

about democracy being the only antidote to this particular ailment. The essays here explore the variety and dynamism of specific responses to repressive acts and institutions. They demonstrate that too much attention to the politicians, soldiers and bureaucrats would weaken our ability to recognize the turbulent emotions that state actors are stirring up among a wide variety of people not accustomed to the uses of power. By recording what some such people are trying to do, the authors here alert us to the possibilities ahead. To keep such records from wandering aimlessly in all directions is far from easy. The editors are to be commended for keeping their colleagues focused on the central theme. Their firm hands have ensured that the six essays on an elusive subject have told their stories equally well.

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***Reforming Thai Politics*. Edited by Duncan McCargo.** Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS), 2002. Softcover: 291pp.

This is yet another useful book about the post-1997 reform politics in Thailand, a theme that has recently attracted enormous attention among Thai political observers, both in Thailand and abroad. Six years of civil society's struggle to reform Thai politics aiming to establish among other things, better checks and balances in the governance of Thailand culminated in the promulgation of the "People's Constitution" in 1997. Yet the new Constitution — the 16th since the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932 — should not be taken as an end-point, but rather as another step in a long road of political development in Thailand.

It is in this context that *Reforming Thai Politics* is worthwhile reading. Duncan McCargo, one of the most prolific Western (*farang*) scholars on Thailand in recent years, should be congratulated for turning into an edited volume the papers presented at the 7th International Conference on Thai Studies, held in Amsterdam in July 1999. By and large, the volume covers sufficiently key aspects of the reform.

The book is divided into three main parts: Part I on the Meanings of Political Reform, discusses the background of the reform. Prawes Wasi, who was one of the key persons — or in fact, one might say, the one who "started it all" — in initiating the reform succinctly recaps the events leading to the reform movement. Although, readers may

have heard it before through the media, Prawes's article here is probably the first first-hand account from him written in English. Prawes, a medical doctor and professor of medicine and who is now one of Thailand's most respected public intellectuals, traces the reform process back to the 1991 military coup against the democratically elected government of Chatichai Choonhavan and the subsequent May 1992 public uprising against the military. Of great interest in Prawes's chapter is the way he and other reformists, comprising key persons from various organizations and professions, were able to turn a rather elite-urban, academic, legalistic and highly technical matter of political reform into a common political language, thus resulting in a formidable countrywide political movement. In the end, the movement, empowered by their strong desire to change the political system and practices in Thailand, originated the 1997 Constitution. One must say, this is the work of a political genius.

Other chapters in this section highlight issues pertinent to the political reform. They include detailed discussions by Michael Connors about the processes and hurdles associated with the drafting and promulgation of the 1997 Constitution; the notion of "good governance" by Thirayuth Boonmi, a former student leader during the 1973 student uprising and a well-regarded public intellectual; and the stabilizing role of the Thai monarchy in an unstable democracy by Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian. Two other chapters in this section on human rights and democratization and social welfare help caution the reader how precarious or shallow Thai democracy remains when people still do not understand the importance of basic human rights and social welfare.

The most interesting part of the book is Part II on the Popular Sector. There are five very interesting papers in this section dealing with the rise and the role of civil society in the political reforms. Two of the chapters are written by promising young Thai academics, Somchai Phatharathananunth and Naruemon Thabchumpon, and one by a prominent Australia scholar on Thailand, Kevin Hewison. Somchai, a democratic theorist, gives an extensive critical review of the nature of elite democracy in Thailand, and Naruemon, an authority on Thai NGOs, provides many useful insights into the civil society organizations in the country.

Naruemon's categorization of Thai NGOs into three types with different emphasis in their political participation — cooperation-oriented, grassroots mobilization, and societal self-reliance — is very insightful and will benefit academics who work not only on Thailand, but also on politics in developing countries in general.

The inclusion in this section of a chapter on the role of women in political reform is praiseworthy. Philippe Doneys details how women participate in Thai political life, which has otherwise been dominated and portrayed as a male-only affair. Significantly, women's organizations established the Women and Constitution Network which played a big role in the establishment of the new Constitution. This chapter gives voice to Thai women and their place in the whole political reform process during 1997.

Part III on Electoral Reform is an important one. At the end of the day, elections are one of the most visible manifestations of the reform process, for they are responsible for putting governments in place not only at the national but also the local level. The chapters in this part of the book outline promises and continuing problems of the new electoral system in nurturing a new electoral politics and practice, including provisions aiming to eliminate vote-buying and preventing other forms of fraud and manipulation.

The book would have contributed more to the understanding of the reform process had it contained chapters on the role of capital (domestic or international) and bureaucracy (including the military) which itself has been undergoing decay or "identity crisis" in recent years. Research on Thailand still lacks a strong focus on the changing role of capital which has played a crucial part in the political changes in Thailand, particularly since the 1991 coup which set a momentum for the political reforms discussed in this edited volume.

Lastly, I must note my delight in seeing two young Thai academics — Somchai Phatharathananunth and Naruemon Thabchumpon — being in the forefront of Thai studies in English at the moment. In general, Thai political studies available in English continue to be dominated by English-speaking Westerners. Only a handful of young Thai academics have taken up this responsibility of engaging themselves with Western scholars. Thongchai Winichakul of the University of Wisconsin is probably the most prominent one doing this at the moment. But there need to be more native Thai scholars engaging in the debates with their Western counterparts. Western-trained Thai scholars tend to get drawn into political activism when they return to Thailand, and often see very little need to contribute to a theoretical debate on Thai political studies at the international level. Indeed, one might say that the most obvious reason is that Thai academics are generally handicapped by their lack of proficiency in English. But the lack of will and desire to be more cosmopolitan in their outlook might be even more fundamental. In this book, out of sixteen chapters, only five chapters (not counting Prawes' and Thirayuth's) are written by Thai academics. Prawes is more of a

public intellectual, not a researcher per se, and Thirayuth's is a translation of a piece he published in a Thai weekly. Obviously, the Thai contributions need to be increased.

Overall, however, this is a timely book on the "new" Thai politics which certainly contributes a great deal to a better understanding of the political changes in Thailand, which incidentally seem to be occurring at a rather rapid pace under the new government of Thaksin Shinawatra.

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Whither Free Trade Agreements? Proliferation, Evaluation and Multilateralism. Edited by Jiro Okamoto. Chiba, Japan: Institute of Developing Economies (IDE), JETRO, 2003. 414pp.

Free trade agreements (FTAs) are too important to be left to the analyses of economists. This superb book is about the hows and whys of FTAs pursued by countries in the Americas and Asia, where the web of FTAs and regional free trade agreements (RTAs) can eventually lead to a single world free market system. The United States, "irritated" by the paralysis of the negotiations for multilateral trade liberalization by GATT/WTO, is said to have switched gear to a series of bilateral FTAs in the Americas as well as distant Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. A staunch promoter of multilateralism, Japan swiftly abandoned its established policy and followed suit. Singapore and Thailand, two of the most ardent supporters of regional free trade of ASEAN, also opted for a series of FTAs. However, Malaysia has stood firm in favour of ASEAN regionalism.

Neorealism turns trade into national or neomercantilist agendas, while the structures and benefits accruing from FTAs and RTAs are decidedly neoliberal. The first three chapters are fine renditions of the free trade theories from the Smith-Ricardian classical perspectives to the more refined Ohlin-Heckscher theorem on trade and international political economy models of FTAs. The reader learns about the fine distinctions among preferential trade agreement, FTA, RTA, customs union, common market and economic integration. The three waves of FTA movements are well explained: the European initiatives of the 1950s; the refined commitment of economic integration of Europe and