conflict in US universities over the nature of “area studies.” That struggle has overflowed into a broader international debate about the role of area studies in the academy. In essence, the turn to quantitative, indeed algebraic, methods in the social sciences, has seen area studies counter with an increased emphasis on deep cultural understandings and extensive fieldwork. Indeed, there is now a large gap between those who favour the use of large multi-country databases to test hypotheses and those who are drawn to the study of individuals, communities and societies based on ethnographic, literary and cultural research. Often, as this book states, area studies requires “intensive study to attain a high level of proficiency of at least one area language” (xi).

This methods debate has seen the “scientists” worrying about their denominators, the “beauty” of their models and the results of endless regressions. Harking back to approaches
deeply embedded in modernisation theory, there is even a behaviouralist turn that sees, for example, political scientists conducting “experiments.”

Meanwhile, much of area studies has come to be dominated by approaches that declare themselves post-structural, post-modern, post-colonial and post-Marxist. While claiming “multidisciplinarity,” these approaches are heavily influenced by comparative literature and neo-Foucauldian approaches that laud diversity and hybridities, are anti-determinist and reject “binaries” and the very notion that social science can be scientific. Such area studies approaches generally claim to be about the study of power. Yet power is considered multi-dimensional, where, for example, class is just one kind of power, along with gender, discourses, knowledge, and where identity becomes a central element of self-reflective “narratives.”

There have been some attempts to find a middle path such as the collection edited by Kuhonta, Slater and Vu (Southeast Asia in Political Science. Theory, Region, and Qualitative Analysis, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), but the gap between area studies and the quantitative approach seems wider than ever. As the editors of this collection state, “area studies have become a kind of border zone, under attack from constituent disciplines, both social sciences and humanities” (xi).

This collection seeks to mark out some of the territory of area studies, emphasising interdisciplinarity and seeking out some of the comparative components that can be observed in 16 chapters that range far and wide: China, the Dominican Republic, Russia (Soviet, post-Soviet and Siberia), the Central Asian republics, South Africa, Taiwan and more. Like area studies itself, the chapters are not easy to categorise by theme or method. Several of the chapters do engage with several of the most recent fads in area studies such as discourses, memories, borders and human rights theory. As Ayşe Zarakol points out in her “Afterword,” for all of this, the authors “share a preoccupation with identity and want to explore its complicated relationship to space/territory, to time/memory, and to community and its symbols” (268).

There is a rendering of area studies where “problematising” and “historicising” becomes fetishised, cast in a language of nouns made verbs to render the social, cultural and political world as complex as possible. At times, it seems that the notion is that this problematised, confusingly complex world, where reality is like moon dust, can only be translated to the rest of us by area studies specialists. This collection, however, is not drawn into such obfuscating cul-de-sacs with many of the chapters being clear, concise and enlightening.

In a short review, it is impossible to do justice to the range and merits of topics covered in the chapters of this collection. Like the Kuhonta, Slater and Vu collection, the chapters do seem to chart a middle path between extremist quantitative analysis and culturalist studies that make some area studies essentially impenetrable to those not initiated into its rites and argot. Unlike Kuhonta, Slater and Vu, however, this book traverses a multi-disciplinary terrain over many regions, meaning it lacks the discipline and area focus that their collection had.

Following from some of the comments already made, one of the problems I have with this collection is that, like so much in the academy more broadly, the various turns described above have apparently carved out areas of study that eschew class analysis. For all the attention to power, it is remarkable that economic power and who has it are absent. For instance, this book has no index entries for class, wealth, inequality or economy. While inequality is mentioned in the introduction, it seems that these topics are deemed too modernist, determinist and structuralist to warrant concerted attention. Perhaps an area studies that is politically blinded to class has some attractions in North American universities where class is often dismissed as irrelevant.
It is this dismissal of class that draws area studies back to its roots, often as an element of foreign policy. One of the laments in the editors’ introduction is that area studies is being forgotten in strategic terms by the US administration which has, they say, minimised what’s happening behind “regime change.” This has involved “reducing to train specialists who provide government and media with reliable information ‘on the ground’” (1). This reflects changes to Title VI funding in the US that gave birth to a plethora of area studies centres in universities that were part of various academic Cold War interventions that began around the end of World War 2. State instrumentalism is now cast as a “parochialism” and a call is made to maintain this “valuable resource developed over many decades” (3). Yet the editors are well aware of the dubious connection between the academy and state organisations, and their introduction provides details of these links in recent decades, many of them more than a little disturbing.

Overall, this is an interesting collection, a useful call for increased attention to area studies and a text on how area studies can be done in a way that avoids disciplinary extremism.

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David Shambaugh, *China’s Future*

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on to restrain North Korea, the US has established high-altitude missile defence systems in Japan and South Korea. These can penetrate China’s anti-access and area-denial capabilities and can intercept both tactical short-range non-nuclear and strategic long-range nuclear North Korean and Chinese ballistic missiles. From the Chinese perspective, as well as being a buffer against US Forces Korea, North Korea has provided an economic corridor for the development of China’s northeastern economy by means of joint special economic zones and transportation links, into North Korea’s industrial belt between Sinuiju and Pyongyang, with access to the East China Sea.

By way of a discussion that brings together the challenges faced by the Communist Party-state, in Chapter 9, So and Chu reiterate that, although what remains of the socialist economy has dwindled and diminished, state neo-liberalism will continue to proceed by adaptations and adjustments, by speed-ups and slow-downs, which will be complicated by the interdependence between provincial and local authorities and their business supporters. To date, China’s global and regional geo-political future is uncertain and may involve brinkmanship in Asia with the US and its allies, even though some of them have started to hedge between the US and China. While a majority of Chinese respondents to surveys share nationalist attitudes and have confidence in the regime’s ability to get economic results and to improve living standards, there is evidence of disquiet over income inequality, unfair working conditions, arbitrary land expropriations, administrative corruption and environmental degradation that lead to “mass incidents.” So, to paraphrase the authors, the Communist Party-state will still need to deflect, pre-empt, institutionalise, or, as a last resort, repress social conflict and civil unrest.

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It is undoubtedly true, as stated on the back cover of this book, that “arguably the most consequential question in global affairs” is China’s future. China specialists will appreciate this book. It is written by one of the foremost scholars of China’s contemporary politics, David Shambaugh, and it summarises much contemporary information about China’s politics, society and economy. It is also written in a manner that invites the general reader to consider it.

For this general reader, however, Schambaugh’s lively and speculative argument regarding a troubled future for the political and economic giant is flawed. While Schambaugh’s copious knowledge of China is on display, as I will shortly explain, his theoretical and ideological lenses let him down.

In China’s Future, Shambaugh argues that China has reached a key political turning point in its modern history. That’s not an unreasonable claim, for as Shambaugh shows, various Chinese leaders have reached this conclusion. Identifying China’s current political location as “hard authoritarianism,” the author suggests that there are four paths away from this: neo-totalitarianism, renewed hard authoritarianism, soft authoritarianism and semi-democracy (2). The choices made about the path to be travelled will have far-reaching economic, social and political ramifications. He argues that “if the regime stays on its current course...economic development will stagnate and even stall, exacerbating already
acute social problems, and producing the protracted political decline of the ruling Chinese Communist Party [CCP].” (3).

In assessing the pathways, Shambaugh argues that: neo-totalitarianism will be regressive and result in atrophy and collapse; hard authoritarianism may bring limited reform but stagnation and decline; soft authoritarianism may see moderate reform and a partial transition; and semi-democracy will promote successful reform and full transition (5). The “transition” the author appears to be considering is not just to a “superpower” but to a modern economy and progressive society.

Pointing to a range of extensively detailed problems, bottlenecks and obstacles facing the economy (Chapter 2), social progress (Chapter 3) and the polity (Chapter 4), Shambaugh argues that in each of these areas there are variables and questions that the Chinese leadership – as the ones who determine China’s future – must ponder, and make “conscious choices” (16). In other words, the nature of China’s political system has a great deal to do with changes in other spheres. For example, on the challenges facing the economy, Shambaugh states, “China is trying to create a modern economy with a premodern political system” (22). He worries that politics stifles the economy, risking the country being stuck in the so-called middle-income trap forever. The way out is innovation, which Shambaugh sees as the key for economic success and modernisation (44).

In the myriad economic and social issues confronting the Party’s administration, Shambaugh has a consistent response. For instance, he asserts that “[o]nly a return to more open and tolerant Soft Authoritarianism or a bold transition to a Semi-Democratic political system will effectively address China’s multiple social problems” (96). The emphasis throughout is on an openness and tolerance in the political system, broadly conceived as political liberalisation. Without this liberalisation, Shambaugh argues that China will become more unstable, more unpredictable and, should various fractures and schisms not be controlled, countrywide instability is a possible outcome.

When looking at the political future, the author seems convinced that hard authoritarianism will be maintained until the Party Congress in 2017, but considers there may be space for a soft authoritarianism beyond that (136). For the longer term, however, Shambaugh sees the hardline authoritarians regaining position and power. He says that this is likely to result in stalled reforms and “the CCP will gradually lose its grip on power” (136).

In his final chapter, the author turns to China’s international relations. Like so many others, Shambaugh sees China’s international role increasing, but he believes that its policies are unlikely to change – a kind of “more of the same” scenario. He admits that the domestic political situation is likely to influence the way Chinese leaders involve themselves in external affairs. A tranquil internal politics will allow the leaders to better and more coherently focus on the nation’s international ambitions (171).

The book has no conclusion. This is somewhat disappointing, but given that Shambaugh has a clear introduction that sets out China’s pathways and each chapter has a concise conclusion, the author no doubt felt that his message was clear enough.

To conclude this review, I want to return to my comment that Shambaugh’s theoretical and ideological lenses are a problem for the book and its argument. Essentially, the author presents a theoretical position that has deep roots in modernisation theory. While Shambaugh distinguishes different pathways for China, his preference is for political modernisation that has an “end of history” feel to it. Much has been written about the failures of modernisation theory, so there is no need to revisit those critiques here. Modernisation theory certainly runs deep in American political science departments and Shambaugh’s uncritical use of it in this work suggests that few of the criticisms have been adequately considered.

Sticking with a modernisation perspective that links economic development and democratisation today seems an anachronism. Indeed, the long era of elite-driven political
domination in the West seems increasingly troubled. With the poor and marginalised having been left behind, the support for electoral democracies is crumbling – as seen in “shocks” like the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump. Indeed, democracy is now under threat in the West. One might imagine Chinese leaders and some of their people looking at those outcomes and threats, wondering again about the usefulness of openness and participation. Indeed, throughout the Asian region, such liberal qualities are under threat.

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The South China Sea is the setting for a number of conflicting sovereignty claims, which have heightened tensions between China and regional Southeast Asian states such as Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam. These waters are a primary route for a large proportion of world trade and are abundant in natural resources. Stability is therefore an important pre-condition for continued domestic and international trade and regional development. With the potential for conflict ever-present, scholars from a variety of disciplines have increasingly attempted to enhance public awareness of the crisis, clarify the nature of the disputes and recommend a variety of solutions to mitigate the tension. This edited collection joins this debate, aiming to enhance knowledge of the South China Sea sovereignty disputes. Multi-disciplinary in nature, the volume is divided into four parts: Part I addresses the global dimensions of the South China Sea dispute; Part II focuses on interests at the subnational, national and regional levels; Part III looks at sovereignty disputes through the prism of international maritime law; and Part IV considers the prospects for conflict or co-operation in the region.

The edition includes chapters from a host of renowned scholars. Those familiar with the maritime and regional security literature will recognise Rodolfo C. Severino, Renato Cruz De Castro, Alice Ba, Ian Storey, Bonnie Glaser and Carlyle Thayer, to name but a few. The book works on two distinct levels. At an individual chapter level, the input of regional experts makes it an important contribution to the field. All chapters are clearly articulated and thought provoking. Standout chapters include Renato Cruz De Castro’s “The Obama Administration’s Strategic Rebalancing in Asia: From a Diplomatic to a Strategic Constrainment of an Emergent China?” (42–58), and Alice Ba and Ian Storey’s “Continuity and Change in the South China Sea” (71–96). Where these chapters succeed is that they provide detailed assessments of the South China Sea dispute, as one would expect from a book of this nature, whilst also exploring connections and drivers that are probative and insightful; offering potential future scenarios or new opportunities for the dispute. On a second level, the book also works as a collection of essays. The multi-disciplinary nature enhances its overall appeal, with the section on maritime law sitting nicely alongside other chapters. Non-legal experts will find these chapters eminently accessible. In addition to the various legal arguments there is a clear awareness of the various

The recent turbulence in Thailand’s politics has seen much ink spilled in an attempt to explain the root causes of conflict. *Thai Politics: Between Democracy and Its Discontents* does this and goes further by considering Thailand’s political future. Daniel Unger and Chandra Mahakanjana are negative about the nature of politics but are a little more optimistic regarding a more democratic politics following the current period of military rule.

Using modernization theory, the authors seek to understand why Thailand, as a middle-income economy, has been unable to embed a stable democratic form of government (1–5). In this effort, the authors are quick to dismiss notions that Thailand’s troubles are “a straightforward class conflict or the stubborn refusal of hidebound elites to relinquish power and privilege” (5). They also seek to dismiss any thought that the monarchy has contributed to political conflict (8–10). Neither dismissal is particularly convincingly handled. In fact, on class, the authors admit that material and structural factors and high inequality do motivate some of the political conflict. Their position seems to be to argue that “other factors”—intra-elite conflict, political culture—also need to be considered (5–8), a point few class analysts would disagree on. The authors also spend considerable space making a positive case for the monarchy, although their arguments are not new, being reflective of Thailand’s elite perspective.

The authors have structured their book to include seven chapters. Chapter 1 is the authors’ conceptual outline of the conditions that favour the emergence and consolidation of democracy and Thailand’s democratic failures. Chapter 2 provides the authors’ interpretation of recent events in Thai politics, providing a background for the following chapters. Chapters 3 to 6 follow the lines of enquiry set out in the first chapter, examining the history and structure of the Thai state, rule of law, political communication, and political mobilization. In chapter 7, the authors consider Thailand’s political future.

The authors’ approach to the analysis that they expand in chapters 3 through 6 emphasizes personalism, leaders’ morality (or lack of it), the strength of informal institutions, the role of the monarchy, and the hold of traditionalism. In addressing these themes, the approach is unsurprising for those familiar with the modernization approaches to Thailand that were dominant in the 1960s and 1970s. That said, the authors are eclectic, with references to Shakespeare, Hume, Nietzsche, J.S. Mill, Disraeli, Weber, Geertz, Bourdieu, and many more, often cited as quotations sourced from the works of others.

The authors are attracted by a culturalist approach. By quoting Ruth Benedict from 1943 and Thomas Kirsch from 1973, they resurrect—but do
not name—a notion that Thailand is a “loosely-structured society,” resisting (appropriate) modernity and democratic governance.

Theoretical approach aside, most readers will find much to agree with in this book. It covers much ground, makes comparative references, and where it is available, the authors deploy survey data regarding political participation and attitudes. Some will be pleased to find that the authors, after considering a range of conflicts and repeated political failures, consider that Thailand can still manufacture a democratic future that adapts to “mass demands for political inclusion and rising levels of political participation” (212).

Yet getting to this agreeable conclusion is a complicated mix of methods and analysis that is less satisfying. In their comparative references, the authors are overwhelmingly struck by similarities between contemporary Thailand and Western countries of many decades ago. Thaksin Shinawatra’s politics is compared with Andrew Jackson’s populism (209–212), the Thai elite’s rejection of majoritarianism is compared with eighteenth-century British and American calls for limits on voting (23), rural-urban splits are compared with nineteenth-century Denmark (137), and Thailand’s “limited corporatist features” are said to resemble seventeenth-century Russia (165). These frequent comparative asides construct a narrative implying political backwardness.

Alongside these comparisons, the authors state that they “give much attention to Thai interpretations of social life, uses of information, patterns of participation in politics...” and more (23). Surprisingly, to do this, the authors rely almost entirely on resources in English. This means the Thai voices heard are those of an elite writing in English or those reported in English-language sources. The authors do not consider how this pattern might skew their results and the arguments they make.

While the authors identify that “weak institutions lie at the roots of Thailand’s democracy problem” (206), they make this a far more controversial argument when expressing support for a perspective that “too many Thais lack what it takes to sustain democratic institutions.” Acknowledging that this is a “decidedly politically incorrect stance” (206), chapter 5 presents an argument that forcefully makes this claim. Thais are said to debate with “low information content” and exhibit “poor quality public deliberations” (131). Further, they “employ crude stylized cognitive maps” (132), are overtaken by superstition (135), and are mostly “politically unsophisticated” (134). Data are mined to argue that Thailand’s children are poorly schooled by poor teachers, read little, and do badly on standardized tests (138–139). This has political outcomes as voters have limited knowledge, with poor, rural voters easily led astray (151). Given that a similar rhetoric stirred elitist and anti-election activism that led to a military coup in 2014, this assessment will certainly be contentious.

While the authors’ political perspectives are clear and, at times, they are somewhat uncritical of “yellow shirt” and royalist claims, they do seek to be
even-handed. For example, they criticize Thaksin but also the generals who seized power in 2014. Likewise, while their numerous discussions of King Bhumibol are mostly uncritical, they do recognize that the monarchy must change and become a truly constitutional monarchy.

In the end, it seems the authors are liberals in search of democracy, recognizing the need for increased political inclusion but worried that this might be damaging for Thailand (and for its elite). In that context, Thai Politics will be applauded, criticized, and debated.

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BUDDHISM, POLITICS, AND POLITICAL THOUGHT IN MYANMAR.


This is an important, fresh study of Buddhist political thought and influence in Myanmar. The book imparts a keen sense of Burmese history and culture, brought into perspective through the author’s extensive fieldwork in Myanmar over several years, where he had access to key members of the monastic order (sangha), local folk, scholars, politicians and students (though he was not permitted to work in Myanmar’s university libraries and generally does not identify his Myanmar contacts by name).

An introduction provides an extensive literature review, important because the subject has been recently and comprehensively analyzed from several perspectives, such as those of Michael Aung-Thwin, Gustaaf Houtman, and Juliane Schober, to name but a few. Seven chapters unfold the central argument: what constitutes a tradition of Burmese Buddhist political thought and concepts. The first chapter provides a synoptic review of a few pre-colonial Burmese monarchs (e.g., Mindon Min, Thibaw) and their contributions to an emerging national identity based on a traditional Theravada world-view.

Early post-independence (1948) figures and events, such as the political organization Dobama Asiayone, General Aung San, the Panglong Agreement, and the fourteen years of democracy mostly under Prime Minister U Nu, are put into focus. General Ne Win’s long military hegemony and his Burma Socialist Programme Party (1962–1988) also introduce the key subject of the place of Marxism and its relationship to Buddhist moral teachings in Burmese political thought. Most significant in this period was the 1988 mass political protest, with some sangha participation, and the emergence of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as not only a key political figure, but as a national paradigm of Buddhist integrity and purpose. The chapter also introduces other themes later carefully unfolded, such as the 2007 “Saffron Revolution,” the 2010 and 2015 national elections, the quasi-civilian government of Thein Sein, and the
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in Japan (in contrast to other places that are currently facing limited institutional support due to budget cuts), and young scholars are encouraged to contribute their research and expertise in many different fields and in national/local/vernacular languages in the region, not solely in English. As such, this book illustrates how (foreign) scholars can help initiate, facilitate, and foster fruitful dialogues, including on topics that are still controversial, as part of their common interest to develop an active network of communities of learners in the region.

_G30S dan Asia_ is an interesting volume that opens up a new field of study on the 1965 coup in the context of international politics in the region, under the Cold War situation. It is a must-read volume for every young Indonesian to look into and understand his/her nation’s troubled history beyond the official narrative.

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**References**


_Siam’s New Detectives: Visualizing Crime and Conspiracy in Modern Thailand_  
SAMSON LIM  

Bearing the hallmarks of a fine PhD thesis, Samson Lim’s _Siam’s New Detectives: Visualizing Crime and Conspiracy in Modern Thailand_ contributes fresh perspectives, information, and analysis on the still under-studied police force in Thailand. The police play an important role in Thailand, not just in managing crime but as political actors. From the police force’s early days as a Bangkok-based constabulary, established in 1860, Lim tells of a reorganization, the founding of a provincial gendarmerie, and expansion and modernization (pp. 24–33). His book takes us through an account of the police and its investigative techniques as it became the CIA’s preferred agency and armed to the teeth in the early 1950s, while also discussing some aspects of the police up to the early twenty-
first century. His attention is largely on the investigative methods learned and adopted by the police and how they “visualized” crime and, in some cases, manufactured crimes, suspects, and confessions. The book is organized into five chapters, together with an introduction and conclusion.

In the introduction Lim begins with the story of Sherry Ann Duncan, a Thai-American teenager abducted and murdered in 1986. Four men were arrested, pressed to “reenact” their “crime,” and convicted in 1990, on the evidence of a witness. Sentenced to death, the four were eventually released in 1993 by a Supreme Court that ruled on the lack of corroborating evidence. While in prison one defendant died, another was crippled, and a third contracted a disease that would eventually kill him. Then, in 1996, a court convicted another three men of Duncan’s murder. They, too, were made to reenact the crime based on the evidence of the very same witness used by the police in the first trial. This time, the witness gave details about a completely different crime scene. Before each trial this witness was tutored by the police, who decided what his statement should say (pp. 1–2). As Lim notes, this is not a particularly unusual case (p. 2). Indeed, while I was reading Lim’s book, there were similar cases reported in the Bangkok media. For example, in March 2017 it was widely reported that a man had been sentenced to 21 years in jail for a robbery where the police “witnesses” were 7- and 11-year-old boys. More than a decade after the crime, fellow prison inmates confessed to being the real robbers. Clearly, the police had manufactured this unfortunate man’s conviction.

The book concentrates on explaining how the police are trained to investigate crimes and is focused on the various investigative methods used, concentrating on visual representations, including fingerprints, maps, and sketches to photographs and reenactments (p. 3). Lim engages in a postmodern assessment of this, replete with questions of how “facts” are created—he argues that they gain their “facticity [sic] from aesthetic rules . . .” (p. 3)—and how these visual representations become a means for generating “new information” as the police contemplate these representations (p. 4). Lim argues that by “acknowledging the productive nature of images, in addition to their symbolic functions, one can see that policing is fundamentally an interactive, creative endeavor as much as a disciplinary one” (pp. 8–9). This interaction and its manipulation mean the “deployment of state violence is seen as justified, desirable, and necessary” in society (p. 9).

Chapter 1 discusses the historical development of policing. The author argues that the inauguration and growth of the police force was in response to elite concerns about crime in a rapidly developing Bangkok that was a “ramshackle, transient place” (p. 12) where crime was identified as a “problem” (pp. 16–24). He shows that the police and bureaucracy were ill prepared to deal with rising crime, and this resulted in bureaucratic reform and increased training for the police. As the force developed, the public got to know it, and the police and public developed “a set of routines to help them make sense of the noise of daily life, to come to grips with the violence and crime that plague Thai society” (p. 33).

Yet, as the author observes, although force was outlawed in 1895, it was not unusual for police
officers and civilian officials to use force in extracting confessions. Lim says that beating confessions from suspects “was still employed well into the 1920s and 1930s (and some would say is still today)” (p. 29). The parenthetic comment is unnecessary ambivalent; numerous authoritative reports have shown that the police and military regularly use beatings and torture against detainees and suspects.

Chapter 2 is an account of how the police force began to modernize and develop its “sets of routines” for investigating crimes, mainly examining the early part of the twentieth century. This is a story of the development of an “ostensibly scientific” approach to investigation (p. 35), involving statistics, photography, fingerprints, crime and crime scene reports, and other scientific investigation techniques. All these techniques needed to be taught to police and trainees, and Lim carefully details the ways in which this was handled, relying mainly on the manuals developed for the purpose. This chapter is insightful and carefully developed. My lingering question relates to the relationship between the police and the broader justice system, including the judiciary and the prison system, which is not addressed by the author.

In Chapter 3 Lim turns to “mapping,” relating the ways in which the police were trained not just to delineate space but how to constantly monitor and surveil it. While Lim introduces the chapter with a promise to indicate how preemptive violence by the state is justified, he does not fully deliver, being sidetracked into a discussion of cosmology.

Chapter 4 sees the author returning to the reenactment of crimes, first mentioned in the discussion of the Duncan murder. While these probably began in the 1920s (p. 89), Lim focuses on the relationship that developed between the police and the press, mediated by these performances. Lim dates the relationship to the early 1950s, involving photographs and later film and video coverage of crime reenactments. Given that these usually take place after a suspect’s confession has been obtained, both the police and public tend to view reenactments as accurate and perhaps even cathartic. In this relationship, the police can also manipulate perceptions. The current military regime in Bangkok has been especially manipulative. It is no surprise to see police parade the regime’s political opponents, dressing them up and telling them how to behave, pointing weapons, and so on (see Bangkok Post, September 14, 2014). The confession and reenactment are mutually reinforcing “evidence” when suspects are taken to trial. A “freely given” confession more or less guarantees a conviction (p. 93). So important is the confession that courts provide an incentive to suspects, tending to halve jail time for those who confess. For the police, the way to demonstrate to the court that a confession was not coerced is to have the suspect reenact the crime (p. 95). That the press likes a good crime story means that reenactments are mutually beneficial for media and police (p. 105).

This attention to the public naming and shaming of those who have confessed accords with other efforts to maintain the impunity enjoyed by the authorities when they are involved in extrajudicial killings. It is not uncommon for such murders to be waved away as a “bad person” getting
their “proper” punishment (p. 103). In recent years, southern Malay Muslims and alleged drug users and traffickers have met this fate, with the authorities smearing the disappeared and those who die in custody as “violent separatists” or “drug traffickers” (see Wassana 2017).

Lim begins Chapter 5 with the observation that “conspiracy theory” has become a “governing rubric or narrative architecture” that “endures to shape the way in which Thais interpret current events” (p. 114). In this chapter Lim argues that this “unfortunate situation,” an “entrenched cynicism and general air of suspicion,” is directly linked to the Cold War and the “brutal deployment of physical force by competing agents of the Thai state” (p. 114). He details the aid to police provided by the United States and has data on the huge expansion of numbers and weaponry this permitted as the police developed paramilitary capabilities. Lim details several events that he considers conspiracies, from the shooting death of King Ananda in 1946, on the wrong end of a US-supplied weapon, to recent “visualizations” of alleged anti-monarchy conspiracies. Lim concludes that the conspiracies were neither spontaneous nor natural. Rather, he says, they resulted from a “deliberate program of misrepresentation . . .” (p. 133) designed for political purposes and a “strategy of elites against their enemies, real and perceived” (p. 134).

In his conclusion, the author returns to his theoretical concerns and his emphasis on images, noting that visual representations can take many forms and can have multiple functions and readings. In essence, images and their uses are socially and politically constructed. Images and words may help people to make sense of the world, but they may also be used to concoct a reality for readers and viewers. Lim makes these points succinctly, and aside from some lapses into postmodern language manufacture, his summing up is well written. At the same time, this reader felt somewhat disappointed when some of the cases mentioned in the text, including the Sherry Ann Duncan and King Ananda cases, were left as mysteries. But then, much that the Thai police do lacks transparency and is as illegal as the crimes investigated. How such a huge force is so remarkably opaque, inept, and corrupt remains a mystery.

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A Great Place to Have a War. America in Laos and the Birth of a Military CIAJoshua Kurlantzick (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016)

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in the Philippines National Police, who did not co-ordinate with either the military or the MILF. The de Jesus conclude that “the main lesson of Mamasapano is that it should not have happened at all” (189).

The final two chapters of the collection explore the daunting development challenges facing Mindanao. Toby C. Mosod deploys an impressive range of data to explain how and why Muslim-populated parts of the island are the poorest in the country, bearing comparison in terms of human security (or insecurity) with some of the least developed parts of Africa. Francisco J. Lara Jr contributes an excellent chapter on Mindanao’s shadow economies, arguing that informal but relatively non-destructive economic activities (such as some types of smuggling) should be recognised at least semi-officially, allowing for greater concentration on suppressing activities such as drug smuggling and kidnapping for ransom. Lara’s sophisticated analysis makes clear that formal and informal economies are linked, and that any interventions need to be carefully targeted, given the weakness of the state and prevalence of clan-based and other informal local institutions. Both chapters make important distinctions between “vertical conflicts” between the government and Moro political and armed actors, which in principle can be resolved through negotiations, and “horizontal conflicts” involving often clan-based inter-communal clashes on the ground, including local Christian-Muslim tensions.

Every chapter in this collection makes important contributions towards its particular subject area. In total, the essays constitute a significant and useful resource for understanding violent conflict on Mindanao, and prospects for peace and prosperity.

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A Great Place to Have a War. America in Laos and the Birth of a Military CIA

Joshua Kurlantzick (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016)

The so-called secret war, waged by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Laos, is still sometimes claimed to be little known. In fact, there is now a very considerable journalistic and academic literature on the USA’s role in that country from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s. Indeed, in the introduction to their collection, The Clandestine Cold War in Asia (Milton Park: Cass, 2000, 2, 13), Richard Aldrich, Garry Rawnsley and Ming-Yeh Rawnsley state that “diet of material for the Cold War in Asia has been comparatively thin,” with the exceptions of Vietnam and Laos.

There is also a large amount of archival material available for electronic download. Much of it remains heavily and seemingly arbitrarily redacted, yet this avalanche of documents does add useful detail to the story of the CIA and its “not-so-secret secret war” in Laos (101). Any useful new book on this period would need to use these new materials or present a different angle on events.

In his new book, Kurlantzick provides a lively account of the period, yet makes relatively little use of the archival material. His contribution is in conducting a series of interviews with several of the key figures on the CIA’s payroll in those years and in making an argument that the CIA’s operations in Laos were precursors for decades of covert actions.
Kurlantzick’s interviews are interwoven through 19 chapters that are roughly chronological, following the USA’s involvement with Laos. His most noteworthy interviews include the CIA’s most significant recruit, General Vang Pao. He arranged and led the Hmong army that the US considered was their best chance of defeating or, in some accounts, stalling the communist forces in Indochina. He also talked with people associated with Thai royalists who mounted vigorous anti-communist propaganda operations that led to Thailand’s strong support for the CIA’s war in Laos. Thailand’s lynchpin role was provided by military regimes that owed a great deal to US aid and the activities of the CIA.

Among the figures interviewed are Bill Lair, Willis Bird Jr and Tony Poe (Anthony Poshepny). Lair helped build Thailand’s notorious Border Patrol Police, developed Hmong forces in Laos and was responsible for some of the major planning for CIA operations there. Willis Bird Jr is the son of former CIA agent and entrepreneur Willis Bird Sr, who was Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in China during World War II before running an import-export company that also supplied arms to General Phao Sriyanon’s Thai Police and ran Sea Supply, a CIA front, with operations into Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. Bird and Lair were both married to sisters of former Thai foreign minister and privy councillor Siddhi Savetsila. With such links, it is hardly surprising that Thailand became critical for the conduct of the war in Laos, as well as in Cambodia and Vietnam. Thailand supplied “thousands to fight in Laos,” funded by the US administration (5). Tony Poe is usually described as a “legendary CIA veteran” who undertook covert actions in Korea, Indonesia and Tibet, before landing in Laos where his behaviour deteriorated to become murderous and bizarre.

As the recurring actors in Kurlantzick’s account, the ambitious and ruthless Vang Pao and CIA operatives Lair and Poe appear to have presented accounts that justify actions that many readers may find unjustifiable. Yet for all the interviews, there isn’t a great deal in this book that would not be known to those who have followed the works and ephemera on the “secret war.” Those who have read, for example, Roger Warner’s Shooting at the Moon (South Royalton: Steerforth, 1996), which also uses interviews with participants, will not find much that is strikingly new. Kurlantzick, however, relies less on anecdote, in part reflecting the far greater availability of documentation since Warner’s book.

Chapters 1 to 3 introduce the main actors and Kurlantzick arguments and Chapter 4 presents background on Laos. The beginnings of the CIA’s involvement is covered in Chapter 5 and Operation Momentum is in Chapter 6. This operation built on the US’s fears following the Battle for Vientiane, which brought down the regime that came after the Kong Le rebellion. The rightists were supported by the CIA and used Thai police commandos trained by Lair and the CIA. Not only did this action make Laos a major battleground for years to come, but it convinced the generals in Bangkok to become the USA’s base for operations in the rest of Indochina, including the deplorable bombing of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. When Eisenhower handed over to Kennedy in early 1961, Laos had become a major focus of the US government’s attention (83). Kennedy was reluctant to commit US ground troops and while the Geneva agreements were portrayed as a way of solving the “neutrality problem” in Laos, worries about communist advances saw Kennedy approve the expansion of Operation Momentum (89). Planned by Lair, it funded and trained anti-communist guerrilla armies and, most importantly, Vang Pao’s Hmong army (Chapter 7).

Chapters 8 to 12 detail the escalation of the war in Laos and the CIA’s efforts to maintain its guerrilla operations, including the massive expansion of bombing sorties over an expanding proportion of the country. Chapters 13 to 17 detail the unwinding of the CIA’s efforts and the defeat of its forces, and most especially the Hmong, who were left in difficult circumstances. Many became refugees in Thailand, hoping for resettlement to the USA, where Vang Pao was ensconced. Chapters 18 and 19 represent Kurlantzick’s assessment of the aftermath of the CIA’s activities in Laos and how these offered lessons for future covert actions.
William Sullivan, also one of Kurlantzick’s principal characters, was not interviewed. However, as Ambassador in Vientiane from 1964 to 1969, he clearly was central to the events discussed in the book. It was Sullivan who in October 1969 appeared before a closed Congressional sub-committee answering questions on US involvement in the war in Laos from the likes of Senators William Fulbright and Stuart Symington (181–188). The US mainstream press had finally begun to reveal that Laos was a bigger operation than the public had known, with huge expenditure and massive and inhumanely destructive bombing. As Kurlantzick puts it, Sullivan’s statements “did not match the reality in Laos” (184). It was Sullivan who had presided over the destruction of Laos by US bombers. As the website “Legacies of War” (http://legaciesofwar.org/resources/books-documents/land-of-a-million-bombs/) chronicles it:

From 1964 to 1973, …the US military dropped 260 million cluster bombs – about 2.5 million tons of munitions – on Laos over the course of 580,000 bombing missions. This is equivalent to a planeload of bombs being unloaded every eight minutes, 24 hours a day, for nine years – nearly seven bombs for every man, woman and child living in Laos. It is more than all the bombs dropped on Europe throughout World War II, leaving Laos …with the unfortunate distinction of being the most heavily bombed country [per capita] in history.

Yet Sullivan could state to members of Congress that “he had no knowledge of any significant US intervention in the country.” Quite simply, Sullivan was “lying to the Senate” (187). By that time, despite the carpet-bombing of much of the country, the CIA and Vang Pao were losing ground. Yet the bombing continued until 1973.

When Kurlantzick turns to linking CIA operations in Laos with more contemporary events, he explores a useful hypothesis. He argues that from the time of the Eisenhower administration, and most especially from the beginning of the covert war with Operation Momentum under Kennedy, the operations in Laos became the “first such secret, CIA-run war in American history” (12). Unlike the US War in Vietnam, the troops on the ground waged a guerrilla rather than a conventional campaign. Kurlantzick points out that many in the CIA did not consider Laos as a “loss.” Directors Richard Helms and William Colby decided that Laos was a “superb job” and a “war we won” (245). That peculiar verdict is taken up in Chapter 18, where Kurlantzick shows how agents with experience in Laos eventually occupied influential positions that saw covert and paramilitary operations rejuvenated under the Reagan administration (248). Kurlantzick sees Laos mirrored in Afghanistan, Nicaragua and in several other conflict regions (248–252).

It is true that the CIA’s first full-throated covert war was Laos. At the same time, what OSS founding director “Wild” Bill Donovan continually returned to was the idea of establishing relationships with local fighters to wage the OSS’s wars. The OSS did this in North Africa, Greece, the Balkans and parts of Asia during World War II. When he became US Ambassador in Thailand in 1953, one of the first things he plotted was the establishment of “covert commando outfits being organized …to sneak into other Southeast Asian nations and harass the communists” (see D. Waller, Wild Bill Donovan, New York: Free Press, 2011, 367).

While critical of Vang Pao, Kurlantzick seems drawn to the story of the Hmong. He tends to see them as caught between their leader and the CIA in a war that killed many. He considers Hmong society as a kind of proto-democracy or, following James Scott, as the “original anarchists” (66). At least the post-World War II history of the Hmong and the role of Vang Pao suggests that they worked towards state organisations rather than seeking to “escape” them.

For those who don’t know a lot about the “secret war” in Laos, Kurlantzick’s account is a readable introduction. For those who are familiar with the CIA’s intervention, the book covers much familiar ground.

In *Youth Cultures in China*, Jeroen de Kloet and Anthony Y. H. Fung provide a sophisticated and erudite account of how appropriations and localisations of international digital technologies, music trends and fashion styles enable Chinese youth to experiment with “spontaneous” and “unpredictable” identities and embodiments as they navigate through cultural spaces that allow for the emergence of “new youth subjectivities” (22–23). Paraphrasing de Kloet and Fung, this involves continuous semiotic efforts by Chinese youth to create possibilities through what the authors refer to as “youthscapes” that are constrained by state rules and regulations (27–28). Relatedly, what appear to be refractory behaviours of youth interrelate with an “individualizing, consumption-oriented, urban and technologically-mutable” market economy influenced by globalisation and urbanisation “devoid of a revolutionary zeal” (25–26).

Accordingly, de Kloet and Fung acquaint us with how today’s youth are not interested so much in democratic rights and revolutionary changes as they are in a mixture of “consumerism and nationalism.” They have a simultaneous cosmopolitan perspective in terms of international education in Japan or the USA, and, somewhat perversely, a nationalist outlook that results in internet campaigns against Japan or the USA. The authors refer to this as “cosmopolitanism” when the internet enables overseas students to maintain a connection with their homeland through “networked communicative formations in the virtual world” (8–9).

Internet penetration in China is highest among youth in urban areas, at above 80%, though the vast majority use the internet for entertaining themselves and for sending messages, rather than for discussing political or legal issues (83). De Kloet and Fung trace this preference to how the Communist Party’s internet firewall delays, dilutes and limits access by youth to online counter-hegemonic opinions until they leave school or go to university. So, in spite of the fact that the internet firewall has “folded youth into the discourses that sustain the state, the family, and the school” (53), eventually young people can use virtual private network accounts to get around the internet firewall and can aspire to be themselves online by interacting with each other and by integrating different media such as videos, photos and recordings, although their online activities are scrutinised by the security and propaganda organs of the state to identify “anti-social” propensities and “deviant” predispositions (91).

The unwillingness of youth to attach their expectations to a vision of a transformative cooperative society complements their cynical attitude to a Communist Party, bent on a course of authoritarian capitalism, which a number of them join with reluctance, wherein they subject themselves to its dreary routine and put up with its doctrinal gibberish, not because they believe in its activities, but in order to boost their career prospects. In addition, although their families are reluctant to thrust them into a cold world to make a living for themselves, youth still feel the pressure on them to secure a well-paid job; to get married and have children; to look after their parents in their old age; and to purchase a house or...
Working Towards the Monarchy: The Politics of Space in Downtown Bangkok by Serhat Ünaldi (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016)

Kevin Hewison

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BOOK REVIEWS

Working Towards the Monarchy: The Politics of Space in Downtown Bangkok
by Serhat Ünaldi (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016)

Thailand’s King Bhumibol Adulyadej died not long after this book was published, having reigned for over 70 years. After a delay of about six weeks, his son, Vajiralongkorn, was proclaimed king. Despite predictions that it might collapse in a succession struggle, the monarchy continues. It remains one of the world’s wealthiest monarchies and, as it has been for all military regimes since the mid-1950s, is critical for the legitimacy of Thailand’s current military dictatorship.

Because it remains politically and economically significant, Ünaldi’s account of the monarchy, its allies, investments and politics is an important intervention. Those who are uncritical supporters of the monarchy are likely to find this revealing book troubling and even threatening of reverence for the royal family. Scholars of Thailand will welcome the book as an important contribution to the critical literature on the monarchy. The book also advances our understanding of Thailand’s contemporary politics and the political crisis that began around 2005.

In a clearly written book of two parts, involving Prologue, Introduction, six chapters, Conclusion, Epilogue, extensive Bibliography and Index, Ünaldi asks how understanding Bangkok’s largely royal-owned downtown can add to our comprehension of Thailand’s recent political contestation (12). He hints at an answer early in the book when he quotes royalist architect Sumet Jumsai who says architecture “should be subject to the rules of our Thai hierarchy” (vii).

Ünaldi bookends his study with the Prologue and Epilogue. In the former, the author discusses the 2010 military crackdowns on red shirt protesters and provides a succinct background to the events of the previous five or so years of political conflict. The latter is a brief story of the clean-up following that violent removal of the red shirts that saw several buildings on the royally-owned lands of the high society Siam-Ratchaprasong shopping precinct torched. While this description is left to speak for itself, the impression is of the authorities and their supporters seeking to cleanse a royal space of red shirt impurities as a way of restoring Sumet’s “Thai hierarchy” (vii).

Part I of the book, comprising the Introduction and Chapters 1–3, offers a theoretically informed account of Bhumibol’s monarchy and the challenges to it from capitalist development and the rise of electoral politics, personified for the royalist elite, in Thaksin Shinawatra. The author’s theory is Weberian with an emphasis on charismatic authority, filled out with several post-modern approaches to space, habits and charisma. The author’s theoretical innovation is to agree that charisma adheres to an individual and a position but adding that it may be used by others. This association with the king’s charisma can protect and benefit many, from Sino-Thai capitalists to slum dwellers, and is referred to as “working towards the monarchy” (11).

Ünaldi draws and modifies this notion from work on Nazi Germany and its “central leadership figure whose charisma was used by wide sections of society for the enhancement of their influence and social standing, as well as for mundane economic aims” (11). He identifies a similar personality cult around the “sacred charisma of the Thai monarchy [which has] served as a source of symbolic capital that was defended and enhanced by those who profited from it.” For those left out, Ünaldi suggests that they eventually turn against
royal charisma. So it was that Thaksin “worked around” the king and red shirts “attacked the architecture that represented and supported it” (11).

Much of Part I is an account of Bhumibol’s reign and its attendant capitalist development that is reinterpreted through the lens of charisma and cosmology, leading to the Thaksin-red shirt challenge. Ardent Weberians will find this useful, although there are some issues with this interpretation. For example, the reader is presented with a bewildering array of charismas: royal charisma (12), sacred charisma (12), hereditary charisma (22), king’s charisma (38), pure charisma (38), leader’s charisma (38), charisma of office (39), Thai charisma (42), charismatic regimes (49), inherited charisma (57), pseudocharisma (60), contending charismas (68), trading charisma (69), entrepreneurial charisma (71), pure charisma (71), political charisma (73), managerial charisma (73), textbook charisma (75) and more. If charisma is such a flexible concept, how useful is it?

A second issue is that this theoretical position seems negligent of class-based analysis, be it Weberian or Marxian. This is especially problematic when the author is focused on a centre of landed and commercial capital. When the discussion turns to business, it is mediated by a Weberian view of religion and capitalism that leads to an analysis reminiscent of the Parsonian turn in mid-twentieth century sociology, emphasising rationalism and values (13). Related, and recalling this approach applied to Thailand in earlier decades, Ünaldi’s use of “working towards the monarchy” is descriptive of relationships between a patron with power and wealth and a second and third tier of senior clients, making what they can of proximity to a power centre. They build the power centre to enrich themselves whether that enrichment is power, wealth, satisfaction or feeling safer, and build a base of compliant clients.

This attention to charisma means that some events have to be somewhat awkwardly reinterpreted. For example, it is true that Bhumibol presided over the development of a conglomerate that is Thailand’s largest capitalist enterprise (13). Yet this is not unique to his charismatic position. Other monarchies have been associated with extensive capitalist development and earlier Thai kings promoted their own businesses and were joint investors in a range of enterprises. It is not clear that Bhumibol’s charisma has been the decisive element in Thailand’s capitalist development or that capitalism needed sanctifying. Another example is seen in the brief discussion of military leader Phibun Songkhram’s constitutional turn in the 1950s. Ünaldi’s take is that this move was a response to royal charisma, not domestic politics, leadership competition, the Cold War or anything else. Weberian ideal types are purported to be at work, with Phibun the legal-rational type versus the king as charismatic leader (58–59). Here the theory seems to be at odds with the historical record.

In examining the conflicts that developed in the mid-2000s, Ünaldi’s account is of competing charismas and a clash of “two demigods” is debatable (23). Other commentators have argued that the conflicts have been between competing elites, but Ünaldi is narrowing this conception considerably. His argument is that Thaksin became a real and symbolic alternative monarch, not just as a competing charismatic leader but that the politician even came to mimic the king (76–83). The evidence for this claim is thin, drawn from the propaganda of the anti-Thaksin People’s Alliance for Democracy (78–83). As this group regularly concocted allegations, some of them contradictory, designed to create a view among royalists that the king was in danger and thus justify their demonstrations, using them as evidence of competing charismas seems to be grasping at yellow straws.

Part II of the book comprises Chapters 4 to 6 and a Conclusion and is focused on the use of royal properties in the downtown Siam-Ratchaprasong area. Ünáldi expertly reveals the history, ownership and use of this most valuable land and its evolution from bucolic palaces to a thriving commercial centre. In the process, he makes excellent use of interviews, funeral volumes and a wealth of other literature.
For this reader, the discussion of the period from General Sarit Thanarat’s royalist coup in 1957 is especially impressive. Who would have thought that an account of the development of the iconic (now demolished) Siam Intercontinental Hotel could have revealed how a modernist hotel project boosted the Sarit regime and the monarchy? Ünaldi cleverly weaves a narrative of the king’s personal land, a joint venture with Sarit’s state and American investors in a project that showcased state and king (and his mother), locally, nationally and internationally (130–132). Continuing the hotel theme, some of Chapter 5 is a treatise of Frank Lloyd Wright and architecture for royal families and their hotels in Japan and Thailand.

In Chapters 4 and 5, Ünaldi presents much information that both reveals and fills out details of the development of the royal family’s wealth that is anchored in extensive land ownership. It was Bhumibol’s reign that saw the royal family getting properties back from the state and minor royals. The important periods for this were under the royalist civilian government from 1947 to 1948 and then under royalist General Sarit’s authoritarian regime a decade later. Through personal ownership and the Crown Property Bureau, the royal family controlled large tracts of the most valuable land in Bangkok that was in great demand for commercial development as the economy rapidly expanded. In intricate and fascinating detail, Ünaldi explains the links between royals and business people as the Siam-Ratchaprasong area is developed and redeveloped.

For example, Princess Sirindhorn’s shareholding in Siam Piwat, the company that rents her personal land and operates the buildings on the land, has a list of “shareholders [that] reads like a who’s who of the upper echelons of Thai society” (158), including families carrying names like Bhrombhakdi, Charoen-Rajapark, Chutrakul, Lamsam, Sophonpanich and Srivikorn. Ünaldi estimates that Princess Sirindhorn personally reaps more than US$55 million per year from her property in the Siam-Ratchaprasong area (157).

Land and profits have also caused some rifts. Ünaldi tells the intricate stories of Petchabun and Pathumwan Palaces and the succession and rank complications in a family that was inter-married within the royal family and of men who took several consorts and produced children who became princes and princesses with property rights (176–180). These dynastic disputes also demonstrate the royal desire to increase incomes from their land, demolishing several iconic buildings, including palaces, when a larger profit was on offer. A related case examines the variegated links between the Sino-Thai Chirathivat family of the Central group and the royal family. Ünaldi notes how very complex the relationship has been. Readers are provided with a soap opera-like set of marriages, divorces, a former Miss Universe, entrepreneurial success and business disputes (185–190). Through it all, the Chirathivat clan has managed an “unbreakable bond with the monarchy” (186). It has been a highly profitable bond.

At the time Ünaldi wrote, Bhumibol was “frail but alive…” (186). This seemed enough to maintain such ruling class alliances between big capitalists – and the monarchy is a family of tycoons – while the economy was in good shape. Yet, as he observes, “[t]here is no inevitability to a market that is forever held together by a symbiotic bond between royals and Sino-Thai entrepreneurs. A change at the head of the monarchy – a less acceptable king on the throne in particular – could swiftly change the rules of the game” (187). Since then, with the death of Bhumibol and the accession of the unpopular and erratic Vajiralongkorn, the game has changed. It remains to be seen how the “rules” will be modified or even shattered.

Chapter 6 is said to be about Ratchaprasong “from below” (191). Ünaldi’s account of discussion of the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre is not nearly as interesting as his discussions of the ways in which lower-class communities have inserted themselves in the royal and commercial space of Siam-Ratchaprasong. After some Foucauldian musings, over
several pages, that tell the reader little about how to understand what follows, the author presents a lively account of slum dwellers, hawkers and anti-monarchy red shirt graffiti.

While Ünaldi also returns to notions of competing charismas, his underlying theme is that those who “are reminded constantly of their structural deprivation while new capitalist desires are being formed and reinforced in their encounters with the goods and entertainment venues in the surrounding shopping malls…” are less easily convinced by royalist propaganda, “demonstrated by their support for Thaksin’s Phuea Thai Party and their affiliation with the Red Shirt movement” (202). He refers to “spatial and social marginalization of the poorest” having radicalised them. That is an important observation.

In the Conclusion, unfortunately stuck in a time just before Bhumibol’s passing, Ünaldi again ponders succession. He points to accounts that the king’s death “could mean that chaos and anarchy will befall the country” (220). This is not a view he shares, observing: “Even after the succession to the throne of Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn, the country would be poised to remain under charismatic rule.” In his view, “the charisma of the royal office and the crown prince’s inherited charisma, as well as the interests of people who are working towards the monarchy – the military, conservative politicians, the urban middle class – will preserve the royal institution…” (225). While the charisma argument might be overdone, several months after succession, Ünaldi’s view may well turn out to be accurate.

Working Towards the Monarchy is a welcome addition to the still limited critical literature on Thailand’s monarchy. Because the monarchy is at the centre of Thailand’s authoritarian politics, this book will be widely read, even if its distribution is restricted in Thailand.

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Mindanao: The Long Journey to Peace and Prosperity P.D. Hutchcroft (ed.)
(Mandaluyong City: Anvil Publishing, 2016)

Over the past several decades, the peace process on Mindanao, in the southern Philippines, has at times presented some of the best prospects for peacebuilding in Southeast Asia. Breakthrough political agreements between the government of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and its offshoot, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) – the two main armed groups struggling for self-determination on behalf of the Moro community – have offered the possibility of real conflict transformation, moving beyond the agreement of preliminary ceasefires towards settlements which address the political and economic drivers of armed conflict. On other occasions, these linked peace processes have been characterised by violence, frustration and even despair.

This book brings together many of the key analysts of, and some important stakeholders in, the Mindanao peace process. It does so at a critical juncture: the previous President of the Philippines, Benigno Aquino III, came close, but ultimately failed to achieve a comprehensive legal-political settlement to decades of conflict. The Bangsamoro Basic Law was intended to operationalise a peace framework and agreement negotiated in 2012 and 2014, but it never passed Congress. In large part, this was due to a backlash in popular opinion
Colonizing, Decolonizing, and Globalizing Kolkata. From a Colonial to a Post-Marxist City, Siddhartha Sen (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017)

Kevin Hewison

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Another useful direction for the future would be a greater integration into broader scholarship on constitutionalism. The chapters in *Constitutionalism and Legal Change in Myanmar* largely work to explain and identify issues posed by ongoing events, and so are empirical in nature. This enables understanding, but it risks confinement of the book as a descriptive study. Future growth of Myanmar studies as a field requires an integration of descriptive and theoretical approaches in analysis. The implication is a need for more theory in the study of constitutionalism in Myanmar. Such a need goes beyond the scope of *Constitutionalism and Legal Change in Myanmar*, but it does reveal points for potentially useful associations with other bodies of scholarship for the future.

In conclusion, *Constitutionalism and Legal Change in Myanmar* is a valuable contribution to the literature in multiple fields: comparative studies, constitutionalism and Myanmar/Burma studies. It focuses on a critical topic for the future of Myanmar, and so reaches both academic and non-academic audiences. It provides an excellent introduction to the subject of constitutionalism in Myanmar. It also offers a model that serves as a starting point for future compilations that can maintain the book’s focus on issues that are sure to change in the fluid environment of Myanmar’s ongoing transition.

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**Colonizing, Decolonizing, and Globalizing Kolkata. From a Colonial to a Post-Marxist City, Siddhartha Sen (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017)**

This book is an essentially chronological account of architecture and urban planning and design in Kolkata. Located on the Hooghly River, today it is one of India’s most populous urban agglomerations. The book focuses on the development of the city from the period when the Nawab of Bengal granted the East India Company a trading licence in 1690, through its colonial experience to its current incarnation, labelled “Globalising Kolkata” by the author.

Sen contextualises architecture, planning and urban design in a broader political economy, delineating the ways in which colonialism, wealth and power are reflected in and imposed by physical forms that themselves reflect social and political control (22–23). To his credit, the author looks beyond the city, to a broader area around Kolkata, including Howrah/Hoora on the west bank of the Hooghly, which the author views as an example of “defiance of the entire scheme of colonial urbanism” (131).

The author claims to develop an analytical framework that draws on “post-structuralism and theories of dependent urbanism” (24). Sen is influenced by Said’s Orientalism and post-colonial perspective and by Foucault’s writings on discipline, surveillance and control. However, Sen’s discussion of these approaches is an accounting of ideas and observations picked from the literature on post-colonialism while failing to develop much theoretical coherence (24–30). This is not so much a criticism of Sen as of the lack of coherence in the diverse literature on post-colonialism. At the same time, the book is not overly burdened by this framework, adding a terminology to a historical recounting of the city’s development.

Sometimes, though, the use of this terminology is trite. For example, that the British should clear land around their fort to better “observe the approaching enemy” seems like standard
military tactics rather than the author’s claim that it is an example of the Foucauldian notion of surveillance at work (52–53).

Despite the focus on colonialism and post-colonialism, there’s only a little historical contextualising and details about the settlements and villages in the area before the British arrived. The author’s attention is on the East India Company’s establishment of a factory, port and its fort. Colonial city planning began early. Soon after making their town, the British were issuing orders regarding the type of buildings permitted and pursuing strategies to separate themselves and Indians (46–48). Efforts to achieve segregation, never entirely successful, continued throughout the colonial period, only to be marketised in the post-colonial era as wealth (and lack of it) separated Indians into class-defined suburbs. In examining the early colonial era, Sen establishes another theme of the volume: comparing Kolkata with other colonial and post-colonial cities in India. Some of these comparisons suggest anomalies in architectural preferences; unfortunately, these insights are not examined in any detail.

The author argues that it was only towards the end of the eighteenth century that architecture came to represent imperial power (61). Certainly, as the East India Company established British trade dominance in the region, cities expanded. The Company, entwined with the British state in London, became more government-like, granted a monopoly on administration as it ceded trade monopolies. Sen argues that the “British adopted neo-classicism in Kolkata because of its connection with the architectural vocabulary of the imperial Roman Empire” (77). This is more an assertion than something the author documents. Even so, the grandeur of architecture afforded by the spoils of imperialism, was seen in Europe and in Kolkata as well. In its central areas and in the colonial housing built for Europeans and some wealthy locals on the cooler outskirts of Kolkata, the buildings were large, spacious and imposing. One observer referred to the European part of town as a “city of palaces” (80). Yet as the city grew and became architecturally European, the British colonialists worried about health and order (67–71). In another theme running through his work, despite its grandeur and the confidence of colonialists in their power and wealth, Kolkata is repeatedly seen as threatening to the well-being of expatriates and, later, to the wealthy of the post-colonial period.

As discussed in several chapters, the fears generated about health had a racial edge and these fears were heightened by a range of oppositions to colonialism, ranging from foot-dragging to rebellion. Urban development became political. Congestion, a lack of grid-like order, streetless areas and hygiene issues became definitional of the Calcutta slum, with one British observer worrying slums promoted vice, immorality, crime and, worryingly, “discontent, sedition, [and] anarchy” (119).

As anti-colonialism increased, Sen discerns the emergence of a “search for Indianess in architecture during the 1920s and 1930s” (102). However, for reasons not fully detailed, Kolkata is not captured by this movement (103). Even so, Kolkata was caught up in the decolonisation struggle and celebrated independence. Yet when Sen begins Chapter 4 with a claim that there was “[n]o significant planning or architectural endeavours...undertaken in Kolkata from the 1930s to the mid-1960s” (133), the reader is left to wonder why the chapter is titled “Decolonizing Kolkata.” Where Kolkata does emerge in this chapter is in discussing its post-colonial planning agenda. The thesis advanced is that India adopted Soviet-style, highly-centralised, five-year plans, and Kolkata, dominated by Marxist politics, was at the forefront of this movement. Plenty of other post-colonial jurisdictions also adopted planning, which was promoted by the United Nations, so India was hardly unique, but Kolkata also had left-leaning governments in place. One mark of radical decolonisation in Kolkata was the renaming of colonial buildings and streets and the removal of colonial-era statues, replacing them with anti-colonial heroes. Lenin Sarani has a handsome statue of Lenin. Both the British and US consulates-general are on Ho Chi Minh Sarani. Kolkata,
always threatening to the British, now came to be seen as threatening to independent India for its communists and revolutionary Naxalites.

Following independence, Kolkata’s population grew substantially with an immediate influx of some 700,000 political refugees (159). The infrastructure of the city was unable to cope with such a large increase, eventually totalling two million, and this exacerbated a struggling economy, damaged by the partition of Bengal at independence and the war that followed in East Bengal/Bangladesh. The problems this posed for urban planning were huge and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) organised extensively at the grassroots. Sen laments that this left little space for non-governmental organisations, considering them “empowering,” although no evidence for this claim is made nor comparative instances of “empowerment” cited (177–181). It is not clear why the author dismisses the Communist Party as practising “urban populism,” when this “political mobilization...[was] facilitated through the provision of land, housing, and other urban services” (179–180). Presumably these mattered for the grassroots.

Chapter 5 examines the marketisation of Kolkata with a turn to economic liberalism from the 1990s. The result has been suburbanism, gated estates, department stores, malls, condominiums, fast food, foreign investment, special economic zones (considered “exceptional” by post-structuralists but, in fact, unexceptional in a world of global supply chains) and other homogenising features of globalisation seen everywhere. Sen blames the Communist Party for holding all this back and yet acknowledges that it was this party “reinventing” itself that resulted in the deepening of marketisation (195). Sounding like the colonialists of previous centuries, twenty-first century Kolkata was marketed to global corporations and the domestic capitalist class as a city governed by concerns for “hygiene, order, and beauty” (196). Real estate development boomed and Kolkata’s urban society became demarcated by class. In the conclusion the author seems disappointed that, for all this liberalisation and marketisation, Kolkata is not yet a global city (241).

Sen’s book is a useful contribution to the literature on Kolkata’s history, adding a perspective from architecture and planning. The publisher has permitted it to be lavishly illustrated with 109 maps, art works and photographs; if they had been in colour, the impact of the book would have been greatly enhanced. As has been seen in this review, the puzzling aspect is Sen’s avowed radicalism but an analysis that isn’t particularly radical. The author notes this “paradox” and seeks to explain it by referring to the disjuncture between Marxism as theory and Marxist-inspired government (32–35). There’s something to this, although there’s not much that is radical in post-structural and post-colonial approaches.

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International Intervention and Local Politics Shahar Hameiri, Caroline Hughes, and Fabio Scarpello (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

Since the 1990s, many cases of international intervention have seen outsiders reach deep inside “fragile” or “failing” states in wide-ranging peace- and state-building programmes. Increasingly, these programmes have involved intensive efforts to reform the public