Traders of jade, traders of rice: the anguish of the DAB

Gehan Wijeyewardene

It is said that the incompatibility between the Kachin and the Karen is that between those who trade in jade and those who trade in rice. The former, like sculptors, look at the crude stone, see the precious form within and intuitively arrive at a price. The latter must measure every bit, even to the last grain. This is not to suggest that the strategy of one is better than that of the other - it is merely to draw attention to the difficulty of maintaining common direction in the tumultuous divisions of modern Burma.

The last few months have seen the Kachin agreement with SLORC; talks between the Karen and SLORC; the Thai government strengthening ties with SLORC, with important economic and industrial agreements in view, and its interference with NGO aid to the DAB and the restrictions placed on the movement of opponents of SLORC in Thailand; the arrest and then ouster of some members of the All Burma Students Democratic Front from Manerplaw; the visit of a US Congressman to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. This period has also seen the declaration of independence by Mšng Tai, the immediate attack on Khun Sa by SLORC forces and the alleged payment of a large bribe to SLORC defence forces for the lifting of the siege. Every one of these 'incidents' needs clear-headed investigation and will certainly get it when the historians are in a position to take over. However objective we may try to be, in this milieu of political conflict, we cannot help but take sides. Therein lies the 'anguish'.

It seems very likely that the period of the Manerplaw alliance is over. The Kachin withdrawal and the expulsion of students perhaps mark the end of the phase, despite the fact that Karen information, particularly through the Karen Human Rights Group, suggests that SLORC military onslaught on the Karen people continues. Recent indications are that the Karen continue their opposition to an agreement, adhering to the principled argument that a truce with SLORC must include a nationwide ceasefire and that talks must be held on neutral territory. Here too, it seems the Thai have now adopted the line that Bangkok will not be available unless SLORC asks for it. This is of course not unreasonable
as SLORC must agree if talks are to take place. Nevertheless the Thai appear to want to convey the message that SLORC's will must prevail. Of course, 'Thai' is short hand and perhaps should be read as 'some Thai military-industrial interests'. (See following article.) The parliamentary and other political pressures being exerted on the Chuan Leekpai government does not help the democratic cause in Burma.

A report in The Canberra Times (23 March) suggests that the military interests in Thailand are ready to push their views on to Thai allies such as Australia. Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri is reported as saying that the Australian media lagged behind Australian political leaders in terms of understanding Asian cultures and the complexities at work in Asia. He is directly quoted as saying 'Burma will finish its new constitution in six to eight months and there will be a new election'. He said that Burma's new constitution would be like Indonesia's and would enshrine the right of the military to be involved in politics. 'You accept and recognize Indonesia, why can't you accept Burma?'!

Is the Foreign Minister of Thailand yearning for the old days of the National Peace Keeping Council and control of the press in his own country?

A few weeks earlier the Burmese Ambassador in Australia also, quite legitimately, attempted to influence Australian views at the highest level. In November last year the Australian Senate passed a resolution moved by Senator Margaret Reid condemning the political and human rights record of SLORC. The Burmese Ambassador replied with a letter which Senator Reid referred to as 'somewhat rewriting history'. It is worthwhile looking at some of the claims made by the Ambassador.

Firstly it was alleged in the resolution in question that there was a lack of progress towards democracy and in the field of human rights in Myanmar. This allegation clearly cannot hold water at all since it can be easily seen from what have been taking place over the past few years in Myanmar that considerable progress has been achieved in various areas, including democracy and human rights. To cite a few examples in this regard, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) Government which has temporarily taken over the responsibilities and duties of State in order that a repeat of the chaos of the 1988 disturbances will not occur, has successfully held a free and fair general election in 1990. It is currently overseeing the holding of National Convention attended by the delegates of all strata of society, including the representatives elected in the 1990 general election and which will draw up a Constitution for future multi-party democracy as well as a market-oriented economy in Myanmar, the SLORC Government has been conducting talks with underground armed groups to secure peace, it is also planning and implementing projects for achievement of progress of national races and border areas, it is combating the menace of narcotic drugs on national, sub-regional and international levels. Moreover, it should be mentioned here that hundreds of persons who no longer pose a threat to the security of the State have also been released. Incidentally, the Government has been compelled to take legal action against some persons, including a few delegates to the National Convention, not because of their political beliefs but because of their actions which, if left unchecked, would derail the constitutional process. Furthermore, the Government had agreed to and received the visits of responsible high-ranking UN human rights officials to my country.

As to the general election held in 1990, I would like to inform you that the authorities of the Union of Myanmar have stated time and again that the objective of the election was the drafting of a new Constitution based on the broad principle of national consensus and not for the formation of a government by the elected representatives. Thus, the question of the SLORC Government not respecting the wishes of the people of Myanmar, as mentioned in the resolution does not arise at all. The Government has reiterated several times that it will transfer power to a firm government established in accordance with a sound constitution which is yet to emerge.

Finally, contrary to what has been stated in the relevant Senate resolution about the role of Tatmadaw (the Myanmar Defence Services) in the political life of Myanmar, it has been agreed at the very outset of the ongoing National Convention that the participation of the Tatmadaw in the leading role of national politics be one of the six objectives of the Convention in laying down basic principles for the drafting of a Constitution. Such a role is in keeping with the Myanmar's historical traditions. The Tatmadaw has invariably been a source of great strength in times of crisis. It has constantly been above party politics and it has always shouldered its primary responsibility of ensuring the non-disintegration of national solidarity and the consolidation of national sovereignty. Additionally, at the current National Convention itself, through a process of free and open deliberations and mutual accommodation significant progress has
been made and a consensus is now in sight (Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates Senate: Daily Hansard Tuesday 1 March 1994).

I cite from this letter at length because it seems to indicate a much greater sophistication in SLORC’s presentation of its case - the 'rewriting of history' is only apparent to those who have some knowledge of modern Burmese history - and this factor must be assessed in conjunction with the Prasong line on the model of Indonesian militarism and the success Burma has had in garnering trade and military assistance from a variety of countries - ASEAN, China and now, it seems, Japan. The only specific comment that I will make here is that it is untrue that the 1990 election was only for the purpose of electing a 'convention' to draw up a constitution. This contradicts the Ambassador's own statement that it was a 'free and fair general election' (not an election for a constitutional convention).

It is to the credit of the Thai that they try to defend, in rational terms, the ASEAN support of SLORC. Others have merely pursued their economic interests and not bothered much with justifications. One finds it very hard to find any rationale in the UNDP pursuit of bolstering SLORC.

Major political problems exist on the other side. The Karen conflict with ABSDF is not easy to fathom. It is clear that many students have left-wing views which sit uneasily with the Christian Karen leadership, but some Karen statements are difficult to understand. In a letter from the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, National Council of the Union of Burma I was told

The Karen National Union (KNU) always opens its doors not only to the Burmese students but to all Burmese democrats to live alongside the Karen people without any discrimination as long as they desire to do so.

If, on the other hand, they wish to leave KNU controlled territory and move to another place, they are at full liberty to do so. The KNU however, consider it its right to ask for the return of the arms it has lended to them when they decide to leave. These arms were lended to the students with their full awareness that they have to return them to the KNU when they decide to leave.

U Moe Thee Zun and a few colleagues recently decided to break off their alliance with the KNU and other ethnic nations and joined force with the remnant of the Communist Party of Burma. They had returned the arms they had borrowed from the KNU. They are at liberty to join the CPB.

There are doubts as to KNU intentions when Moe Thee Zun and eleven other student leaders were detained for 72 hours in Manerplaw. There is some reason to believe that their release was at least partly the consequence of a report of the detention by the BBC. It is very difficult to understand why the KNU would resurrect the spectre of the Communist Party of Burma.

The position of students in Kachin Independence Organization territory is also disturbing. It is reported that they were given three choices - join the KIO, return home - i.e. to SLORC controlled territory or join students in KNU territory. In the last choice no help would be given them in crossing the SLORC-held length of Burma.

As jade traders and rice traders seem to go their different ways and the international isolation of SLORC breaks down, all academics can do is to try to assess the new situation. I will here raise, very briefly, some issues which may have a bearing on the immediate future of the Burmese tragedy.

The major questions seem to me to be, first, will the new ASEAN-SLORC-Chinese strategy succeed; and second, what are we to expect as a consequence of the answer to the previous question.

One of the comments I have heard regarding both questions is that even if SLORC succeeds in defeating its opposition they have so destroyed the fabric of Burmese society that the victory will be a Pyrrhic one. This is the worst possible answer for the people of Burma.

The position of left-wing students does raise an issue that has long remained dormant. Both the Karen and the Kachin leadership are conservative Christian. Given the general Buddhist population of the country - which includes large numbers of Karen - what is the future for cross-ethnic understanding? The military dictators of Burma long
appropriated the socialist name while they worked to protect themselves from the outside world. They have abandoned
the name with alacrity and embraced what they suppose to be a free market, selling the national interest to ASEAN
and Chinese entrepreneurs - not to mention the multi-nationals. It may be that the long-term interests of Burma now
lie in the hands of a few abandoned students. It was the students, in 1988, who began the process of bringing Burma
into the modern world. Perhaps they will now continue that process.

***

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE CURRENT SITUATION OF MON
REFUGEES ON THE THAI-BURMESE BORDER

Joanna Hazelton

Mon refugee camp ordered to move

Expressing deep concern about plans for a possible relocation of displaced persons, the Mon National Relief
Committee (MNRC), as long ago as its December 1992 Monthly Report wrote:

...we, the Mon in Thailand, humbly beg the Royal Thai Government to reconsider any decision to relocate the families
of Loh Loe and to kindly accept their current existence in this camp. We ask for nothing except security for our
children and your compassion in our plight.

Loh Loe, situated in Sangkhlaburi district near Thailand’s border with Burma and the largest Mon refugee camp with
approximately 8,000 people, however, was ordered to move. The Royal Thai Army’s 9th Division demanded the
relocation to the new site at Halochkani or to the other existing Mon camp, Pa Yaw. Both places for relocation are
problematic. Paw Yaw is extremely isolated, being inaccessible by land for 7 months of the year (June-December),
very far from hospital facilities, and with barely sufficient water supply for 1000 people in the dry season. Despite this,
by March 1500 people had been relocated from Loh Loe to this camp. Halochkani is problematic in its proximity to
the Burmese army troops.

Considerable confusion has surrounded this latest relocation order from the local Thai authorities. The Thai army
initially demanded the Mon to move to the Burmese side of the border in January of 1993. At that time the MNRC
submitted a petition to Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai appealing to stop this move. Then on February 16 a meeting was
held under the auspices of the Sangkhlaburi governor with representatives from MNRC, the National Security Council
(NSC), Sangkhlaburi district officials, border police and the 9th Division Army resulting in an agreement which stated
that Thailand would allow Mon refugees to shelter in Thailand until the political situation in Burma changes. However,
a later meeting concerning the relocation of the Mon across the border was held and an initial group of 139 people was
sent to clear the site at Halochkani on October 6, 1993; they then resisted orders to clear on the Burmese side of the
border and returned from Halochkani by October 13. Further discussions ensued and the NSC issued a warrant in
December affirming that the people could remain in Thailand. However, in late December the 9th Army came to Loh
Loe ordering the people to begin moving (with a deadline at the end of March this year). In response the MNRC
immediately arranged for 150 people to leave on January 5th. By early March 5000 people were relocated to
Halochkani.

Halochkani is about 35 kilometres north of the present Loh Loe site and is a convenient half an hour’s drive along a
good road to Sangklaburi. It is located on a part of the border where the actual boundary is under dispute between the
Thai and Burmese authorities. The camp is considered to be just inside Burmese territory (500 metres) and there is a
newly opened Thai border police checkpoint to pass through before entering the camp. For the refugees, though, the
concern is not so much with geopolitical intricacies of border demarcations, but rather with the camp’s proximity to
the Burmese army outpost, only 4 kilometres away (about one hour's walk).

Inadequate water supplies to support a large number of people is another immediate problem. In February Médecins
Sans Frontiers (MSF) was still to put a water tank in place and the people were making do with a bamboo irrigation
structure carrying water from the mountain stream. People were busily constructing their new bamboo houses, finding adequate materials from the surrounding environment, but the move was taxing healthwise. Medics reported a number of illnesses associated with the shortfall in water including skin infections, dehydration, dysentery, and the ever large malaria caseload. Within the first 3 weeks in the life of the small temporary hospital, medics had dealt with 400 patients.

This is not the first occasion on which the Mon refugees have been forcibly relocated by the local Thai authorities. The forced movement of the Mon refugees into Thailand in especially large numbers arose after the large tatmadaw offensives in early 1990. Once they had escaped the dangers of the Burmese military, instability featured in their reception within Thailand; with the earlier relocation of Day Bung camp (population 2,462) in June 1991 and their removal to Loh Loe from Krone Kung, Pa Nung Htaw and Baleh Hnook camps (with a total population of 5066) in April 1992. In May 1993 Pa Mark camp was also closed down and people moved to join Pa Yaw where space and fresh water was in short supply for additional people.

Mon/SLORC ceasefire talks

The pressure currently experienced by the Mon refugees cannot be understood in isolation. Wider events including the political processes within and between Burma and Thailand must be considered. As the refugee movements are symptomatic of war/conflict and political/economic/military events, so too the context of the refugees' removal from the host situation needs to be examined in its political/economic/military setting. Consideration of the host country's relationship with the 'sending' country, its perception of the refugees in this context, and developments within the 'source' country are vital concerns.

A key matter in the current developments for the Mon in Thailand is the enormous pressure on individual ethnic groups to enter into ceasefires with the SLORC, as indeed the Kokang, Wa, Shan, Pa-O, Palaung, and most recently, the Kachin, have experienced. The Mon have in recent months also come under great pressure to negotiate. The SLORC's strategy of unilateral, as opposed to united DAB, talks is widely familiar and is troubling for the ethnic and Burman democratic opposition forces. Such a strategy is undermining their pro-democracy and federalism struggles and aiding the intentions of the military regime to consolidate (and possibly gain legitimacy for) its power.

A 5-member Mon delegation first met in secret with SLORC representatives during the last week of December 1993 in Moulmein. It was reported that no progress was made in these talks1. News of the secret talks was revealed in the Burmese section of a BBC radio broadcast on January 10 1994. Then during a visit to the southeastern town of Ye, military intelligence chief Lt Gen Khin Nyunt announced that a second round of talks would take place later in March. Burma's state-run television showed him talking with Mon officials, proclaiming that they would soon 'join hands with the government in developing the country'2.

In February, however, New Mon State Party (NMSP) sources also reported the movement of the 104th and 433rd Burmese army battalions towards NMSP headquarters at Baho (about 50 km south of Three Pagoda Pass). There are also reports of between 20-30,000 conscripted villagers forced to work on the 160 km rail line from the town of Ye in Mon State to Tavoy in Tenasserim Division. Conscription for this railway began at the start of the dry season in late 1993 and conditions have been reported as abusive.

Thai Pressure

Despite the great need for peace in Burma's border areas, the ceasefire negotiation process is developing under severe pressure from both the SLORC regime and Thailand. The Mon have suffered significantly in loss of their territory to Burmese military forces and from decades of civil war. Thailand has moved away from its older policy of engaging with both sides to an emphasis on involvement with the SLORC. Thailand's controversial adherence to the ASEAN 'constructive engagement' policy first announced in the early 1990s continues. Further, in its position as host country for this year's ASEAN Ministerial Meeting to be held in Bangkok in July, Thailand has invited Burma as an observer and guest.

Departments of the Thai government pertinent to policy towards Burma involve the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the Foreign Ministry (FM), the Ministry of the Interior (MOI), the National Security Council (NSC) and the military.
The general configuration of command regarding the refugees has comprised the NSC being responsible for policy, the Supreme Command (SC) for coordination of policy, and MOI for implementing policy. Broadly, in the past the PMO and FM have been considered to be more sympathetic to the Burmese pro-democracy movement than the MOI, NSC, or the military. However, since the Nobel Peace laureates’ visit to the Thai Burmese border last year, this configuration has been modified. The FM was seen as promoting the use of Thailand for the Burmese pro-democracy movement which was followed by Rangoon’s wrath. Interior Minister Gen Chaovarat has been concerned with his own political survival which has resulted in a certain loss of influence by MOI.

Therefore, while Thailand denies any change in its policy towards Burma and the opposition, the NSC has come to dominate policy which has undeniably toughened in recent times. In January the NSC announced plans to work out stringent measures to 'strictly control Burmese ethnic groups...to prevent them from engaging in anti-Rangoon activities'. While the Supreme Command and MOI are not close to the peace talks process, they wish to retain control over NGOs. A clampdown on NGOs was recently declared and the NSC’s deputy chief Kajadpai Burutpat announced that a committee to keep a close watch on the NGOs would be established. He was quoted as saying: 'We are now gathering evidence to prove our suspicion. NGOs whose staff are found to have been illegally slipping into Burma to help the minorites will be subject to legal action...'. In addition, Lt Gen Sanan Kajornklam, chief of the Thai-Burma border coordinating office of the Supreme Command, insisted NGOs assisting the refugees be registered with MOI. He also noted: 'Thailand has a clear policy of not allowing any group to use its soil as a base for anti-Burmese government campaigns'. It should be noted, though, that Thailand is still supporting humanitarian services to the refugees and the consortium of aid agencies -Burma Border Consortium- continues to have access for supplies. And with the Loh Loe relocation, NGOs are still permitted to supply Halochkani.

Thai authorities are clearly concerned to not be identified by Rangoon as hosting its pro-democracy and ethnic opposition. Thai actions in recent months have pointed towards this via arrests, deportations, denial of re-entry visas to Thailand for National Coalition Government - Union of Burma (NCGUB - the government-in-exile) officials; restrictions on the movements of political and ethnic leaders and the conduct of their activities on Thai territory; two recent instances whereby medicines and arms were intercepted; and statements admonishing NGO activities. Further, Thailand is concerned about stability in its western neighbour. In its anxiety to avoid any more massive refugee flows it wants to see military stability come to these border areas and this has been viewed as support for SLORC. But it must be asked whether increased militarisation benefits stability in the long term. As anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom wrote recently:

If people pay attention to only the physical...politico-military manifestations of violence, they may in fact be quite successful in conflict re-solution: resolving the violent conflicts that blow up time and time again because the full spectrum of alliances, antagonisms, and in/justices associated with 'war' were not sufficiently addressed in the first place.

Also, in recent years, the ethnic opposition/s have become dependent on Thailand for refuge, communications and humanitarian assistance. In this light, Thai authorities want to achieve conditions for the major ethnic opposition groups to come to SLORC's 'peace talks' table. In addition to the NSC's strong influence in this scenario, a certain Thai businessman, Mr Xuwicha Hiranprueck, is also crucially involved in his capacity as personal advisor to the Chairman of the NSC. Sources, which must remain unnamed, state that he is pushing the agenda of events regarding Burma very vigorously. This advisor has also had a business and personal relationship with the Burmese military since the 1960s and was the agent for the US $1 million Thai fishing trawler which was blown up by dissident Burmese students in January 1991. Sources indicate that this businessman's exertion translates into control over events on the ground.

His agenda includes the following: that the New Mon State Party will sign a 'gentleman's agreement' with SLORC by April 13; that all refugees will be required to move back to the cease fire zone before the rainy season in May; that then the refugees will be entitled to 4 months' supply of rice; and following this, the Karen will be the next target for 'peace talks' under overwhelming pressure. Previous requests by the Karen to hold talks in Thailand have been rejected. This agenda is currently secret. Implications for monitoring safety and security upon return and are incontrovertibly perturbing. If return is forced and access impeded the implications could be catastrophic.
Gas pipeline issue

Substantial concern has been raised about the proposed natural gas pipeline and controversy and speculation has surrounded its route. Manerplaw-based environmental and human rights group, Green November (GN) wrote about the issue last year, with detailed descriptions of the players, plans, and most likely route. The route has since been revealed (as GN predicted) to the Thai press as: coming ashore from the Martaban Gulf, beginning in Phaung Daw Village (south of Heini Basin); and following the Tavoy and Zinba river valleys toward the border of Thailand to enter Thailand at Ban I-Tong (Nai Et Taung), about 50 km south of Three Pagoda Pass in Kanchanburi Province. Burmese army soldiers gained control of Nai Ei Taung after December 1991.

Both Mon and Karen soldiers are said to be active in the area where the pipeline will be laid. And recent intermittent battles have taken place between the Mon National Liberation Army (which has its HQ in the area) and tatmadaw troops during February and March. The burning of 2 refugee villages (mostly Tavoyan and Burman) by the Thai 9th army border police patrols in April last year has been linked to the pipeline's Nat Ei Taung route in this area.

Pisanh Paladsingha, the leader of the ethnic Mon community in Thailand, at a recent protest outside the United Nations Building in Bangkok noted: 'It's quite clear that the Mon are being pressured to agree to a ceasefire so that the pipeline can be built. The pipeline is the result of an agreement reached by the Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT) and Myanmar Oil & Gas Enterprise (MOGE). Total, a French state-owned company which has signed a production-sharing agreement with the Burmese government, will be responsible for constructing the pipeline in Burma while the PTT will build it on the Thai side. An additional strategic point is that the railroad currently under construction with forced labour is considered to make it easier for SLORC troops to secure the area where the pipeline will be laid.

1994 will be a critical year for developments in Burma. In recent political displays, SLORC has attempted to subdue its image. In the quest to achieve ceasefires with the remaining major ethnic groups, namely the Mon, Karen, and Karrenni, it has altered its rhetoric slightly, for instance when Khin Nyunt in his speeches late last year described them with milder terms such as 'armed groups' and 'national brethren'. While the tatmadaw troops patrol, the SLORC proclaims: 'The Tatmadaw has been sacrificing much of its blood and sweat to prevent disintegration of the Union. All nationalities of the Union are urged to give all co-operation and assistance in this great task.' Attempts to assuage critics are also manifest in Aung San Suu Kyi's recent permission to receive her first non-family visitor since her house arrest in 1989, US Congressman Bill Richardson. Another of the SLORC's recent moves to sanction its rule has been the formation of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), a banner under which thousands of Burmese are being coerced to attend mass rallies of alleged support for peace talks and the ongoing 'national convention'. Meanwhile, as Thailand pressures Burma's democratic opposition to be silent or possibly leave its territory, it is rumoured that SLORC will shortly offer an amnesty to all dissidents. Given this constellation of events, it behoves us to ask: what is in store for the future of Burma's pro-democracy effort and the hopes of the ethnic opposition/s to central military rule?

*****

Announcement

Southeast Asian Linguistic Society Conference

23-27 May 1994 at The Bangkapi Rose Hotel (Bangkok) and The Providence (Chiangmai)

Theme: Southeast Asian Linguistics

Organizers: Ramkhamhaeng University and Payap University

Registration by 30 April.

Enquiries: Dr Udom Warotamasikkhadit

SEALS IV
Trade Fairs in the Quadrangle

Two papers

THE MYANMAR TRADE FAIR: TACHILEIK 21-31 DECEMBER 1993

Andrew Walker*

The Sai River is an unimpressive border between the Thai town of Mai Sai and Tachileik in Burma. The narrow river is easily crossed by the Burmese labourers who stand in the waist-deep water scooping river sand into long flat-bottomed boats to supply what seems to be a mini-building boom in Tachileik. Down-river, at the bridge linking the towns, a constant stream of motorbikes, utilities and pedestrians travels back and forward throughout the day (even ‘farang’ can cross for a day after surrendering their passport on the Thai side and $5 US on the Burmese side).

This rather permeable border and the mushrooming of white concrete apartments, shops and hotels in Tachileik, provided an appropriate backdrop for the Myanmar Trade Fair held from 21-31 December 1993 in the newly constructed Shan Yo Ma Plaza on the outskirts of town. Coloured flags lined the main street of the 'City of the Golden Triangle' the kilometre of so to the Trade Fair (and beyond) while samlor drivers touted in the busy riverside border market for 10 baht fares to the 'big market' at the Plaza.

The three storey concrete complex (destined to become a shopping centre once the trade fair moved on) was filled with the products of a bewildering array of ministries, departments, enterprises and cooperatives. Officially, this was a cooperative trade fair, though I was told that many private entrepreneurs were present under the cooperative banner. On the Ground floor the Ministry of Agriculture displayed samples of rubber, soybeans, corn, cabbages, avocados and the like. The displays by the Ministry of Industry had a more value added feel with rugs, textiles, shoes, beverages, electrical goods, bicycles, clothing and glass relic caskets. A number of regional cooperatives displayed silver goods (in which they seemed to be doing a brisk trade), leather goods (a barking deer and snakeskin leather coat), Mandalay puppets and cushion covers. The rest of the floor was taken up with gems, jade and jewellery.

A similar range of products was available for inspection and purchase on Level 2. The Ministry of Trade and a number of primary production cooperatives displayed big earners such as rice and seafood. The Ministry of Forestry and Myanmar Timber Enterprises had what appeared to be excellent bargains in wooden furniture and carvings. Myanmar Department Stores displayed consumer goods such as foodstuffs, cigarettes, televisions, radios, karaoke machines and guitars. Asian Art Myanmar was present with an art and craft display. Level 3 had more of the same plus a range of specialised handicrafts such as lacqueredware and batik and small stalls representing a number of ethnic minorities.

The trade fair had a festive atmosphere. Gold tinsel signs above doorways wished happy new year and wide-eyed school children ran through the Plaza staring at karaoke machines, trying out reclining chairs and giggling at the few farang tourists present. Out the front, on the first day I visited, a young singer provided highly amplified Asian/Western rock. The following day this musical display had been replaced with a table loaded with floral tributes to the trade fair from Burmese and Thai businesses. Refreshments were available in a large airy pavilion out the back courtesy of the Food and Beverages Cooperative whilst outside on the second floor the sunny Coca Restaurant provided me with warm beer and ice. (Coca overlooked the earthworks of a new housing estate.) The only damper on proceedings was the presence, at most entrances, of khaki clad men with rather large guns.

Speaking to some of the organisers, I was told that the trade fair was part of the government's border development initiative and that its basic aim was to transform 'border trade' into 'formal trade' and to encourage the substitution of legal for illegal commercial activities in the region. The organisers hoped that Burmese enterprises would be able to enter into business arrangements with Thai and Chinese merchants operating in the region. It was unclear to me how
the majority of enterprises present, being Rangoon based, would be able to maintain such a commercial presence in the region. However, the fact that the local markets in Tachileik were dominated by Chinese merchandise seemed to highlight the urgency of their task. The Bangkok Post (December 23, 1993) reported that thousands of Thai and 600 Chinese businesses had been invited to the trade fair. However, judging by the very small number of cars in the very big car-park the extent of non-local participation may have been disappointing. (The car park will look less bare when the Pathumthani Shan Yoma Hotel is constructed in its place.) Further trade fairs are planned for other border regions in the coming months.

***

`THROUGH SOUTHEAST ASIA TO THE WORLD'; REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST KUNMING EXPORT COMMODITIES FAIR.

E.C. Chapman* and Peter Hinton**

The First Kunming Export Commodities Fair (August 8-18) was jointly organized by Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou, Guangxi, Tibet and two municipalities of Chongqing and Chengdu, an area which is home to a population totalling 225 million. Its organizers anticipate that it will become an annual event, housed in Kunming's new International Trade Fair Centre which was completed just before the fair was opened at a cost of US$65 million.

The theme of the fair - 'Face to Southeast Asia, go to the World' - is an indication that the provincial governments concerned regarded increased trade with Laos, Thailand, Burma, Cambodia and Vietnam as essential to their economic success. Trade between Yunnan and its neighbours has a venerable history, a point which those publicizing the fair were quick to emphasise. The Kunming fair was consequently described as: 'a new effort to reinvigorate the ancient Southern Silk Road, which dated back to the fourth century BC'. In former times this route linked Yunnan with India through Burma in a lucrative trade which included textiles, jade and other precious stones, medicinal herbs, opium and tea. Other traditional trade routes reached south, into Vietnam and Thailand.

Those initiating the fair probably had in mind the precedent of Guangdong, where sustained high growth rates have been made possible by rapidly increasing foreign trade and investment. While Guangdong and other south-eastern seaboard provinces have been in the vanguard of China's recent economic boom - the national GDP growth rate was 13.9% in 1993 (Asiaweek October 13, p.64) - many other regions in have been unable to benefit to any great extent from the fruits of the new capitalism. In fact, some have suffered from the impact of an escalating rate of inflation, and declining revenue payments from Beijing. Yunnan, traditionally one of the poorest, most remote - and politically fractious - provinces is potentially one of the heaviest losers. But the boom in Southeast Asia, particularly in Thailand, is providing a golden opportunity for Yunnan to pull in investment capital, to market its products and to buy raw materials. The Trade Fair represents an ambitious attempt to seize this opportunity.

The Venue

Kunming, a pleasant city of 3.6 million at the 1990 Census, has been host to a number of important fairs and festivals, including the China Arts Festival in 1992. The selection of Kunming as the venue for the latter was regarded as a major coup, for it was the first time this national festival was staged outside a major city such as Beijing or Shanghai. These events have helped foster an unprecedented boom in the building of roads, hotels and shopping complexes. The Trade Fair Centre is one of the more spectacular of the recent developments. It is a sprawling building three stories high situated in spacious, landscaped grounds not far from Kunming International Airport. A four lane access road has been built, with ample parking space. The planners obviously think that before too long the car will replace the bicycle as the main means of transport around the city.

The building itself is self-consciously modern. It is faced with reflecting curtain glass, while inside a spacious, naturally lit lobby soars to a roof supported by exposed polished stainless steel girders and struts. The exhibition halls either opened off the lobby or one of the two mezzanine floors. A large room at ground level was set aside for communications and press liaison. Unfortunately, as the staff apologetically explained, the communications hookups
had not been finalized in time, so this facility was not fully functional. For example, interregional and international communications were so difficult during the fair that it was virtually impossible to secure an international telephone or fax connection. The deficiencies of China's telecommunications network were painfully evident.

A great deal of attention was given to the presentation of the festival. Women attendants in long red silk dresses with yellow sashes emblazoned with the word 'Welcome' in English were on hand to give directions. Elaborate flower arrangements adorned the lobby. Outside there were balloons, airships, fountains and brass bands. The latter entertained the many Kunming residents who came to look but who perhaps could not afford the entrance fees which were high in relation to incomes. There was, in fact, a great deal of popular interest in the festival. People all over town grouped around television sets throughout the long opening ceremony, the internationality of which was underlined by the instantaneous translation of speeches from Putonghua (Mandarin) to English.

All in all the building and the general presentation of the fair was strikingly different from the stolid Stalinist ethos which has until recently pervaded officially sponsored events in China.

The organizers must have been very pleased with the attendance figures. On the two occasions we visited the fair, the building was packed. There is no data on the national or provincial origins of those who attended: however it was clearly an Asian affair. We saw at the most five Europeans in the crowd.

The Exhibits

It was a peculiarity of the fair, but a feature of great significance, that the exhibits were ordered according to the localities from which they originated rather than according to product category. Exhibition areas were allocated to particular provinces. Within these, there were subdivisions for prefectures and counties. This led to an often anarchic juxtaposition of products. Telecommunications equipment could be found cheek by jowl with leather goods and walnuts. Sometimes, where exhibition bays were shared by several exhibitors to save costs, things were even more chaotic. In one case, we came across a bay which included displays by a computerised name-card printing service, a floor tiling manufacturer, a small brewery and a producer of simple satellite dishes, all crammed into a space about ten metres square. (The satellite dishes, incidentally, were produced and marketed by the Electronics Department of Yunnan University. It is not only Australian university departments which are being told to go out and market their products!)

This all made it very difficult for potential buyers to make comparisons between products of the same kind, scattered as they were through the fair. The difficulties were compounded by the fact that there was no catalogue or master list of exhibitors readily available. Moreover, some Thai businessmen we spoke to after the fair complained that there were no clear cut arrangements by which transactions could be negotiated, financed and secured.

In a real way the disjuncture between the appearance of the fair and its substance mirrored the state of the rural economy of provincial China today: capitalism is being encouraged - but with distinct qualifications. A curious semi-capitalism, half-dissolved socialism prevails. It was this that made the fair such an interesting phenomenon.

Background

The present Chinese strategy of export-led growth has its origins in an experiment initiated in Guangdong. In 1978 Guangdong producers were encouraged to cater to neighbouring Hongkong people's tastes for meat, fruit and fish. This was a distinct departure from the Maoist 'grain first' approach to rural production. The experiment was a success, and in 1984 the policy was introduced nationwide under the slogan propagated by Premier Zhao Ziyang: 'Trade-Industry-Agriculture'. (Zweig 1991)

Guangdong was given special privileges to encourage its entrepreneurial activities. It was, for example, permitted to retain all the foreign exchange it earned. Clearly such concessions could not be extended to all provinces when the policy which prioritized trade became general. In the past few years liberalization measures have been applied unevenly, and to a different extent across the country. Moreover, all provinces were not equally well placed for access to international trade. Guangdong, located so close to Hong Kong was especially well situated. However provinces without seaports and those located far from international borders were relatively disadvantaged. That is why Sichuan,
Guizhou and Guangxi were keen to combine forces with Yunnan in the trade fair.

In Yunnan, there has recently been a spontaneous growth in cross-border trade with Burma, Laos and Thailand, which we have documented elsewhere (Chapman, Hinton and Tan 1992; Chapman and Hinton 1993). This has been accelerated by the economic reforms in China with accompanying relaxation of border controls, the economic boom in Thailand and the expansionary forces this has set in motion, and the removal of Soviet support for Laos, which has forced the Lao government to seek closer economic relations with its neighbours. At the same time, China has capitalized on the need of SLORC - the present ruling junta in Rangoon - for armaments and international credibility, to successfully promote its military and economic interests across the border into Burma.

There is a great deal of raw commercial energy in both China and Thailand which has yet to be converted to sustained economic achievement. This is partly because roads, rail and riverine routes are still primitive, but there are less tangible factors. These include a residual wariness born of decades of confrontation through the Cold War, bureaucratic conservatism in both Thailand and China, confusion of laws and procedures governing customs and immigration, and sheer lack of information about markets and products through the region we have called the Mekong Corridor. The Trade Fair represented an imaginative attempt to overcome some of these impediments.

The Role of Township Enterprises (TEs)

Some of the exhibits at the fair were by state industries. However, most were presented by Township Enterprises (TEs). A Township Enterprise (TE) is run by a township government. Townships are subdivisions of counties and comprise approximately 5000-10000 people in a number of villages. TEs have become ubiquitous in rural China. They were originally instituted in 1978, to absorb labour released from agricultural production after decollectivization. They are essentially small rural industries which produce a great variety of goods. In rural Yunnan, food processing is probably their most common activity. They process tea, package honeyed walnuts, make buckwheat crisps, refine sugar, produce oil from rape seed and brew beer. They can employ as few as ten people, or as many as four or five hundred.

There is an inherent contradiction in the role of TEs today. While they were originally established to provide employment rather than to make profits, but they are now being asked to be an important element in expanding exports in a fiercely competitive international marketplace. Their first role explains why it is that many TEs are allowed to run at a loss and why the banks (all of which are government run) continue to provide finance to TEs which are unlikely to succeed in commercial terms (Hong 1992). The lack of any real competition between TEs explains why much of their produce is of poor quality, and why there is a great deal of duplication of their products. The TEs are one way of ensuring a social wage, but they will have to undergo substantial transformation if their commercial role is to be given precedence.\(^1\)

Even when they achieve the latter aim, TEs still face major problems in marketing their products. There are bureaucratic and infrastructural problems but over and above these factors, there is a significant information gap. The people running the TEs often simply do not know how or where to sell their products. Most managerial staff have restricted social horizons and limited networks. Most were born and bred in the localities in which they operated. Regulations which inhibit the free movement of people, particularly from rural areas to cities - even to rural towns - are strictly enforced. Knowledge about the outside world and the capacity to wheel and deal which this allows is thus constrained. Government authorities, moreover, did little to provide marketing information or advice. In the past, when advisory agencies were set up, they were often inclined to keep a tight fist on information, using it to control, rather than to assist their TE clients. (Zweig 1991)

The Consequences of the New Regionalism

The subdivision of the fair into exhibits from different provinces, prefectures and counties was a reflection of a regionalism which has been accentuated by recent changes in government policy involving a devolution of fiscal policy and economic responsibility. This has had both positive and negative effects. On the positive side, local authorities have been given much greater latitude to raise capital. Yunnan province, for example, has been deal directly with the Asian Development Bank without having to work through the central government. (See, for example, ADB 1993)
Another positive outcome is that local authorities have been given considerable autonomy in developing cross-border trade. This is in line with the national policy of export led growth and follows the model of Guangdong's economic success. It is however, unlikely that provinces like Yunnan will ever be granted as many inducements and incentives as Guangdong, whose success the Beijing reformists was so anxious to ensure. Nevertheless, border counties have been allowed to retain a fair proportion of the customs and excise revenue they collect. In one case a newly designated official cross-border post (Mengla) has been allowed to retain all revenue for the next three years to boost trade with Laos.

On the negative side, devolution has meant that the central government has cut the funds it allocates to the provinces, leaving them to raise the lost income themselves. The provinces, in turn, have increased their levies on the prefectures. The prefectures levy their constituent counties. The buck stops at county level, and it is the counties which feel the pinch most strongly. The situation has spawned a host of new taxes which are as arbitrary and diverse as they are resented by those who are forced to pay them. The latter range from domestic air travellers - an array of exactions greet the traveller on arrival or departure in places like Jinghong and Simao - to peasant farmers. Toll gates appear on country roads overnight and farmers have to pay when they come and go to market, as county officials seek new ways to meet the escalating revenue quotas set by prefectures. Taxes on TEs have also increased. The taxes have caused resentment of everyone from small farmers, whose incomes have been slashed by the combined forces of pegged prices for much of their produce and an alarming rate of inflation, to businessmen whose returns are subject to a great variety of new taxes as their inputs.

There are exceptions to this rule: there are enterprises which are allowed to pay minimal tax. However these appear to be mainly former state enterprises which the state regards as having potential for producing exportable goods. An example is Kunming Machine Tool, one of the exhibitors at the Trade Fair, a company which is paying a flat tax rate of only 15%. The concession appears to have paid off, as net profit quadrupled in 1991 and doubled last year. (Sender 1993) This company recently became only the sixth mainland Chinese company to be listed on Hongkong Stock Exchange. The host of other enterprises of various sizes in Yunnan which have not been so lucky pay much higher taxes in a stunning variety of categories. In fact it would appear that many township enterprises are allowed to continue solely because they are revenue milch cows. They operate at a loss or with very little profit because it is very uncommon for banks to foreclose on any loans they might have - in fact they seem to extend further finance to clearly marginal enterprises - and because any state subsidies paid to them are more than adequately compensated by revenue extracted.

The provincial authorities, for their part, have little option other than to increase taxes as they now have to pay for the whole substantial range of social services which are still largely intact from the pre-reform era, but without the large subsidies from Beijing they once received.

Conclusion

Despite all the reservations outlined in this paper, the First Kunming Export Commodities Fair gave cause for optimism. Its most significant achievement was that it put people in touch with people. Exhibitors were able to compare notes with their peers from other parts of southwest China, potential buyers and suppliers from both China and abroad were given an opportunity to meet producers. This has not happened on this scale before. Maybe not as many transactions were arranged as many might have hoped. Despite reforms, the laws governing business transactions - for instance the laws of contract - are labyrinthine. There was a lack of business experience amongst representatives of TEs at the fair. However, many networks were established or enhanced, and the flow of information on markets, productive techniques etc - the lack of which we identify above as being an important inhibiting factor in the development of enterprises in the region - was greatly improved. The fax machines might not have been able to meet demand, and the exhibits may have been often amateurish but an important start has been made. As one Thai businessman said to us: 'It will be better next year'.

Note

1. There is a great deal of speculation in the recent literature about the nature and consequences of successive recent
reforms. Unger (1987) documents the different and often opposed administrative systems that have been put in place over since Mao: for instance Party officials were often opposed to local authorities or those with technical expertise. Once established, systems were rarely done away with even if they had proved ineffectual. The result is layer upon layer of 'jerry-built' administrative structures, each serving special interests. None of this helps the emergence of effective market economies. Wong's (1991) discussion of the process of decentralisation concludes that there is a crisis owing to a 'botched sequence of reforms'. Thus the main structures of a Soviet style economic system remain in place which negate reforms to stimulate the market economy in the provinces. Oi (1992), on the other hand considers that the reforms lead along a path which presents a viable alternative to 'the pains of privatisation' and under what she calls 'local state corporatism' local officials can 'take social need into consideration when making economic decisions'. It is interesting to note in this context that even a highly market oriented enterprise like Kunming Machine Tool, has a manager who was quoted as saying 'if we encounter difficulties, the first route would normally be to reduce people...That is easy for the company but it isn't necessarily good for the long term. We should think of other ways; we must motivate [all the workers] to improve productivity.' (Sender 1993) It cannot be assumed that the emerging market economy in China will always follow the pattern of Western capitalism.

References

Asian Development Bank

Chapman, E.C.; Hinton, Peter; and Tan Jingrong
1992 The Cross-Border Trade Between Yunnan and Burma and the Emerging Mekong Corridor. Thai-Yunnan Project Newsletter #19, Canberra.

Chapman, E.C. and Hinton, Peter
1993 The Emerging Mekong Corridor: a Note on Recent Developments (to May 1993). Thai-Yunnan Project Newsletter #21, Canberra.

Hong Xiaoyuan

Oi, Jean

Sender, Henny

Wong, Christine P.W.

Unger, Jonathan

Zweig, David

GREENING OF ISAAN - MORE THAN JUST A PINCH OF SALT12

Kevin Hewison

On November 10, 1988 the Bangkok Press reported that Army Commander-in-Chief General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh would seek to resign in 1989. Before that time, however, he vowed to ensure the continuation of the Isaan Khieow
(Green Northeast) Project by negotiating a Bt20,000 million loan from the World Bank.

While the amount was later denied, the general confirmed that he was discussing the matter with the bank. Whatever the amount, the money was to be used for an irrigation network in the Northeast.

The concept of large-scale irrigation was first proposed in Biwater International Limited's proposals for the Green Northeast Project presented to the Army commander in February 1988. It has since been featured in Isaan Khieow Foundation documents which displays maps of irrigation canals linking the Mun, Chi and Mekong rivers.

Irrigation is an attractive concept. Many villagers in the Northeast dream about the potential for irrigation from their rivers. After all, if water can be supplied to dry areas, farmers can grow more crops, the economy will improve, as will the quality of life, and everyone will be happier.

However, two recent research reports suggest that the situation may not be so simple. These reports summarize research conducted in the Northeast and deserve consideration if large-scale irrigation projects are contemplated.

The first report, by German academics Ernst Loffler and Jochen Kubiniok, examines the problems of soil salinization, and the second, by Chulalongkorn University researcher Dr Wathana Wongsekiarttirat, looks at the experience of irrigation utilization. Let us summarize their findings.

Salinization

The two Germans note that salinization is not a new problem, either in Thailand or elsewhere. It was, however, localized until about a century ago, 'when large irrigation projects came into existence and resulted in the rapid expansion of irrigated land ... This eventually caused a rise in water table, a mobilization of salts and a gradual transport of salts to the root zone or even to the soil surface.'

Soil salinization is not exclusively a problem of irrigation systems, for it can also occur in non-irrigated areas. However, the authors note that salinization associated with 'irrigation in arid and semi-arid areas ... is most widespread and occurs in its most severe form.' In the Northeast, both forms of salinization can be observed.

The general cause of salting is 'an excess of water leading to rising water tables. In the case of dryland salting this surplus water, however, does not result from water brought into the area ... through irrigation but is simply the result of a drastic change in land use, usually the removal of deep rooting trees with high water consumption and their replacement by shallow rooting vegetation such as cereal crops.'

Other factors are also at work, including the original salt source, problems of leaching and drainage, and salt accumulation, and all of these are normally linked to the geomorphological history of an area.

In the Northeast, salinization has expanded markedly and much of this can be attributed to forest clearance. Clearance has been accelerated with the introduction of upland crops such as cassava and sugarcane. The result has been that today about 26,000 square kilometres of the Northeast have a salt problem, and a similar area is under threat.

At this point the two authors go into a technical explanation of how it is that salt, embedded in the soils of the Northeast, are brought to the surface. Basically they see two processes at work, one localized and the other a more region-wide process. One has salt originating directly from weathered Mahasarkham bedrock which is transported from uplands through shallow groundwater flows to nearby lowlands. The other involves the general rise of groundwater levels and then the capillary rise of salts to the surface. Salt infiltrates the groundwater flow from distant salt-bearing rock strata.

Solutions?

The comments the researchers make on possible means of alleviating the Northeast's salinization problems are important. They argue that regardless 'of whether salt moves to or near the surface by shallow interflow or through long and medium distance transport through the deeper groundwater, a long-term improvement of the situation can
only be achieved through a lowering of the groundwater table, since only this can stop the direct or indirect rise of salts to the soil surface.

The authors are convinced that the most important, but also most socially difficult, solution lies in reafforestation in groundwater recharge areas - that is, the uplands, where cassava and sugarcane are grown.

In addition to this, a number of other measures are considered important. These include farmer practices which reduce evaporation, improving soil structure, and reducing exposed soil surfaces (for example, mulching, and abandoning the practice of burning rice straw). They then discuss irrigation. What they say is worth repeating.

‘One of the most efficient ways to improve water management ... [is] irrigation and this would also alleviate the salinity problem since as long as the rice fields are water-covered no capillary rise is possible. However, irrigation in the Northeast is not an easy task. Nearly all the suitable dam sites have already been utilized ... To pond large quantities of water on the [Korat] plateau itself is not only technologically difficult, but would cause a substantial loss of land that presently belongs to the better watered and slightly more fertile stretches of rice land. There are also considerable ecological and hygiene problems associated with the ponding of large areas of shallow water, and the ponded water would result in a further rise of the water table causing an increase in salinity hazard outside the irrigated area. An irrigation project that would serve most of the plainlands of the Northeast is also unfeasible because of the limited water supply and the high rates of evaporation ...’

The authors warn that any irrigation project, even small-scale, requires careful investigation of the hydrogeology of the area since 'the withdrawal of fresh water may - if it exceeds fresh water recharge - cause salt water incursions at least during the latter part of the dry season when the fresh water supply is low or exhausted and the need for irrigation water is highest.'

All of this suggests the need for great care in technical planning and implementation. But, even if large-scale irrigation is technically feasible, Wathana’s research indicates that there are still many social and management hurdles to be negotiated if irrigation is to be successful.

Utilization and Management

Wathana shows that one of the key government policies in attempting to raise the incomes of agriculturalists in the Northeast has been to promote dry season cropping through irrigation. the government has also attempted to provide agricultural extension and promotion services to farmers, especially in pump irrigation areas (see table).

In those areas where water for irrigation is reliable and yields are high it is a sad fact that much irrigated land remains under-utilized. The table 1 indicates the extent of this problem between 1974 and 1982. This table shows that the highest level of utilization was 16.9 per cent in 1979, but seems to be around 10 per cent in most years. Surprisingly, utilization does not seem to increase over the years that the system is in place.

Subsistence

The conclusions drawn from this data are interesting. It appears that farmers attempt to produce 'enough' rice for the family. So, if there is a drought, utilization will increase, but in good years it tends to fall off again. Also, when water charges rise, utilization falls. The researcher concludes that even though the government has provided agricultural incentives, good design, and has attempted to implement good management through community participation and credit facilities, utilization remains low.

If we refer back to the salinization process, it is noticed that under-utilization can be a problem, as fields left to cycles of wetting and drying can increase salting.

Wathana analyzes both quantitative and qualitative data in attempting to understand this problem of under-utilization. First, it is clear that farmers' decisions on the use of irrigated land for dry season cropping are based on 'an evaluation of their food requirements, and ... cash income (requirements). Irrigation has greatly aided households which are unable to produce enough wet-paddy for household consumption from the preceding wet season. As for those
producing a wet-paddy surplus, a "trade-off" between dry season cropping and non-farm employment is made. The nature of the choice depends largely upon the skills of the individual and the off-farm opportunities.

It seems that the family applies itself to wet season cropping and then breaks up to participate in non-farm activities, ranging from labouring in Bangkok to handicrafts production in the village. This is important for it means that the labour exchanges and family labour is not always available for dry season cropping.

Farmer Decisions

Second, Wathana's study indicates that the 'agricultural decisions of dry-season croppers appear to be made from an evaluation of their needs for the immediate future rather than longer-term planning. They set (aside) the land to be used in the dry season... to satisfy their food requirements.'

Any extra income derived from dry season cropping tends to be used for consumption goods or for financing a child's higher education.

Third, the decision to plant in the dry season depends on the availability of non-farm opportunities. As the author explains, 'Once the households' food requirements have been satisfied from wet season farming, non-farm employment becomes an alternative means of earning cash income. As non-farm employment in towns, especially in Bangkok, is widely available... it is possible for households to allocate a part of their labour to non-farming activities.'

If dry season cropping is to be undertaken, then it is very much dependent on the availability of labour. This itself depends on the opportunities for extra income from non-farm activities weighed up against those for dry season cropping.

Wathana's study concludes that 'contrary to the expectations and intentions of the planners responsible for the improvement of irrigation facilities... the main benefit of pump irrigation to the farmers has been the capacity it provides for them to produce emergency crops... From the feasibility studies, the planners expected a dramatic increase in production resulting from... double cropping. This expectation has not... materialized... In social terms, it cannot be denied that the "safety valve" that irrigation provides... is the most welcome infrastructure investment in the region. But in purely economic terms, one must question whether the vast sums of money spent on improving irrigation... (for) the Northeast... may be more effectively employed in another way...'.

Conclusion

The results reported in these two studies should be considered very carefully by any group or agency that considers irrigation is the way to make the Northeast green. Because of the salinization problems and under-utilization, large tracts of land may be rather more white than green.

Irrigation may be a part of a solution to the problems of the Northeast, but a cautious approach is required. Very careful and expensive local and regional technical evaluations are required if major salinity problems are to be avoided. But, as Wathana shows, the social problems can easily negate technical solutions.

If the current economic conditions for farmers do not change so that they get a better return for farm work, then they will continue to seek off-farm opportunities, and irrigation utilization will remain low.

Postscript

The following item appeared in The Nation 7 March 1994

'Isarn Aid Project "Linked to UK Arms Sales Bid"

Britain has since the mid-1980's given aid to Thailand in exchange for arms deals which may have been linked to the purchase of torpedoes, transport aircraft and tanks.
In 1984, when Thailand made a contract worth about £5 million for torpedoes, transport aircraft and tanks, financial assistance to Thailand jumped to more than £200 million from an average of £5.5 million in the previous four years, according to The Sunday Times yesterday.

During the visit of then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to Thailand in July 1988, her defence procurement minister, Lord Trefargne, visited the Defence Asia ‘88 exhibition in Bangkok.

The paper said Britain and Thailand were negotiating a military assistance programme involving a consortium headed by British Aerospace and GEC- Marconi. In the financial year 1988-89, British aid payments to Thailand leapt to almost £24 million.

Biwater, the British water development company, was then negotiating for contracts worth £700 million under a forestry and water supply programme known as Green E-Sarn, according to the report.

In 1989 a protocol for soft loans under Aid and Trade Provision (ATP) was signed between the two countries and British commitment was given in principle to help fund the Isarn project through ATP.

In 1990, a report published in The Daily Telegraph confirmed that support for the Biwater bid was being linked to the arms deal.

In the event, Thailand declined to buy large amounts of British arms, concluding instead an agreement for US jets and other equipment. In 1990, the proposal to fund the Green E-Sarn project also faded.

### Table on facing page

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 1970</td>
<td>2400</td>
<td>737*</td>
<td>1535</td>
<td>1482</td>
<td>2379</td>
<td>3936</td>
<td>5415</td>
<td>4608</td>
<td>3763</td>
<td>3534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>18500</td>
<td>2578</td>
<td>2785</td>
<td>3213</td>
<td>3765</td>
<td>4262</td>
<td>2751</td>
<td>2817</td>
<td>3034</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>875</td>
<td>1322</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>523</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (Area)</td>
<td>272500</td>
<td>737</td>
<td>4113</td>
<td>4359</td>
<td>5892</td>
<td>11303</td>
<td>22898</td>
<td>18576</td>
<td>22598</td>
<td>23346</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Area in rai

# Percentage

Source: National Energy Authority data as presented in Wathana, P. 141.

***

C.P. FITZGERALD, 1902-1992

Ann Turner and Ian Wilson

When Patrick FitzGerald died peacefully in April 1992, the ranks of great sinologists were sadly diminished. His acclaim was wide and, since settling here in 1950, he had done much to inform Australian understanding of China and the way we look at Asia. Patrick FitzGerald will always be remembered as an historian of Greater China but he also wrote on the overseas Chinese and, as an early anthropologist, on the minority peoples of Yunnan in his The Tower of
Five Glories: a Study of the Min Chia of Ta Li, Yunnan.

He was of that generation for whom disciplinary boundaries and academic titles meant little. His first degree was a Doctor of Letters awarded by The Australian National University upon his retirement at the end of 1967. Until then he had attended academic processions in his undegraduate gown, worn with his Irish elfin grin, among the red, blue and purple sumptuary excesses of other universities.

Patrick was essentially self-taught and very widely read. In his teens he discovered China and found sources in English inadequate so translated a 12 volume work in French to widen his knowledge. Economic circumstances prevented him from going up to Oxford and then into the diplomatic service, but at 21 he sailed for Shanghai after less than a year at the School of Oriental Studies and no diploma. He had a job as assistant stores manager on the Peking-Mukden Railway and soon set himself apart from his European colleagues by furthering his study of the language and culture, an activity which most of them found quite pointless. He developed a healthy disdain for these views and in his many subsequent travels in China were regarded as dangerous and foolhardy. His command of the language and essential egalitarianism served him well but, although he refused many offers of firearms, he did travel with a swordstick in case he got into a real jam.

His next job was managing an American-owned enterprise in Hankou which cleaned and sorted pigs' intestines for US hotdog casings. He felt that to understand the process he should spend some time on the shop floor working beside the Chinese employees, an action which contributed to his reputation as a somewhat eccentric young man. These experiences put him in a much better position to understand the sense of humiliation and resentment which was soon to erupt in the May 30 Incident in Shanghai and across much of East China in 1925. This was at the time when, as the British consul later told him, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin was so ignorant of the country, which had substantial British investments, that he confused the location of Canton with Peking. As had been the case with George Ernest Morrison, whose London Times pieces on China had excited the young FitzGerald, Patrick's experience and understanding was of interest to his government and he was asked to brief British officials on many occasions. This relationship was eventually to land him at Bletchley Park intelligence and crypto-analysis base during the war. After the war, he returned to China to run the British Council's program, another activity which may have aroused suspicions among some Chinese because the Council had provided cover for intelligence operations as a sideline to its cultural offerings in foreign climes. This is perhaps relevant, much later, when we could only speculate on the reasons which prevented him from getting a visa to China after 1958. Despite the inherent fairness of his assessments of Mao's China, and his urgings in the name of common sense for Australia to recognise that government, it remains clear that he received no reward from the PRC and his later writings were written from outside.

Between railway stores, independent travel and pigs' intestines, FitzGerald managed to complete research for a book on the Tang Emperor Taizong. He returned to England in 1927 to write and completed the SOS diploma in Chinese, gaining a small scholarship which assisted him in his next project -- to travel on foot and by mule from Kunming through Guizhou province and southern Sichuan to Chungking [Chongqing]. This was a very different China from the Treaty Ports, railways and expatriate society most foreigners knew. He arrived in the Yunnan capital from Haiphong in 1930 and began a fascinating journey which was to take many months over Ming dynasty roads, seldom maintained and described by the locals as 'good for ten years; bad for ten thousand'. The British consul tried to prevent what he thought a suicidal venture for an unarmed party which had to carry more in silver coin than food or clothing. In the end, it was the local Chinese magistrate whose permission was crucial and this was obtained over some good food, wine and conversation on the Chinese classics. His liking for all three was to stand FitzGerald in good stead on the journey for banditry was a real problem. These men were usually beholden to or very frightened of the regional warlords, most of whom had some education, and provided safe passage and even escorts for the intrepid party.

The articles based on these travels and the Taizong Emperor were well received and, through Sir George Sansom, Patrick met Professor Seligman. This led to a commission to write a social anthropology piece on the Bai people of Yunnan, and the famous Short Cultural History of China. This was completed in 1939 and FitzGerald set off for China again, armed with a Leverhulme fellowship and some seminars from Malinowski. He was to spend two years in Dali on research, noting with wry regret that Queen Victoria had passed up an opportunity to incorporate Yunnan into the British Empire, 'thus abandoned the only opportunity to possess one of the few remaining lands of temperate climates in which people of Western nations could have happily settled'. He learnt Bai, yet another activity seen by Europeans
as incomprehensible, since it had no written script and hence no literature.

The book on the Bai bears reading again today, but it does not contain the results of Patrick's very amusing study of the anthropology (he might have termed it pathology) of the American missionaries, usually from the more obscure and fundamentalist Baptist sects from the South. His deep-seated scepticism is nowhere better displayed than in his accounts of their activities in the backwoods of China.

The war interrupted his work in China but he was to return soon after it was over and remained until 1950, describing so colourfully the siege and surrender of Beijing to the communist forces in his remarkable book first published as Revolution in China. This work, republished many times in Penguin as The Birth of Communist China, advances a theme detectable in his earlier writings but never so clearly. Patrick was aware of the dangers of accepting the cyclical or wave-like view of history portrayed in the dynastic chronicles commissioned by each emperor to present his reign in the most possible light. Even so, he saw the communist regime as yet another dynastic successor, with the first generation of leaders as scholars, albeit with a different doctrine, like their fathers. Their philosophy, he says in a passage frequently used as a chopping block in tutorials on Chinese politics, is still essentially the philosophy of their grandfathers. He was, then, a conservative historian in that he always denied anything like a 'qualitative change' took place in October, 1949.

FitzGerald had met Copeland in China and was invited to a visiting readership at The Australian National University. He was also in demand back at the School of Oriental (to which had been added African) Studies in London, but smart footwork by Sir Mark Oliphant while Acting Vice-Chancellor saw him with a chair and a new department, Far Eastern History, where he remained until his retirement.

He often described himself as an Irish conservative, and saw the irony in his popularity with the political left when he certainly did not subscribe to even neo-marxist historical analysis. The conservative government of the day certainly did not embrace him as one of their own and he was subject to attacks in parliament as that 'meddlesome professor' who had criticised Australia's position on the recognition of China and was later to write scathingly on the myth that the Vietminh had from the outset been a communist movement with no nationalist credentials at all. Along with Bishop Bergmann, Manning Clark and Jim Davidson, he wrote as early as April 1954 a public statement warning of the outcomes of a policy which so uncritically and quite wrongly accepted the American Cold War view of the war in Indochina.

In the fifties and early sixties he became known to new generations of students and earned their respect for his erudition and his application of his knowledge to the problems of the day. He saw no sense in isolating China and was the first president of the Australia-China Society. He led a delegation to China in 1956 and organised others so more Australians, influential or not, might see for themselves. All visitors were warned, however, that China is so vast that we should be cautious in any conclusions we might draw from the three-week tour. He built up his department, trained postgraduates and still wrote and lectured widely on China and on Australian foreign policy. He kept up an impressive output which increased if anything after his retirement. Lack of access did push him more towards looking at the overseas Chinese, but he was also able to produce considered works reflecting his long experience and reflection. In this genre, The Southern Expansion of the Chinese People and his charming memoir, Why China? stand out and repay rereading.

He was always sympathetic to China and would explain that it was because of the breadth, tolerance and objectivity of the culture. Others have extracted different themes in addition from such a long history, but Patrick could always explain his position with courtesy and example. Like others, he had great hopes for the Cultural Revolution when it began and was disappointed when it turned out to be rather more than a different way to conduct an election. He frequently disagreed with the present leadership and was no doubt very disappointed not to be able to visit China again when it seemed a new wave of changes flowed from the return of Deng Xiaoping in 1977. When interviewed not long before his death, he remained optimistic about the state of China and was confident that a new and better leadership by a younger generation would fulfill that optimism. 'Old men must die. [and] The very old men now in charge ... can't last much longer.'

Canberra, December 1993
YAO SPECIALISTS MEET IN THAILAND: - An Afterview

Douglas J. Miles

The International Association for Yao Studies held its fourth workshop in north Thailand last December when the Tribal Research Institute, University of Chiangmai hosted the event in collaboration with the Chiangmai Chapter for Yao Studies.

The ninety participants included representatives of tertiary institutes, government agencies and other organisations in China, Thailand, Laos, Hong Kong, the USA, Japan, France, the UK and Australia. The major sponsors were the Bank of Bangkok and Toyota which subsidised the travel and accommodation expenses of more than twenty associates of IAYS from China. Members from other countries paid a $US60 fee which covered five nights of accommodation at the Phucomb Hotel, all meals and a Khantok dinner. The program provided time for an evening reception at the TRI whose director Khun Chantaboon Sutthi delivered an illustrated address on the Institute's operations; also for a Yao banquet in the home of M. Jess Pourret whose collections of Yao manuscripts, artefacts and paintings were available for inspection both in his private museum and in a public exhibition at the Alliance Francaise.

The main proceedings which extended from the 2nd to the 5th December took the form of plenary meetings at which authors delivered abstracts of some 28 papers to initiate comment by panelists and contributors from the audience in Chinese, Mien, Thai and English. Dr Pornpan Juntaronaront provided instantaneous translations with some assistance from colleagues.

The theme for the 1994 workshop was 'Yao Literacy and Religion'. Three major lines of interest dominated discussion. One concerned the nature of the relationship between contemporary Yao ceremonial practice and distinct variants of Taoism evident from the study of texts which indicate the dynamism of southern China's religious history throughout the last five centuries.

A joint paper by Professor Jacques Lemoine (Chinese University of Hong Kong) and Professor Zhang Youjun (Guangxi Institute for Nationalities) proved to be outstandingly innovatory in this area of enquiry by announcing the discovery of the Meishan tradition of Taoism which was also the subject of a later commentary by Dr Lowell Star, Needham Institute, Cambridge.

Another line of major interest emanated from an appeal by Chao Kao Chiam (Iu-mienh Association of Oregon State) for the determination of a common script and orthography in which Yao of the USA, France, China, Laos and Thailand may communicate. The meeting noted the history of government opposition to the teaching of romanized Yao scripts to school children in Thailand.

Discussion of the question 'Are they Ancestor Worshipping?' (Doug Miles, James Cook University) revealed that there is widespread discomfort among Chinese graduate students in ethnology and sociology with the definitions which British anthropology has enshrined in the international literature about religion in their country.

As the gathering dispersed, there was general agreement among the participants that this meeting of IAYS had attained an unprecedented level in the standard of scholarship typifying the associations seminars; further that Chantaboon Sutthi and Chob Kachananda deserved the highest commendation not only for the efficiency with which they and their colleagues at the TRI organised the event but also for the atmosphere of amicability which prevailed throughout.

Books and other publications

Most books listed here will be reviewed in due course.

Edited Peter G. Warr The Thai Economy in Transition Cambridge University Press. Australian price $75
Reviews


Anyone who teaches undergraduate students about Asia from an anthropological perspective will find this introductory text an invaluable tool.

Indeed, the first pages of Grant Evans' introduction, 'Asia and the Anthropological Imagination', can well be described as inspired. Beginning with the question of 'What is Asia?'; Evans deftly shows how the notion of 'Asia' has, in various ways, been socially constricted -- the product first of European exploration, later redefined in reaction by Asians themselves--; he thus uses the question to illustrate the ways in which our basic categories of understanding reflect the very social and cultural world that they are meant to comprehend. This leads directly to the question of 'Why anthropology?' and to a fresh look at those hoary dichotomies of anthropology textbooks: - relativism/ethnocentrism, insider/outside and so on.

'This book', the Preface tells us, 'is for students of Asia', (it) 'takes mainstream anthropological themes and examines them through (the empirical lens of) Asian cultures and societies'. The book is conceived, in other words, as, at once, an introduction to anthropology and, at the same time, as an introduction to Asia from an anthropological point of view. In practice, however, some chapters seem likely to work better in anthropology courses, others in courses on Asia.

Any book comprised of chapters written by thirteen authors is bound to reflect marked differences of style and approach. Asia's Cultural Mosaic is no exception. Following a superb introduction, the second chapter, 'Asian Origins' by Sandra Bowdler, quickly bogs down in fossils, tool-types, sites and stratigraphy. The reader receives only slight guidance through a maze of contradictory interpretations, and the chapter ends abruptly, with only the briefest nod to the post-Pleistocene prehistory of Asia. By contrast, Chapter Three, 'The Linguistic Mosaic', by Amara Prasithrathsint, shows how readable and informative an otherwise technical topic can be, even while ranging over a number of topics, from possible links between language and modes of thought, to classification, national languages and linguistic
politics.

In 'Asian Families' and 'Ancestors and In-Laws', Clark Sorensen offers, in two chapters, an excellent introduction to domestic groups, kinship, and marriage in Asia. Up-to-date and lucid, Sorensen handles conceptual terms with insight while synthesizing and drawing out significant contracts within a vast ethnographic literature. Only in the second chapter does the discussion, particularly of lineage systems, seem rather more detailed than warranted in an introductory text. Here (and elsewhere) a useful addition might be, at the end of each chapter, brief suggestions for supplemental or follow-up reading. John Clammer's chapter on economic anthropology ('Fishermen, Forest-eaters, Peddlers, Peasants, and Pastoralists') is particularly good at posing general questions, although, unlike the previous chapters, ethnographic examples might have been explored further.

Paul Cohen's excellent chapter on the Asian state, 'Order under Heaven', is one of those that seems better suited to a course on Asia: similarly, Nicholas Tapp's chapter on religion, 'Karma and Cosmology'. Writing as an anthropologist, Tapp makes a persuasive case for the study of popular religion and the need to balance literate, text-oriented interpretations with a knowledge of popular practice. Grant Evans' 'Hierarchy and Dominance' presents a lively account of status, class, caste and stratification, while Lian Kwen Fee and Ananda Rajah, in 'The Ethnic Mosaic', offer a useful survey of ethnic relations in Asia, including a section on ethnic violence.

Christine Helliwell's engagingly-written chapter, 'Women in Asia', is excellent. Particularly useful is her re-examination of the 'domestic'/public' distinction. As she points out women play a prominent role in the urban workforce in East and Southeast Asia and hence in the region's current economic transformation. Also excellent, Patrick Guinness 'People in Cities' works well as both an introduction to urban anthropology and as a survey of urban society in Asia. Guinness skillfully contrasts alternative approaches to the city, showing how each adds to our understanding of urban life. He also gives a valuable account of urban ethnicity, pointing up the historical ethnic segregation of many Asian cities and the role of cities in the emergence of so-called plural societies in colonial Asia. Surprisingly, however, he makes only passing mention of the demise of Phnom Penh and so leaves unexamined the interesting question of why the remarkable antipathy of Asia's socialist states toward the city.

Jesucita Sodusta gives an admirably judicious account of fieldwork, research ethics, and the application of anthropology to development issues, such as health care and land reform; while in 'Japan: The Anthropology of Modernity', Joy Hendry presents an engrossing review of anthropological studies of Japanese life, highlighting their implications to contemporary theories of modernity.

In the final chapter, 'A Global Village? Anthropology in the Future', Evans discusses the dilemma of anthropology in a world of increasing global integration. What seems to be called for, he suggests, is a kind of macro-anthropology, yet the dilemma the discipline faces is how to reconcile this with anthropology's special commitment to documenting micro-worlds. A partial solution may be to give special attention to research sites at 'the interface of cultural interpenetration' --tourism in Asia being an example that Evans briefly explores. The chapter ends with the hope that Asian anthropologists, as their numbers continue to grow, will look increasingly towards regional comparisons and beyond, possibly moving anthropology full circle, away from its traditional pre-occupation with non-Western 'Others', to a new, and possibly deeper understanding of the West. Finally, the photographic illustrations deserve comment; they are the best I have seen in a textbook, timely, often thought-provoking, they avoid 'exoticizing' and are nicely linked to the written text.

Clifford Sather

Universiti Malaya/University of Oregon

Mayoury Ngaosyvathn Lao Women: yesterday and today. (In Lao and English) Appendix, transliteration, bibliography. Lao State Publishing Enterprise 1993. $10. Available from Mr Con Con, PO Box 898 Mt Travatt Central, Queensland 4122.

The book is divided into two sections: the first focusing on the politics of women's powerlessness and the second on
Lao women in a changing world. In the first section, women's roles in the spirit world are explored and contrasts drawn between animist and Buddhist periods. The social expectations placed upon women in relationships, in the village and in the wider community and the economics of the feminisation of poverty are discussed. In the second section, the changing economic and political environment of Laos is looked at with reference to women's political participation, new roles and oppportunities. The 1975 revolution led by the Lao Peoples Revolutionary Party heralded a new era of social reform for women, and the realities of such 'reform' are investigated.

The first chapter of Mayoury's book is a fascinating exploration of Lao women and their relation to the spirit world. Animism was the most prominent 'religion' in Laos before Buddhism became the accepted State religion. Within the realm of animist belief, women were considered worthy of respect due to their extensive links to the spirit world, however the increasing influence of Buddhism gradually eroded this esteemed social position. Women's involvement in the Buddhist religion is great, physically sustaining the monkhood through regular offerings of food, however involvement in religious activities at a higher level is considered taboo, effectively keeping women on the spiritual periphery of the religion they literally keep alive.

As well as religious exclusion and discrimination, women in Laos have had to contend with the restrictive expectations placed on them by society as often embodied in tradition. Legends and fairy tales repeatedly reinforced the concept of self denial and self sacrifice by women as worthy of praise and respect. This self denial expected of Lao women is particularly obvious when looking at the relationships between men and women. In the famous 'Khun Bulom' tale of the first king of the Lao people, the King spoke to his sons' wives saying 'Go to rest after your husbands and always be the first to rise; always foresee their commands...' Lao women are expected to respect and honour their husbands at any personal cost. Mayoury uses the term 'husband cult' to explain the way that women were treated almost as slaves and had to treat their husbands as gods in traditional Lao society. Modern Lao society however, does not seem markedly different

Modernity and change associated with outside influences is largely blamed for the current social transformation and dislocation in Laos.

Prostitution, rising crime levels and obsession with material goods are some of the problems identified. The impact of foreign ideals and the widespread acceptance of a 'foreign cultural model, of goods, dress and easy money' has had a long history in Laos due to Thai, French and Western interference and domination. Siamese domination in the nineteenth century is described as a period of persecution and corruption of Lao women, the French however are blamed for the introduction of prostitution. During the French colonial period Lao men were conscripted into the French Army where they became acquainted with Vietnamese prostitution, later bringing their acceptance and demand for prostitution back into Laos.

Some readers may find inconsistencies in the treatment of tradition in Mayoury's writing. The constant blame placed on outside influences for the demise of Lao tradition seems somewhat strange given the directness of Mayoury's earlier attack on tradition as a means of keeping women supressed. In her analysis of changing Laos Mayoury claims that 'Laos is a country where the inhabitants, particularly the women were long protected by tradition and customs'. One example of a dramatic departure from Lao tradition is Mayoury's promotion of Western feminist ideology, the opening quote of her text originating from Simone De Beauvoir's book The Second Sex.

The twentieth century has also been a period of great change, largely as a result of outside influences. According to Mayoury, the desire for material wealth and the ease of which aid money has been available has combined to create a 'parasitic culture' in Laos. The recent economic reform and greater acceptance of capitalism in Laos has also enabled the private sector to 'promote undesirable things'. Mayoury's concept of Laos as a peaceful, safe, family-oriented country before foreigners came and destroyed the status quo could be interpreted as patronising towards Lao people, implying their actions or attitudes are irrelevant. The government is however excluded from this apparent powerlessness, Mayoury suggesting that it is the duty of government to 'cautiously assess changes before allowing them to happen'.

The government in Laos has had a large impact on the day-to-day existence of many Lao women. Internal political change in Laos has been dramatic over the past century but the 1975 revolution was the first time Lao women were
involved and offered the prospect of equality and participation. The Lao PDR trained and educated women to be involved in the political system through night-time literacy classes and the sharing of traditionally 'male' duties. These attempts by the Lao PDR to make women's workload and general roles in society more equal were negated by the fact that women's workload actually increased as they were no longer only expected to look after their family, tend the garden and animals, but also to fulfill their duties toward the party and the nation.

One slightly bizarre embodiment of this political culture was the promotion of the 'Three Goods and Two Duties' whereby Lao women were expected to be 'good citizens, wives and mothers, while fulfilling their duties in the spirit of authentic internationalism and ardent patriotism'. 100,334 out of 2 million women were proclaimed to have met these requirements in 1988, 4 years after the government campaign began. As no men were targeted in such a way to be good fathers and husbands, the question is raised by Mayoury as to whether such programs did anything at all to advance the cause of women, actually imposing even more restrictions on their lives.

The two halves of Mayoury's book may appeal to different audiences. The first half of the book is written in a more personal and narrative style while the second half delves into the policies and statistical facts surrounding the Lao PDR. The book was first written in Lao and later translated into English, making an excellent reference to speakers of both languages. Lao Women: Yesterday and Today is a fascinating book as well as a valuable resource and I would not hesitate to recommend it.

Tameraine Beasley

Faculty of Asian Studies, ANU


We do not usually review or list books of this type in the Newsletter. Piroon, however, has been a good friend of the Project and a good friend of many members of the ANU and others in Australia. I would personally like to take this opportunity to bring this book to the notice of his many friends and to our readers in general. It is a fascinating view of Thai society not easily available to the foreigner.

Piroon spent many years in detention and was released during the liberalization of the Chatchai prime ministership. This book is evidence of both the gentleness and strength of his character. It contains seventeen short accounts of the people with whom he shared that period of detention and some of the events that took place. There are no heroics here, only the warm appreciation of the lives and tragedies of other people looked at with a sense of humour and self-awareness.

The story which gives the title to the book sets the tone and conveys the character. The immediate incident is the narrator's attempt to brighten the surroundings of his detention by carefully cultivating a betel plant in an empty brandy bottle. Part of this task was the careful removal of dust from the leaves of the plant. He recalls having performed such tasks before - during a period of residence in the USA. He is employed to wipe the leaves of plants in a commercial sales room. He meets a Thai woman who also works there and a gentle friendship develops as she brings extra food for him at lunch time - Thai food to replace the eternal sandwiches. The relationship ends when the American boss claims proprietary rights over her and sacks the narrator.

The turbulence of the period is reflected in the tragedies of the many detainees. There is the Vietnamese, with no hope of quick release detained because he was found outside his restricted area; the old man who has the promise of a transfer to an old people's home - but he must first find 8000 baht to pay ten years' alien's registration fee - a sum quite beyond his means; and then there is the man not guilty of any misdoing - just found by Border Police on the Thai side of the border, with no papers. In detention no one seems to know who he is or where he comes from. Is he Yunnanese? Is he Shan? The tragedy is heightened by the fact that these are not difficult questions to answer. In detention they remain unanswered; the man is to be deported but there is no place to deport him to.
It is hoped an English translation will be available in the not too distant future.

Gehan Wijeyewardene

* * *

**Notices**

The Research School of Pacific Studies of The Australian National University has decided that it will henceforth be known as the research school of pacific and asian studies.

**Newsletter**

Requests to be placed on our mailing list now go on a waiting list. We try to shorten the waiting period as much as possible.

Back numbers 1-22 are still available at Aus$10 each. We now have a maximum price of Aus$100 for this run. Copies of Number 23 onwards will be charged at Aus$10 each with no discount. Some issues are only available as photocopies. As always we are happy for readers to make their own copies. We also have no objection to reproduction of material from the Newsletter as long as due acknowledgment is made.

Please note that all payments must be made in advance in Australian dollars. University bankers do not allow us to handle foreign currencies without exorbitant charges.

Also note that the Newsletter is available on computer network. The numbers available are regularly updated.

ACCESS:
ftp to coombs.anu.edu.au
gopher to coombs.anu.edu.au OR cheops.anu.edu.au, port 70

Scott Bamber is away on fieldwork and this issue of the Newsletter is edited by Gehan Wijeyewardene in the Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University.

*  

The electronic mail address for correspondence is: GEW400@COOMBS.ANU.EDU.AU

*  

This issue of the Newsletter is published with the aid of a grant from the National Thai Studies Centre.

G.W.

*  

1 The Nation Feb 25, 1994

2 The Nation, March 12, 1994

3 Bangkok Post, January 8, 1994

4 The Nation, January 31, 1994

5 Who also oversaw the Cambodian repatriation process

7 Warzones: Cultures of Violence, Militarisation and Peace, Working Paper No 145, Peace Research Centre, Research
School of Pacific and Asian Studies, ANU, February 1994

8 Green November, Deadly Energy, August-September 1993; The Nation, March 11 1992

9 The Nation, March 11, 1994

10 Bangkok Post, February 25, 1994

11 This slogan appears in large bold letters daily in Burma’s official newspaper, New Light of Myanmar

* Department of Anthropology, The Australian National University

*Asian Studies, ANU

**Anthropology, University of Sydney

12 This article appeared in The Nation Sunday, November 27, 1988. Serious water problems in Thailand and SEAsia generally gives it current relevance. The original article was published under the pseudonym 'Laurie Rothweld'.

13 Ann Turner interviewed Patrick FitzGerald for the National Library in late February 1992. Her interpretations have been of great value in assembling this tribute (IW).