

The chapter on the manufacturing industry, although very informative and relevant in putting forth policy initiatives, is led by a discussion on the simplistic partial input productivity measures. Drawing policy implications from the various studies using total factor productivity growth measures would have been useful as well. Also, special mention of the electronics industry would have been appropriate given that it is the leading industry in the manufacturing sector.

The most comprehensive chapter among the various sectoral concerns is that on the financial sector development. It traces the separation of the domestic and offshore markets, the vitality of the six local banks, the young stock brokerage industry and the increasing international nature of the stock exchange market. A missing element in this section is possibly a discussion on the merger and acquisition trend among the local banks. However, this is no fault of the author as this trend took off after the completion of the book. The author concludes the chapter with a strong call for a “complete overhaul” of the Central Provident Fund scheme which has often been chided for locking up investible funds.

Lastly, it is refreshing that a book titled as this, has included a section on the social and cultural perspectives of the competitive strategy in the global context. This aspect is often overlooked when authors become too involved in the mere economics of it all. For example, the chapter on the social fabric of competitiveness adds a philosophical and social dimension to economic governance and state intervention. It brings one’s attention to the need for the population to move in tandem with the changes in the environment by changing attitudes and tolerance. The next chapter’s theme on entrepreneurship has always been a central issue in Singapore and the discussion has renewed that interest by providing an updated version of the entrepreneurial scene. It also brings together the western and eastern views (the Chinese business culture) on the process of managing small and medium enterprises. The last chapter of this book appropriately focuses on human resource management, given that labour is the only resource that Singapore has in any meaningful supply. Here an

attempt is made to provide some answers to the big question of how organizations and human resource professionals could respond to changes in the increasingly global environment.

In general, this book is an excellent, well-documented study to launch Singapore into the “Millennium Lap”. But whether Singapore continues to ride high on the tide of success and economic growth depends on the extent of the dialogue and interaction between academic research such as this and policy advisers.

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***A Siamese Tragedy.* By Walden Bello, Shea Cunningham and Li Kheng Poh.** London: Zed Books, 1998. 256 pp.

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Sub-titled “Development and Disintegration in Modern Thailand”, *A Siamese Tragedy* depicts various disappointments and adverse side-effects in Thailand’s economic development model of the last forty years or so. Individual chapters tackle such issues as: “the failure of industrial deepening”, Bangkok, pollution, deforestation, the AIDS crisis, and the decline of the agricultural sector. What Thailand needs, the authors propose, is a fundamental re-think of its economic development model (or, perhaps, the lack of one). This book is dense with supporting data, and displays some admirably comprehensive research work by the authors. That said, many of the topics discussed — such as traffic congestion in Bangkok, or the sex industry and AIDS — have been well-researched before, and this book’s utility is in providing a fairly cogent synthesis of earlier primary research, some of which may not have been readily available outside of Thailand.

The authors state that their research for this book was conducted “when Thailand was an economic miracle”, and the completion of its writing occurred “in the months after the economy crashed”. While this sudden and massive disloc-

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tion in Thailand's economic growth trajectory might have posed problems for other observers writing about the country, the financial crisis does not appear to have put these authors off their stride one jot. Indeed, the financial crisis — and the sharp economic downturn that followed in its wake — is cited by the authors as evidence to support their view. If the proof is in the pudding, then the Thai financial crisis served as a very welcome dessert for these authors, perhaps coming at just the right time during the making of this book. Entering right on cue, with the economic crisis in the role of *deus ex machina*, the authors suggest that the events of July 1997 lend weight to the notion that Thailand's current development path is unsustainable. They could be right.

The authors argue that by the mid-1990s, the main concern of the NGO movement in Thailand was "what it considered [to be] the disruptive forces unleashed by an unregulated private sector, the global market economy, and transnational financial and corporate forces". And the financial crisis that swept Thailand in 1997 "was seen as a vindication of the movement's critique of globalization". Yet the even the NGO movement, like most, was surprised by the speed and scale of the crisis, having anticipated that a more "gradual exacerbation of the contradictions of the economic and social structures" would be forthcoming. What should have been a slow deceleration turned out to be a high-impact crash. Indeed, the rapidity of events during the crisis is cited as the main reason why the NGO movement did not make a better job of getting its message over, at what should have been an ideal time. The authors argue that "while its critique was strong, its articulation of the alternative left much to be desired".

Perhaps the same accusation could be made of this book. Having made a fairly convincing argument for a re-think of Thailand's development model, the authors largely side-step the task of providing an alternative model. A concluding chapter, entitled "Revisioning the Future", teases the reader with a section on "fleshing out the alternative", but then fails to deliver much in just three pages of text. After having provided such a seemingly coherent depiction of what Thailand got

wrong in past years, the authors should have made at least some stab at proposing an alternative model, or at least identifying key pillars of such a model. Instead, the reader gets a brief check-list, which includes: "a transaction tax to be imposed on speculative capital" (much harder than it looks and prone to back-firing); an Asian emergency regional fund; a common strategy among Asian countries on foreign debt issues with "Western governments"; growth "principally financed from domestic savings and investment"; a reorientation of development around the domestic market; more democratic decision-making; and a better distribution of wealth. At best, some of these points are very general, and the merits of others are dubious.

While it is hard to be dismissive of the many valid points that are made in this book, the authors' exclusive focus on the negative aspects of Thailand's recent economic development leaves one feeling unduly despondent. There are also numerous things that Thailand has got right over the last forty years, yet which get little coverage in this book. Despite the massive economic change that has been underway in Thailand, its social and political fabric remains remarkably intact, and the country has been able to avoid some of the major economic and political blunders and developmental dead-ends of some of its immediate neighbours. Perhaps the authors take such factors as "a given", but they are worthy of some acknowledgement, surely.

It will be very interesting to witness what happens next in Thailand's economic development. With economic growth now back into positive territory, and a halting to the IMF loan programme expected in 2000, there will be a temptation for policy back-sliding to occur. This is also a year where party politics will be upper-most in the minds of the leadership, as the country prepares for both senate and parliament elections, guided by a new constitutional framework. But there is much that Thailand still needs to do in the economic sphere, if the country is to overcome the damage done by the financial crisis of 1997, and to reduce the risk of its repetition in the future. Unfortunately, much of that work entails grappling with rather unexciting challenges, like corporate

debt restructuring, re-building bank loan portfolios, and actually putting into practice recent legislative and regulatory changes. These sorts of micro issues do not capture the imagination, and so the potential for drift is significant. Yet the aggregate sum of numerous micro issues equals one major macro issue — the return to sustainable economic growth in Thailand, regardless of the precise type of economic development model adopted.

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***French and Japanese Economic Relations With Vietnam Since 1975.* By Heinrich Dahm. Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1999. Pp. 193.**

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This book provides an evaluation of the strategies employed by France and Japan in conducting economic relations with Vietnam over the past 25 years. As a timely collection of facts and figures on Vietnam's relations with both its colonial masters, France, and Asia's powerhouse, Japan, it offers an in-depth understanding of Vietnam's experiences with the main foreigners who interacted with and ruled Vietnam. It will serve as a useful survey of existing literature and wealth of knowledge for scholars interested in Vietnam's historical perspectives, the reasoning underpinning its recent move towards the open market and how both countries are today exerting economic and political influence in the new Vietnam. In light of recent developments, it will also serve to shed light in understanding Vietnam's decision to halt foreign investment.

The book comprises three distinct chapters beginning with an account of Vietnam's historical background. This in itself is an arduous task and it proves that exhaustive research was involved in order to construct a realistic impression of Vietnam's tumultuous history. It highlights the need for a sound understanding of Vietnam's history which is quintessential for any study of

Vietnam's place in the world economy today. The chapter sets the stage for the later two chapters with a detailed analysis of ancient Vietnam history, the French conquest and so on. Throughout the book issues are penned with clarity and concise facts which aid the understanding of both a newcomer to Vietnamese affairs and experts alike.

Following this, it also elucidates the reader on both Vietnam's domestic and foreign policies since 1975. It explains how domestic policies can be characterised as the leadership's determination to improve the livelihood of the people with an urgency unseen in other socialist environments. As Dahm explains :

After a period of half-hearted economic reforms in the 1980s, the changes in recent years have been essential and profound. These changes were not motivated by new insights of the Vietnamese Communist Party but by the necessity to stay ahead of the people's dissatisfaction.

Vietnam's foreign policy has been targeted primarily at ending the international isolation that it had subjected itself to after 1975. The future challenge resides in Vietnam's ability to establish stable international relations that will continue to support domestic reform and development. In sum, while foreigners are now welcomed in Vietnam, they are at the same time feared, given the past experiences.

The next chapter gives an account of the roles played by the French and Japanese governments respectively in Vietnam. The chapter contains a detailed and fluid treatment of the motivations, activities and problems of both governments' relations in Vietnam. In essence, French governmental relations are motivated by colonial links and the attendant sentimentalities. France sees it as her post-colonial responsibility of continued assimilation to develop relations beyond trade and language. Relations with Vietnam are hence believed to be the starting point of recouping French losses from missing out on the Asian boom.

One way that the French put their motivations into practice was by reaffirming their commitment of contact with the Vietnamese despite the U.S.