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*Trams, Buses, and Rails: The History of Urban Transport in Bangkok, 1886–2010.* By Kakizaki Ichiro. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2014. xvi+346 pp.

The leading historian of transportation in modern Thailand, Kakizaki Ichiro sets out in *Trams, Buses, and Rails* to offer a comprehensive history of Bangkok's progress along the trajectory suggested by the title of his book. Stressing the twin themes of "regulation" and "politicization", he makes his central question "why the development of urban transport in Bangkok was so slow" (p. 10). His answer comes by way of an exhaustively researched volume — one marked by dense narrative and studded with innumerable maps and tables, charting, for example, the evolution of bus routes in the city, route by route by route. The book's deployment of data from, among many other sources, newspapers is shrewd and impressive.

Not quite midway through the book's introduction, Kakizaki notes the focus of extant scholarship concerning Bangkok's trams on the period of their initial appearance. Scholars have often treated that development, in the context of others in the reign of Chulalongkorn (1868–1910), as an indication of the city's encounter with modernity. They have failed, however, to stick with the story, to look into the growth of Bangkok's network of tram lines to the time of its greatest extent in the mid-1920s, to note the crucial connection between tramways and the generation of electricity for the city, or to consider the specific reason for their demise in the 1960s. Kakizaki largely attributes that demise to two factors. One was competition from buses. The second was the fact that Bangkok's trams ran on single tracks located on the side of city streets, rather than in designated rights-of-way in the middle of those streets. In the larger story that this book tells, each of these factors looms large.

The period covered by *Trams, Buses, and Rails* means that the history of Bangkok's buses occupies much of that larger story. For decades, buses defined the city and its rhythms for a majority of residents, and Kakizaki delves into chapters in the history of the

city's buses that include initial attempts at "the municipalization of bus operation" (p. 94) in the late 1930s, the influence of private bus operators on decisions affecting the urban transport sector in the second half of the 1950s, the efforts to unify the city's buses under the auspices of a single organization that culminated in the establishment of the Bangkok Mass Transit Authority (BMTA) in October 1976, that authority's long struggle with deficits and with the need to keep fares low, its conceding the operation of significant numbers of its routes to private operators in order to address these twin challenges, and the rise of vans running on fixed routes as alternatives to buses. This history, as told here, is one of endless difficulty. One wishes that Kakizaki acknowledged the reality that a Bangkok largely dependent on buses was for decades a city whose inhabitants made it work. Nonetheless, he does manage to invoke "a golden age" (p. 227) for BMTA buses in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The reduction and ultimate elimination of deficits, the diversification of bus services, and the expansion of routes — "particularly remarkable toward the east and north" (*ibid.*) — defined this age. It also saw BMTA bus ridership reach its peak level, in 1992.

As regards the second reason for the demise of Bangkok's trams, rooted in a failure to innovate and a lack of official vision, a broad argument of *Trams, Buses, and Rails* is that the long period in which buses represented the primary mode of mass transit in Bangkok was unnecessary, unfortunate and symptomatic of the putatively "slow" development of urban transport in the city. Kakizaki notes that planning for the introduction of mass rapid transit dated to 1967, and that in the early 1970s three years of work assisted by German experts culminated in a plan for mass rapid transit lines connecting Phrakhanong to Bang Sue, Wongwian Yai to Lat Phrao, and Wongwian Yai to Khlong Tan — all three to be completed by 1980. The plan also called for the extension of this system to reach Don Mueang, Bang Kapi, Samrong, Ratburana and Bang Khae a decade later. He decries "the thirty-year period that it took to realize urban railways following the emergence of the plans" (pp. 334–35). In the event, when the elevated trains of the BTS —

officially, the Bangkok Mass Transit System — first ran in 1999, they carried passengers on much more limited routes than those proposed for completion fully nineteen years later. The sequence of fits and starts that culminated in the opening of the BTS and, half a decade later, of the city's first subway line was confusing to follow at the time. Kakizaki does not in his thorough coverage of these sagas entirely penetrate that confusion to advance a clear and coherent story. One wishes, too, that he devoted more attention to matters of finance as they have related to the development of mass rapid transit in Bangkok.

The book's treatment of the difficulties that long plagued the BMTA and of the convoluted story of mass rapid transit — the "rails" of its title — prefigures its answer to the question of why the development of urban transport in Bangkok has proved so "slow". *Trams, Buses, and Rails* finds that answer in the interplay of its themes of "regulation" and "politicization". Kakizaki conceptualizes the former with reference to a "public transport cycle" (p. 341), marked by a transition from competitive private-sector origins through inadequate government control and back to private management. He ascribes the latter, politicization, to the "scramble of interests involved in urban transport" (p. 358) and to the frequent adoption of "populist" transport policies (pp. 200, 276, 350, 358). But his book's hugely detailed episodic narrative eschews systematic treatment both of the regulatory climate that has affected urban transport in Thailand and of political forces and economic interests in Bangkok. A different balance between the book's data on the one hand and its interpretive thrust and analytical framework on the other might perhaps have made for a more effective contribution to Thai historiography and policy studies. Nevertheless, readers — not least those of us old enough to remember the Bangkok that moved on buses — will turn to this book with profit.

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