

Ban Amphawan et Ban Han. Le devenir de deux villages rizicoles du Nord-Est thaïlandais. Edited by Bernard Formoso. Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, CNRS Editions, 1997. 754 pp.

This substantial book is a thoroughly researched monograph of the social and economic evolution of two villages in northeastern Thailand. The book is claimed by both the writer of the Preface and the editor of the volume to be the first multi-disciplinary study on rural Thailand ever published in French. However surprising this might seem, considering the long period over which the French have been conducting research in Thailand (one can think of institutions like the National Centre for Scientific Research [CNRS], ORSTOM, and EFEO whose researchers have been dispatched on location for several decades now), this nevertheless appears to be a justified claim. Another originality of the research that should be mentioned is that it re-visits villages surveyed in 1969–70 by the Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute (CUSRI), and thus provides a rare and welcome diachronic perspective.

With a lifespan spreading over nearly a decade, including the main fieldwork from 1984 to 1986 (here, one regrets that it took ten years after the fieldwork before the book was published), the largest part of the research was conducted chiefly by ethnologists, and also by two ethnolinguists, two sociologists, and a geographer, all either Thai or French. This publication is the final result of a sizeable collaborative effort between Mahidol University, Khon Kaen University, and the CNRS in Paris. The national origins of the contributors to the volume reflect this diversity, five being French (Dupaigne, Formoso, Levy-Ward, Maganon, Taillard) and six Thai, including four from Mahidol (Marukatat, Jimreivat, Sirisai, Thongdi) and two from Khon Kaen (Panyasing, Srisontisuk).

Ban Amphawan and Ban Han, both located in Khon Kaen province, with 773 and 1,137 inhabitants, respectively, were witnessing the heyday of Thailand's economic boom of the 1980s when this survey was conducted. Each in its particular way — and with quite different end results — profited from the relentless economic expansion of that golden

age. It is this which the book brings most competently to light in the first instance (this stands in sharp contrast with the situation in north-eastern Thailand since a ceiling has been reached in agricultural development over the last ten years). This study indeed is forever dated to that precise moment of Thailand's history.

The book contrasts the socio-economics of modernization in these two rice-growing villages, one relying on irrigation, the other on rain-fall; one closer to an important town (Khon Kaen), the other in a rural surrounding; one with a strong cohesion, the other already well engaged on the track of socio-cultural weakening. Thanks partly to the CUSRI research done fifteen years earlier, the historical background is given much attention and convincingly places the foundations for the chapters that follow. In the main body of the book, the amount of detailed data on all aspects of the local economy is staggering while at the same time skilfully kept in close contact with its cultural context. The analytical chapters and the conclusion are solid while modest, avoiding the trap of overestimating the originality of these case studies. The conclusion, in particular, subtly summarizes and contrasts the resemblance and differences between the two villages. It appears that the modernization process in rural northeastern Thailand can take many shapes, two of which are exemplified here. In these situations, the blending of cultural factors with economic circumstances is key to understanding the particularities of each village.

Clearly, in-depth ethnographic research has been instrumental in planting such a sound analysis, and undue generalization has been carefully avoided. It seems to me that the main strength of this imposing monograph is its tying up of exogenous and endogenous economic factors with cultural traditions and local forms of social organization. It exemplifies perfectly what the contribution of anthropological research in rural development can be like. The overall portrait is that of a dynamic and complex society where, in order to comprehend the processes of change, equal importance is given to quantitative and qualitative research and analysis. Perhaps ten years is what it takes to achieve this level of quality, which may also explain why there are not many of such monographs available on any country in Southeast Asia.

The book's only flaw worth mentioning, I am afraid, is that it might be quite some time before the book is available in English.

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