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Jim Placzek

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how much information offered by this book could be of benefit to readers whose interests are in related fields and who have a sufficient basic knowledge of Indonesia, its people, and its culture.

Overall, the book is a valuable contribution to the literature of Indonesian studies, Southeast Asian studies, and studies on performing arts in general. Its extensive examination of the concepts of modernity and tradition in the performing arts of Indonesia, and how both concepts are intertwined and inseparable, will be of great benefit to specialists in the field of Asian cultural studies.

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Thailand: Shifting Ground between the US and a Rising China

BENJAMIN ZAWACKI

London: Zed Books, 2017.

Thailand: Shifting Ground between the US and a Rising China is an indispensable handbook for those who study Thailand or whose work involves the kingdom. A detailed review of the past several decades, it itemizes the steps with which the various governments of Thailand have dealt with the rise of China and its intensive expansion into Southeast Asia, which has been matched by progressive American withdrawal and occasionally the United States completely ignoring the region and its longstanding ally Thailand.

The book is backed up by Benjamin Zawacki's 15 years as a resident of Thailand, and his extensive and thorough interviews with major players in the United States and Thailand, including former US secretaries of state and ambassadors, and former Thai premiers, ministers of foreign affairs, as well as Thai military, political, and social leaders.

In fact, the intensity of the details and the argument contribute to the one negative of the book: the unusually complex and oblique sentence structures, which make it a challenging read even for someone familiar with modern Thailand. It can be a challenge for the casual reader or the undergraduate student. If anything, Zawacki is too absorbed in the historical events he reviews and the people he interviews.

The people Zawacki thanks and those who are quoted by the publisher with very positive comments on this book are a who's who of Thai political leaders, respected commentators, activists, and scholars. The list also includes a large number of leading foreign scholars and news analysts. Underlying all this is the significance of Zawacki's main point: the historic turn of Thai foreign policy and internal values toward those of China, as the United States willingly fades into the historical distance from modern-day Southeast Asia. This is described in several dust-jacket quotes as a "wake-up call." It turns out that Zawacki has a few more timely and profound insights to share

as well.

Zawacki has been a regular contributor to the media in Southeast Asia but also has considerable involvement with international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and the Harvard Law School Human Rights Program. He also served as a policy adviser to US President Jimmy Carter. Though he has lived for the past 15 years in Thailand, in his Introduction he affirms that he is an American and a patriot, and therefore states, "I forfeit any claim to neutrality in this book" (p. ix). This is shown in his clear distaste of Obama's policies toward Asia (e.g., p. 9) and occasional revelations of his very American point of view.

The historic change in Thai foreign relations and related political values is described by Zawacki as an "institutional, cultural, and *national* consensus" (his emphasis, p. 4). Until recent times Thailand was a US ally, strongly reinforced by the long and historic rule of the US-born King Rama IX. Now that the beloved Rama IX has been ritually cremated, Thailand's connection and identification with the United States has come to an end: "More than simply afford the [US] alliance royal cache, Thailand's king and queen were an indispensable and—as proven five decades later—irreplaceable piece of it" (p. 41). Zawacki charts in great detail the many steps along this path in modern Thai history.

The rise of Chinese influence is also felt more generally in Southeast Asia, where US naval dominance of the Straits of Malacca potentially constricts China's oil supply, and China's charm offensive is felt not only in Thailand but also in Myanmar, Cambodia, across Asia and Africa, and into Latin America. China has created over 3,000 acres of artificial islands in the South China Sea (p. 9) over which it claims sovereignty, but it is currently downplaying this extremely controversial claim, allowing local nations to get used to the reality of a Chinese presence in the middle of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

In Part 1 Zawacki reviews the complex history of Thailand ("Siam") since before World War II, including the central role of the partly assimilated ethnic Chinese immigrants to Bangkok and the urban centers. One way of understanding Thai politics is to see the Sino-Thais as an unclearly defined elite among the Thai upper classes. During World War II Sino-Thais made up as much as 16 percent of the population of Siam (p. 33) and half the population of Bangkok. They were the largest ethnic Chinese population in Southeast Asia by 1965 (p. 39); and by 1994, 86 percent of Southeast Asia's billionaires were of Chinese descent (pp. 80–81). The Thai parliament in 2001 was as much as 90 percent Sino-Thai (p. 111). Sino-Thais were gradually becoming a crucial element in the political life of the nation, and eventually the money politics of the Sino-Thai international corporations became a major support for the Network Monarchy, which is resurrecting itself in the current era of King Rama X (pp. 70–71). This gradual dominance of Thai governing bodies has relaxed the former restrictions and limitations on Chinese people, language, and culture. But of course by now Sino-Thais are fully assimilated Thais and share a long-term awareness of Chinese influence on the ultimate value of Thai politics: independence.

Meanwhile, the number of Thai-Chinese visiting China rose by over 60 percent between 1997 and 2003 (p. 113) and Thailand began to welcome increasing numbers of Chinese tourists.

The other point verified relentlessly by Zawacki's research is that, in the words of former Thai Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, ". . . we did not leave America, but you left us" (p. 45).

Part 2 covers the rise of Thaksin Shinawatra to electoral dominance in Thailand, and his overt exaltation of business above all other beliefs and strategies. Under Thaksin, "following four decades of upward mobility within and across all sectors of Thai society, the start of a new century saw the Sino-Thai ready to lead the nation" (p. 111). Thaksin was not fully representative of the Sino-Thai center, as he was from the police rather than the army and was a northerner who gained his electoral support from the North and the Northeast. The country is currently in the final stages of the process of replacing Thaksin with today's Sino-Thai political-military elite, the new Network Monarchy: "In the intra-elite political conflict just underway, the Chinese of Thailand would constitute both sides" (p. 114).

Zawacki also scathingly summarizes the rise and fall of "Thai-style" democracy (especially pp. 129–139). He argues forcefully that "When for six months prior to a coup in 2014 millions of Thais called for replacing electoral democracy with selected leadership, one was to properly understand them as anti-democratic" (p. ix).

These are some of the reasons why Zawacki's book is even more insightful and more valuable than the title implies.

Part 2 records the deepening role of Thailand as the "gateway to ASEAN," including its role as the first ASEAN country to sign a Free Trade Agreement with China (p. 117) and the first ASEAN country to conduct joint military drills with China (p. 123). Zawacki accurately positions this change in Thai international orientation as one aspect of the current global reorganization driven by the Internet and related media, a process labeled "globalization" in general.

The only issue I have with this work is the subtly ironic and very complexly structured sentences, which require a rereading or two to realize that the grammar may be technically correct but the references, pronominal and otherwise, are far too complex for most readers, even those familiar with modern Thai history and regional politics. A serious improvement would be an appendix or glossary. Some examples of this very common and unnecessary complexity are the following:

But it was Chuan who had laid the visit's political groundwork and it was Chuan whom Clinton would host two years later. On account of what transpired between his two terms, Chuan's policies would also inadvertently contribute to Thailand's realignment in the 21st century at the hands of his second successor. (p. 76)

China's repeated claims to the contrary notwithstanding, its silence on Thailand's coups and rights violations is the opposite of "non-interference in domestic affairs". (p. 12)

The State Department's backing of Phibun would relegate it to the US foreign policy wilderness in Thailand. (p. 21)

Rather than see the alliance [with the United States] as having championed their democratic rights and defended them from communist aggression, they saw it as precluding the former and substituting the latter for joint military domination. (p. 46)

While its approach concerned a more conciliatory ASEAN—which began to see Thailand as a part of a larger Chinese design to utilize or neutralize it—China agreed the following year to support a possible Indochina federation. (p. 74)

Zawacki also has a penchant for subtle, implied criticism, a love for abstract literary contrasts, and a deep underlying sense of irony.

Examples of the author's abstract contrasts are "rule of law or by law" (p. 1), "fluent in fallacy" (p. 4), and "nothing succeeds like failure" (p. 6).

An example of underlying irony (and complexity) is: "Indeed, accounting for both the undisputable legitimacy of the Thaksin government and a cognitive dissonance that attends any analysis of his actual governance, was the huge majority of Thais who consistently voted for him" (p. 129).

Despite the stylistic complexities, Zawacki's scholarship deserves the reviewers' high praise. For its main point, its detailed examples and arguments, the book is an absolute necessity for advanced classes or research focused on Thailand and even on ASEAN and its relations with China and the United States. The author is an especially astute observer of the internal issues, personnel, and attitudes of US governmental agencies that interacted with Thailand during the last several decades.

As for Zawacki's writing style, perhaps it is not actually a complaint if a book makes you stop and think, even if it does so fairly often.

A new era has begun in which the rise of China in Asia is as nearly complete as the decline of the United States. Zawacki's book chronicles in detail this change in Thailand and in ASEAN and is as prophetic as the promotional quotes claim.

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