

great extent pulls up short in its presentation of the kinds of power relations that have underpinned the actions of Thai capitalists, the Thai military and/or the Thai monarchy. Obviously, the last of these is a taboo topic in Thailand, and the author cannot be faulted for not addressing it, but silence here performs its usual role of implicitly distorting claims about why things happen the ways that they do. These gaps result in some limitation both in the analysis of the Red Shirt–Yellow Shirt conflict and in the comparative national claims about student activists that the book’s conclusion presents. The book is nonetheless well worth the read and will no doubt help wipe dull smiles off a few faces.

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Thailand’s Theory of Monarchy: The Vessantara Jātaka and the Idea of the Perfect Man. By Patrick Jory. Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2016. xviii+284 pp.

Patrick Jory argues that to understand why the monarchy exercises enormous influence in virtually every aspect of life in Thailand we need to explore the religious sources of Thai conceptions of kingship. The theory of royal rule that Jory details in this lucidly presented study is that of the *bodhisatta* king, a monarch who is a “Buddha-to-be” aiming to attain ten royal “perfections” or *barami*, virtues that Buddhism teaches are the foundations of enlightenment and Buddhahood. In Theravada Buddhism a *bodhisatta* is one who vows to achieve enlightenment in a future incarnation through the accumulation of ten *barami*, virtues such as patience, perseverance and giving alms to the needy. While originally a quality of spiritually and morally superior beings, in Thai political discourse *barami* — from the Pali *pāramī* or “perfection (of virtue)” — evolved into a notion of religiously based charismatic authority and legitimate rule.

Jory elucidates the theory of royal *barami* through detailed studies of the Jataka legends of the Buddha's previous incarnations. He argues that as a genre of Buddhist literature the Jatakas were the principal conduit through which the Theravada theory of monarchy was communicated to a mass audience for several hundred years. The central theme of the many Jatakas is the accumulation of *barami* by the *bodhisatta* or future Buddha over many incarnations, with the final achievement of the ten royal forms of *barami* enabling the *bodhisatta* to be reborn in his final incarnation as Gotama Buddha. The hero of the Jatakas was typically a king, prince or sage, and this identity thus provided a model of moral and political authority for rulers in the pre-modern Theravada world.

Jory focuses specifically on the *Vessantara Jataka*, the final of the series of 550 Jatakas and a tale that reflects the view that the perfection of the virtue of giving opens the way to the final attainment of Buddhahood. For centuries the *Vessantara* was the most popular Jataka in Thailand, performed in a ceremonial recitation called the *Thet Mahachat* or the sermon of the "great incarnation". Jory details how this Jataka provided a paradigm of the ideal ruler, why it was popular for so long and why it lost favour in the second half of the nineteenth century. His study is textually rich, well-illustrated and based on extensive analysis of primary sources, including illustrated manuscripts of the *Vessantara Jataka* not previously analysed in detail. Jory demonstrates the importance of the *Vessantara Jataka* to political culture in the Ayutthaya and early Bangkok periods, arguing that the theory of the *bodhisatta* king reflected in this story reached its apogee in the latter period (1782–1851). He then traces the decline and ultimate eclipse of the political influence of the Jatakas from the middle of the nineteenth century, when Western influence saw the Thai court — in particular Kings Mongkut and Chulalongkorn — adopt critical perspectives towards aspects of the Buddhist tradition, including the Jatakas. In 1904, King Chulalongkorn penned an essay denying the authority of the Jatakas and reclassifying their stories as folktales, in a move that Jory contends repudiated the basis of the concept of the *bodhisatta* king.

Jory bookends his account of the former importance, decline and eclipse of the *Vessantara Jataka*, and the theory of the *bodhisatta* king, with introductory and closing chapters on the return of this theory in the reign of the late King Bhumibol and the political salience of that king's revision of another Jataka, *The Story of Mahajanaka*. Jory presents this revision as a thinly disguised allegory of King Bhumibol's own career, mixing ideas of the *bodhisatta* king in the original Jataka with ideas of the modernizing development-king on which Bhumibol styled himself. Jory contends that the rehabilitation of the Jatakas within the reinvented royalism of the Bhumibol era provided justification for the massive wealth of the monarchy. In royalist discourse, Bhumibol is represented as a contemporary Vessantara who perfected the *barami* of giving by supporting thousands of royal development projects with funds recycled from donations. The rapid acquisition of wealth by the monarchy under Bhumibol was then justified by his perfection of the moral virtue of giving.

However, Jory does not develop his arguments for why the Jatakas regained political importance in Thailand as well as he does his account of their role in the pre-modern period. Citing Justin McDaniel and Christine Gray, he argues that old ideas of kingship have been reintroduced from Thailand's rural provinces, where they were never fully eclipsed, and that the military, monarchy, bureaucracy and commercial banks have mounted sophisticated propaganda campaigns to represent the economic development of the country in the guise of the ascetic practice of an ostensible *bodhisatta* king. While no doubt accurate, these arguments are nonetheless at odds with strong claims made in earlier chapters that the Jatakas had been thoroughly discredited by the early twentieth century. Why did a modern monarch, born and educated in the West, and an equally Western-educated elite latch on to a religious genre and pre-modern ideology previously discredited by the highly revered monarchs Mongkut and Chulalongkorn? Jory does not say why King Bhumibol decided to revise a Jataka tale, rather than another genre of Buddhist literature, or why, given the historical importance of the *Vessantara Jataka*,

the king revised another tale, the *Mahajanaka Jataka*, which does not seem to have been significant in earlier periods.

Perhaps a fuller picture of the rehabilitation of pre-modern discourses of kingship in Thailand needs to look beyond Buddhism. Jory presents only the Buddhist dimension of discourses of royal rule. He does not consider the significant Brahmanical elements in Thai theories of kingship, and he overlooks notions of the monarch as a “virtual deity” (*sammuti devaraja*) and related ideas of royal power as *saksit*, or magically powerful. However, these gaps do not detract from the central contribution of Jory’s innovative study in providing invaluable historical context to the intensified absolutist royalism that has now become the official discourse of the country’s national bureaucracy and authoritarian military regime.

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Learning, Migration and Intergenerational Relations: The Karen and the Gift of Education. By Pia Joliffe. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. xvii+179 pp.

This book is a solid attempt at providing insights into the experiences of young Karen migrating both internally in Thailand for schooling purposes and from Myanmar to other countries. The author has considered the experiences of three distinct populations of the Karen: Karen who were born in Thailand, Karen from Myanmar living in a predominantly Karenni refugee camp on the Thai–Burmese border, and Karen from Myanmar who lived in refugee camps on the Thai–Burmese border and currently live in the North of England.

The book begins with an introduction of the main theory and concepts used. The author employs Malinowski’s and Mauss’s work on the gift economy to frame the way in which the Karen perceive