

same framework of national humiliation to fruitfully examine the conflict over Preah Vihear more than a decade later. So there is much that is new for students of Thai history to discover in this book.

Just as importantly, the author clarifies and deepens our understanding of Thai historiography, shedding some light on a lot of events and dynamics that don't make a lot of sense within what he calls the 'Royal-Nationalist' narrative. The author provides a much-needed corrective, showing how Siam did more than merely survive, but in fact became a competitor in the imperialist game. He makes the case that the elite employed 'ethnic chauvinism, political witch hunts, or religious persecutions' — all still alive and present in today's Thailand (p. 2).

Strate's work brings up a lot of questions. For instance, Strate suggests that the Bangkok elite were carrying out their own 'neo-imperialism' project which they 'disguised as a movement to liberate people and redeem the country's honor' (p. 13). The ideological tool they used was ethnic or racial categories. Thai irredentists stripped away what they considered mistaken ethnic identities (Lao, Khmer, Kha, etc.) and made them racially Thai and legally Thai citizens. So one wonders what the Thai state officials were doing on the ground in these four provinces as part of their neo-imperialist project, and how that contrasted with what they had been doing, say, in the Northeast for half a century.

Throughout the book, the author indicates that there was massive support for the country's irredentist agenda by citing newspaper editorials, polls, and letters while warning the reader not to take these sources at face value. Gauging public opinion, he reflects in the final chapter, 'is a very difficult task' (p. 193). He then says flatly: 'Thailand lacks a space for public opinion. The state manufactures images that serve to legitimise its power and also creates channels for communicating them ... there are no ideological spaces wherein images created by the state can be challenged or evaluated.' As such, the public outpourings he describes throughout the book are actually 'performances of sorts' — an apt description of the current military government's ongoing disastrous performance. One begins to wonder whether anything purporting to be 'public' in Thailand is real or whether it is merely one manufactured performance after another.

Shane Strate's book reveals for us a central mainstay of Thai state ideology for more than a century — the discourse of National Humiliation — that continues to stymie efforts to make any progress toward a better Thailand.

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Communities of potential: Social assemblages in Thailand and beyond

Edited by SHIGEHARU TANABE

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Shigeharu Tanabe's edited volume aims to reveal prominent features of contemporary community movements in Southeast Asia, especially in Thailand and

Cambodia, and to illuminate the potential imagination and practice of the individual and the community.

In his introduction, the editor criticises the classic theories of communities for assuming that collectivity and homogeneity shape the core identity of its members. Since the early 2000s, the Internet and social media have spread widely and heterogeneous forces have become involved in global and local changes, social conditions have been largely changed, and harmonious views about communities have become difficult to apply. Individuals and communities formed on the bases of autonomy or/and social movements are becoming more flexible and open to the outside. Tanabe introduces the concept of 'assemblage' to the ethnographic analysis of social movements in this new context of fluidity, uncertainty, and commodification.

As some of this book's contributors mention, 'assemblage' was first posited by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A thousand plateaus* (1987), and often referred to by scholars such as Manuel DeLanda, Arturo Escobar and Michael Oosterweil. 'Assemblage' can be distinguished from theories that rely on totality (such as a system or structure), essence (such as ethnicity or culture), or the whole (such as the nation-state or global capitalism). Viewed through this framework, communities are seen as a configuration of heterogeneous forces, individuals and groups where the constituent parts have significant roles and retain a certain autonomy. Since relational aspects are considered central to *Communities of potential*, this key theory elucidates how diverse individuals actualise their potential and how community movements are constructed through actions and practices. Without relying on reality, structure or culture, the heterogeneity and communality in these movements can be described through 'assemblage'.

This volume consists of eleven chapters divided into three parts: I) Assemblages in community movements, II) *Communitas* and reflexivity, and III) Experience and alliance. Part I clarifies major characteristics of community movements in which multiple individuals form assemblages to pursue common goals through different approaches. The chapters explore religious movements and folk medicine movements in Northern Thailand and NGO movements in Cambodia. Chapter 2 by Kwanchewan Buadaeng analyses the construction of a pagoda by a charismatic Karen monk, Phue Khaw Taw, on Tamo mountain in Chiang Mai Province. The area's Karen were followers and believers of earlier charismatic monks' prophecy that 'the mountain owner will come to build a pagoda on its top'. Therefore, when the pagoda was announced, the prophecy's followers became excited and helped with its construction. Kwanchewan interprets these events not as the continuation of a traditional religious movement, but as an assemblage of different agencies involved in building the pagoda. Phue Khaw Taw and his diverse followers from Karen State, Myanmar and Thailand, who included other monks, donors, and even local Thai officials, did not form a unified whole, but their interaction increased each other's capacities. Even within one agency, there were differences in ideas and practices. However, Kwanchewan indicates that the instability and multiplicity in the assemblage enabled adaptation to changing socioeconomic circumstances and the actualisation of their religious movement.

Part II investigates marginal community movements that lead to the construction of alternative communities, as exemplified by case studies of marginal Muslim communities, novel spirit cults, Buddhist educational movements, and local museum

movements in Thailand. Kyonosuke Hirai (chap. 8) examines community museums in Thailand, which are operated by local communities and exhibit aspects of local history and lifestyles. Hirai explains their proliferation in the past twenty years in Thailand as representing a response to broad changes arising from: changing indigenous traditions; state-led cultural policy since the late 1990s; the declining integration of rural communities; and the active shaping of these museums by Buddhist monks and tradition. Villagers use the community museums differently according to class, gender, age, and personal experience, creating diverse points of view about their culture and history through interactions with various agents such as museum workers, local officers, NGO workers, and the mass media. Thus, local museums can be seen as assemblages that change people's perceptions about their own communities and transform them through interactions with diverse agents.

Part III focuses on personal experiences constructing embodied subjectivity in the cases of the Buddhist women's movement, a Buddhist monk network for community development, and detoxification training programmes. Chapter 10 by Mayumi Okabe deals with the 'development monks' in Northern Thailand who engage in community development activities. She analyses the network of development monks, which consists of monks of widely varying ethnicity, age, and experience. Examining the individual life histories of several monks and the movement's organisational features, Okabe views the network as neither a static nor a homogeneous community, but as a dynamic and contingent assemblage within an ongoing process of sociopolitical change. She indicates that the network should be understood in relation to other forces, such as NGOs, government policies, development projects, ethnicity, and the farmers' protest movement of the late 1990s. In other words, this network's assemblage is shaped by individual monks' varied, fragmented lives and views as well as multiple external forces. Okabe concludes that the network does not represent any existing group, but rather a new way of constructing the social world for monks in contemporary Thailand.

This volume seeks to overturn the classic premise about society as a holistic entity consisting of individuals and aims to introduce 'assemblage' to ethnographic studies of the region. Assemblage theory enables us to view contemporary social phenomenon as a dynamic configuration of heterogeneous and multiple agents. This theoretical standpoint shares the same direction as the 'ontological turn' used by anthropologists to go beyond the traditional dualism of human/nature, subject/object, or society/materiality. Given that contemporary social movements often consist of various actors, and change their form in an unstable manner, this book presents good examples that allow understanding of social movements not through the lens of idealism or realism, but as ongoing relational process in which people pursue change and increase the potential of their own lives.

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