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The Rise of the Octobrists in Contemporary Thailand. By Kanokrat Lertchoosakul. New Haven: Yale Southeast Asia Studies, 2016. xx+364 pp.

Many scholars and students of Thailand are likely to have experienced a certain frustration regarding the views of the country's politics championed habitually by much of the "general public" in Western countries, and probably in places like China and Japan as well. Thailand boasts millions and millions of tourists, from all over the world. Yet most of these tourists seem to enter and leave the country without seeing a whole series of timeless and hackneyed clichés that they carry with them disturbed — Thailand as the "land of smiles", for example. While it is only one of a number of works that could challenge such inanities, Kanokrat Lertchoosakul's new book on Thailand's Octobrists — former student activists from the 1970s — provides an excellent corrective to any such stale caricatures. Drawing out a rich, peopled account of how the former activists both formed their Octobrist identities and experienced splits among the members of their group as they engaged in their long marches through (and into) the institutions, Professor Kanokrat's book provides a useful analysis of recent political history and a basis for understanding the Red Shirt–Yellow Shirt divide that has animated political conflict in Thailand over the course of the last decade.

The Rise of the Octobrists is decidedly an academic work, indeed a revised doctoral dissertation, and is not likely to be read by most of those visitors to and observers of Thailand whose cliché views most need to be challenged. But it nonetheless provides a valuable resource for those of us who would like to do some of the challenging. Kanokrat has based her work on both detailed archival research and a large number of interviews with former student activists, many of whom have more recently been Red Shirt, Yellow Shirt or no-colour activists. She uses this material to address the historical evolution of the political conflicts that engulf the country in the present. In part because she is herself a child of

former student activists, as she notes early in the book, she begins her account with the university students of the 1960s and 1970s as they became first more liberal in their outlooks and then radicalized as activists at the time of the 14 October 1973 and 6 October 1976 incidents. She follows these people as they reconstructed their lives on re-entering mainstream vocations after the collapse of the Thai Communist Party in the early 1980s and analyses how in the 1990s they produced an understanding of themselves as champions of struggle for progressive social change through their attempts to memorialize their 1970s activities. Finally, she details some of the ways that the former activists split into different factions during the political struggles surrounding the Thaksin Shinawatra regime and its forced removal by the military in 2006.

Professor Kanokrat's account is thick with detail about the lives and views of many specific — and often well-known — former student activists, and it weaves the stories of their activities into a thought-provoking and useful analysis, one that helps shed some light on the current, quite sorry, state of political affairs in the country. Conceptually, the analysis is animated by the author's conviction that a combination of ideas from social movement theory — particularly analyses of political opportunity structures, forms of resource mobilization and discursive framing processes — can help elucidate the ways that the Octobrists' identities and recent activities emerged. This approach provides a particularly useful window on to the issue that provides the title of the book, the ways that the former activists began to frame themselves as Octobrists and heroes of long-standing struggles for democracy and justice, rather than as victims who simply "lost" in their attempts as students to transform Thai society.

The limitations of these same conceptual tools are also on display. For example, none of these tools provides the basis for any particularly compelling analysis of the changing forms of Thai capital — whether the structures of capitalism or the labour process — or of the Thai state. Further, while Professor Kanokrat fills in some of the relevant details here and there, the book to a

great extent pulls up short in its presentation of the kinds of power relations that have underpinned the actions of Thai capitalists, the Thai military and/or the Thai monarchy. Obviously, the last of these is a taboo topic in Thailand, and the author cannot be faulted for not addressing it, but silence here performs its usual role of implicitly distorting claims about why things happen the ways that they do. These gaps result in some limitation both in the analysis of the Red Shirt–Yellow Shirt conflict and in the comparative national claims about student activists that the book’s conclusion presents. The book is nonetheless well worth the read and will no doubt help wipe dull smiles off a few faces.

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Thailand’s Theory of Monarchy: The Vessantara Jātaka and the Idea of the Perfect Man. By Patrick Jory. Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2016. xviii+284 pp.

Patrick Jory argues that to understand why the monarchy exercises enormous influence in virtually every aspect of life in Thailand we need to explore the religious sources of Thai conceptions of kingship. The theory of royal rule that Jory details in this lucidly presented study is that of the *bodhisatta* king, a monarch who is a “Buddha-to-be” aiming to attain ten royal “perfections” or *barami*, virtues that Buddhism teaches are the foundations of enlightenment and Buddhahood. In Theravada Buddhism a *bodhisatta* is one who vows to achieve enlightenment in a future incarnation through the accumulation of ten *barami*, virtues such as patience, perseverance and giving alms to the needy. While originally a quality of spiritually and morally superior beings, in Thai political discourse *barami* — from the Pali *pāramī* or “perfection (of virtue)” — evolved into a notion of religiously based charismatic authority and legitimate rule.