

*Loggers, Monks, Students, and Entrepreneurs: Four Essays on Thailand.* By Bryan Hunsaker, Theodore Mayer, Barbara Griffiths, and Robert Dayley, with an Introduction by Clark Neher. Occasional Paper no. 18, Southeast Asia Publications. DeKalb, Illinois: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, 1996.

*Loggers, Monks, Students, and Entrepreneurs* is a collection of four essays on Thailand, based on secondary sources, and apparently written by graduate students. The essays deal with important contemporary issues and are wide-ranging and informative. Although no new ground is broken, the essays provide interesting insights into some vital issues in Thai politics, economy, and society.

The essay on "Loggers", by Hunsaker, discusses the social and economic influences on deforestation, the government response to date, and the dilemmas facing the government in safeguarding forests. Hunsaker looks beyond the illegal loggers to groups ranging from banks and property developers to migrants in search of land, though his primary focus is on the latter. At one point he writes: "The most sinister culprits ... are the local leaders and commercial interests who compensate migrant farmers to destroy forest lands and subsequently lay claim to these 'degraded' reserves" (p. 22). Unfortunately he does not deal in any detail with the relationships among the commercial interests, the local leaders, and the migrants. That some of the poorest in society seem to have common ground with some of the wealthiest in the destruction of forests, and the way they work together to subvert policy is worthy of more attention. Hunsaker believes that the lack of will in solving the problems of land ownership for migrants frustrates government policy. Yet underlying this problem is the widening gap between rich and poor, and between urban and rural Thais that creates problems for the landless. Ironically, by co-operating with the wealthy illegal loggers to improve their individual situations, landless migrants exacerbate these problems for society as a whole.

The essay on "Monks", by Mayer, explores the new Buddhist movements, and the social milieu that has produced them. At the heart of his essay is an interesting contention: that the respect of people for monks

is based on their detachment from secular matters (p. 45). Mayer believes there is a “line of appropriateness” that must not be crossed. Perhaps this is true, yet there are suggestions in the essay that this “line of appropriateness” has shifted dramatically in recent years, if it exists at all. Mayer quotes Sulak Sivaraksa concerning the Sangha’s Council of Elders: “They live in the past. They devote all their time to form and are out of touch with reality.” He goes on to write: “Others express concern that Buddhism is no longer relevant to people’s needs” (p. 47). The new Buddhist movements, he believes, are “on one level an attempt to make Buddhism relevant in a time of rapid change” (p. 55). Here I think Mayer is quite correct. But then how do we resolve this need for relevance with the contention that respect for monks is based on detachment? This fascinating dilemma could be more carefully addressed in the essay, as it is central to the differences and the struggles between the new sects and the mainstream.

The essay on “Students”, by Griffiths, revisits the student movement of the 1973–76 era. In 1973 the student movement spearheaded the demonstrations which brought down the military government. In 1976, university student demonstrators were massacred at Thammasat University as Thailand returned to military government. Griffiths argues that vocational students were in the vanguard in the assault on university students on 6 October 1976. According to Griffiths, the animosity between university and vocational students developed primarily out of status and class differences, but also out of resentment because the vocational students did not share the same future life prospects as their university counterparts. Although these factors may well have led to resentment, Griffiths has some difficulty demonstrating that in fact it was vocational students in the vanguard of the attack. The attack was led by the Krathing Daeng, or Red Gaur, and although she states that “the determination of the true origin of the Red Gaur is the most difficult problem” (p. 75), she proceeds to equate the Red Gaur with vocational students, sliding from one term to the other as if they were essentially the same. In an influential article, Benedict Anderson (“Withdrawal Symptoms”, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 9, no. 3 (1977) has already argued quite convincingly that vocational students were not

important figures in the Red Gaur movement. Although Anderson has provided only limited evidence, given the importance of his piece and its presence in her bibliography, Griffiths should have addressed Anderson's argument directly. Finally, Griffiths does not distinguish carefully enough between the types of violence perpetrated by the vocational students. Vocational students have, as she mentions, long fought with each other over small things, such as sporting events, or perceived slights. It may be that for many vocational students co-operation with paramilitary groups such as the Red Gaur was aimed primarily at gaining access to better weapons to pursue these private battles, which continued throughout the period until today. Thus while Griffiths' article is thought-provoking, and may be correct, the argument is not quite convincing.

In "Entrepreneurs", Dayley writes of corporatism, formal business associations, and the way Thai politics should be interpreted in light of the expansion of these associations. He builds here on the path-breaking work of Anek Laothamatas, *Business Associations and the New Political Economy of Thailand* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1992), concluding that his article "provides additional evidence" (p. 130) for Anek's liberal corporatism model. Dayley's own particular focus is on the role of provincial associations in decreasing the inequalities between rich and poor, and between Bangkok and the provinces. He concludes that due to their role in promoting provincial development, provincial associations do help to decrease inequality. Unfortunately, Dayley provides statistics on inequality only through 1986, and the provincial chambers of commerce he discusses really began to emerge only in 1984. More recent statistics demonstrate that inequalities continue to grow in Thailand despite the presence of these provincial associations. While it may be that the inequalities would be even worse without the provincial associations, that is a very difficult case to make. Instead, Dayley's work in my mind calls into question the importance of these provincial chambers of commerce in the local economy.

In the earlier work of Anek that Dayley examines, provincial chambers of commerce throughout Thailand were surveyed to examine their

role in the political process. Based on those surveys, Anek concluded that provincial chambers of commerce were a powerful new force in Thai politics. There are two problems with his approach, which can be seen by looking at some other research. At about the same time that Anek conducted his research, I was doing a case-study of provincial politics. My research into the local chamber of commerce proved quite interesting. The staff at the chamber of commerce were very helpful. They described their many projects, their frequent meetings with government officials, and their general importance in the province, just as Anek discovered through his surveys. However, when I went to the provincial governor, and later to some Members of Parliament for the province, I found something very different. The governor told me that the provincial chamber of commerce was not very active and largely irrelevant in local politics. He added that he was irked that the provincial chamber of commerce, despite an invitation, had failed to go to the airport to greet the prime minister on a recent visit. I then revisited the provincial chamber of commerce. The secretary there assured me that they had been at the airport to greet the prime minister, and that they had been right in front with a large sign. However, to the governor, the provincial chamber of commerce was invisible, both literally and figuratively.

I also went to the national chamber of commerce in Bangkok, which was, in some ways, a rival of the provincial chambers since it saw itself as their patron, their superior. There I found a partial answer to this discrepancy in the views of the governor and the provincial chamber of commerce. An official at the national chamber of commerce told me that many provincial chambers of commerce were suffering from two related problems. Firstly, since most were established not voluntarily but as a result of government policy, they were often made up of the friends of the governors who established them. Other entrepreneurs saw no benefit in joining. When the governors who established them were transferred, the chambers lost what little influence they had. Secondly, the provincial chambers of commerce suffered from a lack of funds. Since entrepreneurs saw few benefits in joining, the chambers could not collect enough in dues from members to support activities. Thus the provincial chambers spent much of their time marketing themselves, and

the survey research of the chambers of commerce in Anek's book reveals this marketing.

The second problem with research on local associations is that little has been written on just how they function. One exception is the work of Daniel Arghiros ("Links between Political and Economic Power at the District Level", paper presented to the 5th International Conference on Thai Studies, London, 1993). Arghiros describes a local Brick Manufacturers Association, which is a fascinating combination of formal structure — including uniforms — and informal relations, an association that is part social club, part service organization, and part cartel. Only one small part of the association's activities focuses on business cooperation and lobbying government. This is the type of detailed case-study that is necessary to further our understanding of how civil society works in the provinces. Dayley's article, like Anek's book, is not entirely convincing. Instead it indicates the amount of work still to be done in this area.

Although the Introduction claims that the essays all deal with change and "the continuing strain between tradition and modernity", this theme is not addressed systematically in the essays. Rather, the book seems to be a set of essays with no clear relation to each other. Although good use has been made of secondary sources, the constraints that prevented primary research mean that there is little new here for experts. Yet taken as a whole, these essays provide important insights into various contemporary issues in Thai politics. They also highlight some of the work that remains to be done. If these are some of the future scholars of Thai studies, the future is bright.

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