

Understanding ecologies in their entirety means taking everything into account, not only living species but also non-living things such as soil, water and air. Writing a history of ecologies as such might be a task beyond the capacity of an individual researcher. However, it might be done if interdisciplinary dialogue emerges in the field of, say, area studies, and incorporating environmental humanities. For Myanmar studies and beyond, *Colonizing Animals* paves the way for that dialogue to begin.

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*Constitutional Bricolage: Thailand's Sacred Monarchy vs. The Rule of Law.* By Eugénie Mérieau. London: Bloomsbury, 2021. xi+326 pp.

*Constitutional Bricolage* is a book of graceful sophistication in structure and of inspiring academic passion in substance. As the author intends, the book successfully provides an accurate and detailed account of the Thai constitutional monarchy from before the revolution in 1932 to the current period after the promulgation of the 2017 constitution. With the depth of historical facts and attention to primary sources, the book is the most comprehensive study of Thai constitutional history in both Thai and English to date.

Mérieau situates her book within the field of comparative constitutional law, filling the gap in three main perplexing areas often overlooked or oversimplified: constitutional monarchies, secularization and the rule of law, and methods of constitutional borrowing. However, while Thailand is known as an exemplary case of problematic constitutional borrowing and abuse, the book does not provide any solution to Thailand's constitutional ills, nor does it seek to do so. Indeed, the book is mainly driven by descriptive, doctrinal and historical approaches, refraining from judging and criticizing problematic constitutional theories and practice through

“orientalising” discourses perpetuated in Thailand (p. 26). Still, those seeking practical answers about the proper role of the monarchy and constitutionalism in supporting democratic governance may benefit from the book’s “thick description” that yields insights unavailable from any other normative handbook.

The book’s only normative goal is to offer a new epistemological mode of comparative constitutional inquiry. It challenges the assumption in comparative constitutional law that constitutional design is feasible as a deliberate and controllable exercise. Through the use of “bricolage” as a metaphor for “[t]he process of assembling borrowed legal mechanisms and doctrines from various origins and traditions” (p. 250), constitutional law constantly encounters accidents and improvisations. The only conscious act of design is by jurists who creatively craft legal doctrines to reconcile with the randomness found in the past. Thus, Méricau takes local constitutional thought as legitimate and intelligent legal subjects. Each part of the book comprises three chapters corresponding to the texts, doctrines and practices of each constitutional era in Thailand. These chapters complement each other as they trace, for example, how even the text of an authoritarian constitution matters in practice as enhanced by constitutional doctrines created after the fact.

Substantively, the book takes on the herculean task of analysing and normalizing the “peculiar” case of the Thai monarchy as conceptualized under the terms “democratic system with the king as head of state” (“DKHS”). As Méricau points out, there is a need to create another category of monarchies: neither the British constitutional monarchy nor absolute monarchy. However, this in-between is still undertheorized by the end of the book as a new category for comparative purposes. Instead, because the book takes great care to respect the convoluted theories offered by various influential royalist jurists to consolidate royal prerogatives, the case of Thailand inevitably seems too unique among the well-known monarchies of today to be a new overarching model.

The contribution to the connection between Buddhist kingship and the constitution is the weakest compared to the other two

subjects covered in the book: constitutional monarchy and the state of emergency. But it is likely that the ambiguous and confusing nature of the concepts themselves is the true culprit. So far, attempts to explicate Buddhist legal concepts and movements in Thailand are still at an early stage. The crucial link that could explain how DKHS (as a doctrine that empowers the monarch) is supported by the Buddhist concept of *dharma*, which supposedly acts as natural law to limit the monarch's power, is not obvious. Understandably, the issues of Buddhism and constitutional law have just started to be disentangled by recent scholarship. Apart from a cynical view that jurists and powerholders can pay lip service to Buddhism to gain legitimacy, the exact interdependent relationship between Buddhism and the constitution is still elusive.

The strongest point of the book is its empirically accurate intellectual mappings of the Thai legal elites. The accuracy has been prophetic in recent court cases in Thailand, where DKHS as part of Thai constitutional identity has become more prevalent even in lower courts. While an admirable feat, the expounding of the deeds of the "illiberal" and "abusive" constitutional interpreters will be judged harshly, like the emerging works on authoritarian constitutionalism. Indirectly, the bricolage glorified in the book may justify subsequent injustice and human misery. However, such precise and neutral scholarship contained in *Constitutional Bricolage* will only justify whatever the reader's normative position dictates. Those who agree with the "bricolage" operative in Thailand will treat it as a work handbook, and those who disagree will set it up for further deconstruction.

Finally, it is worth noting that the voices of those who oppose the royalist and military versions of Thai constitutional law do not feature prominently throughout the book. Instead, the main narrative focuses on those who practically shape the foundations for DKHS as Thailand's constitutional identity. Curiously, then, is constitutional bricolage only a perfect tool for those with real power who can better communicate their legal thoughts to both elites and the general population? The strength of this book indeed warrants further critical

and normative discussions for Thai scholars and lawyers, who will benefit greatly from a translated version of this important book on their constitutions.

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