

Ipoh cave temples and other religious sites in other parts of Malaysia and beyond. How do the cave temples, for example, interact and collaborate with each other and with temples in various parts of Malaysia? How do Buddhist and Taoist cave temples maintain their ties with their ancestral monasteries (*zuting* 祖庭) in China? How do Muslims perceive these cave temples in Muslim-majority Malaysia? It is important to note that cave temples do not exist in isolation but are situated within, and therefore influenced by, the course of socio-political change in colonial and post-colonial Malaysia.

Furthermore, this volume could be stronger with better chapter organization and editing. For instance, the introduction, chapter 1, and chapter 2 could be merged into a single chapter. In addition, the English translations contain numerous typographical errors, punctuation mistakes, and grammatical inconsistencies. For example, “glossary” is misspelled as “glossory” (List of chapter[sic]); “*yinglian* 楹聯” (couplets on the pillars) is mistranslated as “autograph of Tao couplets” (p. 64), and “*sanjiao dian* 三教殿” (hall of three religions) is mistyped as “hall of three regions” (p. 259). Lastly, the book does not have a bibliography, so readers are forced to search through the many footnotes to learn more about the sources cited.

Despite these minor quibbles, this volume is an informative and well-researched contribution to the study of Chinese religions and Malaysian history. It is hoped that it will inspire further research on the temple caves in Perak and in Malaysia in general.

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A Meeting of Masks: Status, Power and Hierarchy in Bangkok. By Sophorntavy Vorng. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2017. xii+194 pp.

In 1977, Benedict Anderson first focused attention on the then new Thai middle class, arguing that the success of the 1973 uprising

against military rule in Bangkok had depended on its support. By the time of the massacre of students at Thammasat University in 1976, however, the same now anxious middle class, fearing economic decline and the loss of its status, provided tacit support to a successful rightist coup. Since that time, much has been written of the politics of the Thai middle class, but little of its attitudes, its anxieties and its aspirations. In this book, Sophorntavy Vorng helps to fill that gap.

A Meeting of Masks begins with the challenging task of defining the Bangkok middle class. Its author considers educational prestige the most important factor defining that middle class. Yet she notes that a wide variety of secondary factors, such as occupation, individual income or family income, may also contribute to middle-class status. Sophorntavy therefore opts for “a non-linear model incorporating multiple variables of class and status” (p. 29). While this approach makes for a complex definition with untidy boundaries, it fits well with the older status hierarchies in Thailand, which drew distinctions between individuals on the basis of an even wider set of factors. It may thus better represent the reality than more straightforward definitions taken from social science literature. In a work of ethnography, it proves effective.

Sophorntavy pursues the link between older status hierarchies and middle-class attitudes, employing the concepts of *kalathesa* (time and place), *khaorop sathanthi* (respect for place) and *ru thisung thitam* (knowing high and low) to link the etiquette of the middle class to the court culture of the past. She argues that using these terms, which frequently came up in her discussions with middle-class informants, best allows an analysis both of the interaction of local and global frameworks of space and of the way in which new status hierarchies overlay older hierarchies. For Sophorntavy the Thai middle class is thus embedded in both global and local status hierarchies, which largely shape its members’ thinking and behaviour. She places particular emphasis on the role of local culture, including the use of personal pronouns, levels of speech, the *wai* and other status markers in Thai society.

Like Anderson, Sophorntavy attaches importance to the recent origins of much of the Thai middle class; for both scholars, that

newness leads to anxieties. However, whereas Anderson investigated the political consequences of middle-class anxieties, Sophorntavy is more concerned with the social consequences. The middle class's social anxieties, she argues, are rooted in uncertainties regarding the expected behaviour of its members, and they are often compounded for those new to urban lifestyles. Knowing how to dress, where to shop, what to eat and how to comport oneself in such a way as to gain acceptance as a member of the middle class can be quite complex. Since status hierarchies are linked to Thai Buddhist culture, appropriate behaviour also includes a moral component. To address the resultant anxieties, an entire genre of "how to" books on proper middle-class behaviour has emerged. And yet, we might note, the most common model for behaviour is other members of the middle class. Perhaps, ironically, independent thinking is therefore discouraged in the class whose members we might otherwise expect to defend social and political freedoms. Here, again, Anderson and Sophorntavy appear to share common ground, in that the ultimate anxiety, concerning loss of their newfound middle-class status, leads members of the Bangkok middle class to defend status hierarchies jealously.

Sophorntavy also outlines the competitiveness inherent in the strong focus on social hierarchies and in the economic competition in a neo-liberal climate that sees members of the middle class competing with one another in hopes of achieving "hi-so" (high society) status. Members of the middle class see nothing immoral in employing connections to circumvent legal obstacles to advancing their interests. Although we might also deem this mentality ironic, in light of middle-class frustration with politicians or rural voters who do the same, it should not be surprising that self-awareness and status-oriented behaviours are often at odds.

In closely examining the attitudes, behaviour and thinking of the Bangkok middle class, especially in regard to status hierarchies both local and global, Sophorntavy's work will be of interest to social scientists across a wide range of disciplines. Indeed, we might wish that she herself had considered the implications of her work more broadly. The book's conclusion is quite brief, and serves more

as a summary of previous chapters than as an effort to tease out the implications of those chapters' findings. The powerful role of the rapidly growing middle class in shaping Thai society has thus far received insufficient study, and Sophorntavay's book marks an important contribution to our efforts to understand it.

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Heritage and Identity in Contemporary Thailand: Memory, Place and Power. By Ross King. Singapore: NUS Press, 2017. xiii+319 pp.

Heritage and Identity in Contemporary Thailand is a hard book to review, chiefly because of the difficulty in categorizing it. It is not really a monograph, in spite of Ross King's being credited as the sole author. All of the chapters are in fact based on dissertations and writings by Thai scholars who are acknowledged accordingly at the beginning of each chapter. The chapters not only utilize content provided by selected Thai scholars but also offer their perspectives. It is precisely this collaboration that means that the volume is not simply another outside gaze at Thailand through a Western lens. At the same time, the manuscript is not an edited collection, since it represents a single narrative — that of King. He admits at times going beyond the task of editing the contributions to the book to the point of rewriting some parts. Accordingly, King acutely displays his own awareness of the impossibility of categorizing the book.