

selecting) in the building of the still somewhat fragile Singaporean identity, but also with posing these forward-looking questions on the basis of an examination of the past.

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Innovative Partners: The Rockefeller Foundation and Thailand. By William H. Becker. New York: The Rockefeller Foundation, 2013. 147 pp.

To mark the centenary of its establishment in 1913, the Rockefeller Foundation has published six volumes on its history. Four of them cover, respectively, the foundation's work in the United States, in Africa, in public health and in agriculture. A fifth treats its role as a philanthropic innovator. And the sixth — written by the eminent historian of American business, of economic policy and of the international economy William Becker — focuses on the foundation's work in Thailand, dating to 1915. Each of these volumes is available on the foundation's website, with the volume under review at <http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/uploads/files/29945fef-7950-430d-9892-5767e4066336-innovative.pdf>.

That the Rockefeller Foundation should single out its work in Thailand and with its Thai “partners” through the publication of such a book is in itself worth remarking on. That it chose to do so at a time when rival conceptions of Thailand are the cause of great disharmony makes the decision still more noteworthy, and also rather brave. At the centre of this disharmony is the question of the most appropriate relationship in twenty-first-century Thailand among society, state and the monarchy, whose ties to the foundation this book does so much to celebrate. But the foundation's century of experience with the country and its institutional memory and rich archival record mean that the volume allows for unique insight into

its understanding of the relationship between its activities and major developments in Thailand's recent history.

While the book has a list of the photographs, many of considerable historical interest, that grace its pages, the foundation has chosen to publish it without citations to sources. Nevertheless, the media affairs office of the foundation kindly provided to this reviewer a manuscript version of the book, with citations to sources for the introduction, conclusion and five substantive chapters that comprise *Innovative Partners*.

The first two of these chapters, which — like much of the book — draw above all on the remarkable collections of the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) in Sleepy Hollow, New York, focus on the Rockefeller Foundation's work in public health and medical education in the period between the First World War and the mid-1930s. They are among the strongest chapters in the book.

The first chapter narrates the success of Dr Victor Heiser of the foundation's International Health Commission in winning the support of King Vajiravudh for an effort to replicate in Siam Rockefeller-supported efforts to combat hookworm in the American South. Heiser was not entirely unfamiliar to high-ranking officials in Bangkok when he arrived in the city in April 1915. His previous work in the Philippine Islands had brought him into contact with Phraya Maha-ammattayathibodi (Seng Wiriyasiri), who was acting as Siam's interior minister in Prince Damrong Rajanubhab's stead at the time of the American's visit to Bangkok on behalf of the Rockefeller Foundation. Eleven years before that visit, King Chulalongkorn and Prince Damrong had dispatched two officials to Manila to learn how to produce serum for treating rinderpest and bubonic plague, to receive intensive training in microbial medicine, and to gather materials likely to be of value to the improvement of laboratory work and medical education in Siam (Davisakd 2007, p. 322).

It is not clear whether Heiser and Phraya Maha-ammat had become acquainted in connection with this 1904 Siamese mission or in the course of later contact between Bangkok and colonial health officials in Manila. Whatever the case, the record of such contact makes two

points clear. First, the Philippines numbered among the Southeast Asian colonies of Western powers from which the modernizing Siamese state of the post-1890 period sought to learn. Second, its specific objectives in learning from the Philippine model lay not least in the areas of sanitation and medicine. Victor Heiser may have had a new employer by the time of his 1915 trip to Bangkok. And the Rockefeller Foundation may have been new to Siam. But a certain degree of continuity framed early foundation work in the country.

The chapter also vividly recounts Dr Milford Barnes's success in working with agents of the Bangkok state to take the anti-hookworm campaign to the North. Expanded to other parts of Siam, the campaign helped lay, the book suggests, the foundation for "a successful public health system to prevent disease and save lives" (p. 57; all page-number references to *Innovative Partners* are to the published version of the book).

The book's second chapter concerns the foundation's work to improve medical education at Siriraj Hospital, then still affiliated with Chulalongkorn University. Not least, this story centres on the partnership of the foundation and its representative Dr Aller Ellis with Prince Mahidol Adulyadej (1892–1929), whom the book terms "one of the most important figures in the history of modern Thailand" (p. 35) and whom Ellis appears to have matter-of-factly regarded as the "heir to the throne" (pp. 72, 76) after 1925. Mobilizing the prince's "influence and prestige" (p. 79), the Rockefeller Foundation found in him "a champion who could overcome the bureaucratic infighting" (p. 66) that already characterized the thirty-year-old modern Siamese state.

Unfortunately, the chapter leaves us in the dark about Dr Ellis's and the Rockefeller Foundation's accommodation with what it dismisses as the "relatively small group of academics, intellectuals, government workers, and members of the military" (p. 80) who seized power in Bangkok in June 1932. One suspects that the RAC's holdings include fascinating material on this topic. Nor does the chapter evince awareness that continued domination of the Siamese state's modern bureaucracy on the part of influential and prestigious members of

the royal family played a leading role in precipitating that seizure of power. The lack of due historical context on this point is not the only serious shortcoming in these two chapters. For they take no account of the recent path-breaking work of Davisakd Puaksom on the history of Siam's "medicalizing state", with its argument that "the knowledge and practice of scientific Western medicine were, in fact, introduced by the Siamese court, and they were integral to the constitution of a new conception of population and helped to make that population productive" (Davisakd 2007, p. 312). In the early twentieth century, Pasteurian medicine in Siam served not only economic objectives but also the projects of state-building and internal colonialism on which the absolute monarchy in Bangkok had embarked. Davisakd's work provides essential context for the Rockefeller Foundation's first two decades of activity in Siam. And recourse to such work would have allowed Professor Becker to expose himself not only to material drawn from Thai-language sources but also to the perspectives of Thai scholars, perspectives that scarcely inform *Innovative Partners*.

The book's third chapter, addressing "Thailand and the Green Revolution", is rather weaker than those that precede it. It begins with an erroneous transliteration of the Thai greeting, "Have you eaten rice yet?" — just about the most trivial and *cliché* indicator of the importance of the rice sector to Thailand that there is. The Rockefeller Foundation played a leading role in the establishment of the International Rice Research Institute, or IRRI. It has offered continuing support to the institute. And this chapter tells us that "interest in the work of IRRI has been acknowledged at the highest levels of the Thai Royal House. Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, for example, opened the sixth annual Rice Genetics Symposium in Manila in 2009" and "formally launched IRRI's 50th anniversary at the Institute's headquarters in the Philippines" (p. 95) that same year.

But the chapter is long on the general story of changes in rice science and short on how Thailand localized those changes. The chapter refers, to cite just the most obvious example, to the

development of IR8. But — remarkably — it never actually tells us how widely Thai farmers adopted that variety or any another IRRI variety, let alone in which regions or provinces of Thailand farmers proved most likely to adopt those varieties. The chapter would gain from treatment of the relationship between IRRI varieties and the *ko. kho.* varieties developed by the Rice Department (*krom kankhao*) of Thailand's agriculture ministry. Similarly, accounts of the work of either Thai or foreign actors — figures comparable to Mahidol or Barnes or Ellis — such as those that distinguish the preceding chapters would strengthen this one. Who, for example, were the Thai rice scientists whose studies overseas the foundation funded, and what did they accomplish on their return to Thailand? Who were the leading Thai figures in the Green Revolution, and what was their relationship to IRRI, the foundation, or both? Rather than stressing the ceremonial activities of Prince Mahidol's granddaughter Princess Sirindhorn, for example, the chapter could trace the career of Kwanchai Gomez, the legendary Thai statistician whose innovative work was for decades central to IRRI's research. Dr Kwanchai now serves as both executive director of the Rockefeller Foundation-initiated Asia Rice Foundation and secretary general of the Thai Rice Foundation under Royal Patronage. One wonders, too, what the relationship between foundation representatives in Thailand and 1967 Ramon Magsaysay Award winner Prince Sithiporn Kridakara was, as the latter battled against the "rice premium". Other such questions come to mind. Further, this chapter includes many paragraphs that neither have anything in particular to do with Thailand nor inform our understanding of the country's experience of the Green Revolution.

The fourth chapter of *Innovative Partners* turns to the Rockefeller Foundation's assistance between the early 1960s and the late 1970s to three Thai universities: Mahidol, Kasetsart and Thammasat. Its treatment of the foundation's role in the creation of the faculty of medicine at the newly established Ramathibodi Hospital during the 1960s and of the people involved in the promotion of the life sciences at Mahidol more generally is strong. That treatment draws above all

on a 1979 internal report prepared for the foundation by J. Wayne Reitz, publication of which would be a valuable contribution to the history of science in post-1945 Thailand. The section on Kasetsart traces some important episodes in its expansion and mentions some of the leading figures at that institution during the era, really only yesterday, in which it remained above all an agricultural university.

One turns, however, to the fourth chapter's discussion of Thammasat with particular interest. This discussion gets off to a curious start. It gives the university a royal lineage, tracing its creation to King Chulalongkorn's modernization of the Thai legal system in the 1890s. And, inaccurately reporting when Puey Ungpakorn (1916–99) resigned the governorship of the Bank of Thailand, it fails to understand that he remained in that post during most of the years that he served as dean of the Faculty of Economics at Thammasat. Drawing on a 1978 report prepared for the foundation by the Dartmouth College economist William Baldwin, who spent four years on the Thammasat faculty under Rockefeller Foundation auspices, this section of the chapter touches on the foundation's poorly known effort to develop the university's Faculty of Liberal Arts and alludes in passing to tensions in its Faculty of Political Science. If a copy of this report is not in the Thammasat University archives already, one really ought to be deposited there soon.

The section's real focus is on Thammasat's Faculty of Economics, whose scale and calibre Dr Puey transformed during the years of foundation support. Puzzlingly, this discussion omits mention of the crucial role of Rockefeller Foundation staffer Dr Laurence Stifel, one of this reviewer's own mentors, in assisting Dr Puey in this work from 1967 onward. What makes this omission so striking is the chapter's indication that the foundation learned lessons from criticisms of its programmes at Thai universities for being disconnected from on-the-ground realities in the country and applied those lessons to its later work. For, from the late 1970s through the mid-1980s, Stifel held leadership roles at the foundation's New York headquarters. He would there have been at the centre of efforts to apply lessons from Thailand to the foundation's activities, particularly in his roles

as associate director for social sciences and, later, vice president for program.

The chapter on Rockefeller Foundation support for Thai universities also includes an extremely interesting discussion of the ambitious and long forgotten Mae Klong Integrated Rural Development Project (MIRDP), led by Dr Puey and generously funded by the foundation in the mid-1970s. A target of the Thai right wing of the time and in the end a casualty of the events of 6 October 1976, this project is one whose history students of Thailand during the 1970s and of rural Thailand more generally need to revisit. Many readers of the treatment of the project in *Innovative Partners* will find themselves eager to learn more. Vinyu (1977) and Akin (1980) would be good places for such readers to start. Dr Puey's handwritten comments on the former, penned from his exile in London, are available online. And this is to say nothing of the material on the MIRDP found in James Jensen's 1979 report on the foundation's work with Kasetsart University, on which Professor Becker has drawn so effectively in his discussion of the project. That report is held by the RAC.

In the fifth chapter of the volume, the focus on Thailand and on the individuals central to its activities there again fades. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries saw the foundation adopt an increasingly regional approach in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, it did during those years offer valuable early support to the Thailand Development Research Institute, or TDRI, which subsequently emerged as the country's leading independent policy shop. It also made grants in this period to the Asian Institute of Technology, or AIT. But detailed treatment of the foundation's work with these two Thai institutions is not on the agenda of this chapter, entitled "Facing a World of 'New Realities'". For, after 2005, even the Southeast Asian regional approach gave way to one enshrining "global impact" (p. 165) as the foundation goal worth taking most seriously. This new orientation saw the Rockefeller Foundation cast its Bangkok office as a post responsible for "the entire region of Asia" (ibid.).

Still, there has occasionally been room for activities truly focused on Thailand at the foundation during the past decade. An example

is the inclusion of the municipalities of Chiang Rai and Hat Yai among the ten members of the Rockefeller Foundation's Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network, launched in 2008. The treatment of the network in this chapter neglects, however, to say much about the local-level political and social challenges or "local experts and key city stakeholders" (p. 170) with whom the network has engaged in either Chiang Rai or Hat Yai. Do not expect, for example, to find here the names of the *nayok thetsamontri* (mayors) with whom the foundation has worked in these cities, discussion of the informal networks on which these figures have depended for electoral success, or consideration of the implications of that dependence for the "resilience" of their cities. But perhaps interest in such detail is an inevitable casualty of the "global" focus of the Rockefeller Foundation in its current incarnation. One is reminded, in this regard, of the similar reorientation of Bangkok's elite and near-elite in recent decades: so impressively attentive to the world beyond Thailand, but unfamiliar with — and indeed uninterested in — that city's vast provincial hinterland in a way that would leave Dr Puey dumbfounded and sad.

The foundation's commitment to public health does remain strong. Among its portfolio of ambitious ongoing initiatives, many with a Thai connection, the foundation's Transforming Health Systems programme attaches particular importance to the promotion of efforts towards universal health coverage (UHC), not least by helping Asian and African countries learn from one another. The fifth chapter of the book notes, "Thailand has played an important role in these efforts. It has been a model in the provision of UHC, which was introduced in Thailand in 2002" (p. 171) — an implicit endorsement of one of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra's signature policies, albeit an endorsement that avoids mentioning him by name.

Innovative Partners begins with a preface and a foreword. In the first, Rockefeller Foundation president Judith Rodin refers to the foundation's relationship with "the people of Thailand" (p. 22) twice and to its focus on Thai "communities" (pp. 22–23) three times in just two pages. This is regrettable. For, while perhaps not in the

global context with which the foundation is now most concerned, in the Thai context notions of “community” (*chumchon*) and “the people” (*prachachon*) have long served and today continue to serve systematically to promote the de-politicization of society and thus to retard political change commensurate with rapid social change. Serious insight into Thailand requires the adoption of a critical perspective on these notions. It requires a similar perspective on the long record of anti-democratic paternalism and increasingly anachronistic royalism of the Thai medical establishment that has been the Rockefeller Foundation’s most important partner in the country during the last century. The absence of these perspectives, even in a book intended above all as a celebration of the foundation’s achievements during its first century, risks leaving the Rockefeller Foundation on the wrong side of history in Thailand.

The author of the book’s foreword is the physician Prawase Wasi, a central figure in the now fading network monarchy that has dominated Thailand for the past three and half decades. Writing in his preface that “the Foundation found Prince Mahidol to be a man of virtue” (p. 25), Dr Prawase projects on to its early representatives in the country the ideological emphasis on “good people” (*khon di*) that serves as the cornerstone of reaction in contemporary Thailand. The network has long demonstrated great skill in turning even the most distinguished foreign institutions to its purposes.

While the book does include an index, it is without appendices listing, for example, projects that the Rockefeller Foundation has supported in Thailand; the names of its Thai grantees, many of whom have gone on to play important roles in the country’s affairs; the names of American faculty who served under the auspices of the foundation’s programmes at Thai universities, many of whom produced scholarship on the country of lasting value; or even the names of officers of the foundation who have directed its programmes from Bangkok over the decades. The omission of such data is disappointing, as they would both make even more concrete the depth and range of the Rockefeller Foundation’s achievements in Thailand and prove valuable to researchers.

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