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Unequal Thailand: Aspects of Income, Wealth and Power. Edited by Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker. Singapore: NUS Press, 2016. xv+186 pp.

Unequal Thailand is the newest volume of research to be compiled by the husband and wife team of Baker and Pasuk, the latter a professor of economics at Chulalongkorn University and the former a public intellectual of some note who has written widely on contemporary Thai history and politics. The two have edited an excellent and informative book that focuses on many of the issues that underlie Thailand's current political crises. The editors have brought together painstakingly executed and well-written papers that examine different aspects of inequality of income, wealth, power and knowledge. Taken together, these papers provide a reader with a very clear understanding of what might be done to move Thailand out of its current depressing morass of political disenfranchisement and societal mistrust. Any scholar of the region or the country will find at least several of these chapters of interest, whether her or his own focus is economic, political or sociological.

Most of the contributors to the volume are relatively young scholars working in Thailand. This may account for the wealth of knowledge about how the country works as well as the excellent quality of the data used in the majority of the chapters. This generally high quality of data and analysis is impressive, in that many of the authors rely on information that I, for one, was unaware was available in Thailand. The authors often allude to the fact that the data on which they are relying come from sources which have not previously been exploited or which in some cases have been specifically created for the purposes of analysing inequality in the country.

One chapter, for example, is the first paper ever to explore the concentration of land ownership on a national scale by using new data from the country's Socio-Economic Survey and recently computerized titled landholding information from the Land Department of Thailand. Duangmanee Laovakul, an assistant professor of Economics at

Thammasat University, uses these data to argue persuasively that wealth, even more than income, is highly concentrated in Thailand and that it is concentrated in ways that explain even further the sense of unfairness that underlies the differences between political factions within the country.

The chapter that I found most illuminating was written by Ukrist Pathmanand, a research professor at the Institute of Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University, and entitled “Network Thaksin”. Ukrist uses network analysis to articulate and explore Thaksin Shinawatra’s use of his access to power and privilege in different ways during the course of his terms as premier. The explanation is so nuanced and tempered, given the rhetoric and underlying violence that underscores so many existing accounts of Thaksin’s rise and fall, that I recommend it as reading to anyone who wants to understand more about the origins of the politics and anger of the current Thai impasse. Ukrist ends the chapter by noting that the political alliance that has ruled Thailand for a hundred years

wishes to turn Thailand back into an older type of oligarchy with a formal pyramid topped by the rich few in a revitalized form designed for the complex, open and globalized Thailand of today. Achieving this plan, however, means weakening all democratic institutions and widening the inequalities of wealth, power and privilege. (p. 158)

As the rest of this book makes clear, however, these inequalities are entrenched and the current patterns of growth and redistribution do not seem to be ameliorating them.

Most of the other chapters propose excellent ideas about how to address inequality in Thailand, whether through better regulation of the stock market, more transparent access to networking institutions and programmes, more progressive tax policies or better control of state-owned enterprises, particularly in the energy area. The gradual and piecemeal suggestions of the authors can clearly help to move Thailand towards greater equality and fairer systems of representation. In many ways, the proposals also entail fundamental changes in how the current systems operate. As such, this volume represents so much

of what is wonderful about the state of knowledge and understanding of reality within Thailand. Its authors are clearly well-informed about the operation of the current pattern of inequality and, to be honest, of political oppression. Remarkably, they are also able to express optimism about the potential for change and improvement in Thai society. While it is clear that eventually there will need to be a shift in the philosophy of governance to reflect the conviction that people are actually entitled to the government that they elect and thus truly to solve Thailand's dilemmas, it is reaffirming to read such good scholarship delivered with so much hope for the future.

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Thailand's International Meditation Centers: Tourism and the Global Commodification of Religious Practices. By Brooke Schedneck. London: Routledge, 2015. xii+197 pp.

In an era of globalization and intensified transnational exchanges, the reimagining of Buddhism as it is reconfigured in new social contexts and for new audiences has become an increasingly prominent topic of scholarly interest. And, given modern interpretations of meditation as a universal spiritual technology and of Buddhism as strongly identified with meditative practice, the question of how Buddhist meditation travels across cultural and religious boundaries raises questions concerning the localization of Buddhism in the contemporary world. Not surprisingly, much of the resultant scholarship has focused on cases in which Asian traditions of Buddhist meditation are taught in the West to either non-Buddhists or recent Buddhist converts. Thus, the scholarship of David Preston, Patricia Campbell and Michal Pagis has explored how Western spiritual seekers have taught, learned and embodied various sectarian traditions of Buddhist meditation.