

the book gives us many excellent insights drawn from economics, economic history, and political economy, insights that cut right and deeply into the question. This is where I believe the essential value of the book lies. Professor Somboon's posthumous manuscript is an excellent academic work as well as a nice textbook on economic development in Thailand. Above all, however, the readers will be impressed by this book's celebration of the life and career of one faithful economist who dealt clear-eyed and courageously with the economy of his home country.

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Gambling with the Land: The Contemporary Evolution of Southeast Asian Agriculture

RODOLPHE DE KONINCK and JEAN-FRANÇOIS ROUSSEAU
Singapore: NUS Press, 2012, xv+187p.

Gambling with the Land is one of a series of publications resulting from an international research project on "Challenges of the Agrarian Transition in Southeast Asia" funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The main aim of this book is to illustrate ongoing agricultural intensification and expansion throughout Southeast Asian countries by means of an analysis of statistical data. The book focuses in particular on rapid agricultural transformation that began in the middle of the twentieth century, and draws on statistics relating to agricultural production such as crops, livestock, land, production, yields, irrigated areas, the application of chemical fertilizers, the use of tractors, and so on. In spite of the limitations of the database examined in the book, in terms of both time and space and the quality of the data, the authors have managed to present a general analysis of agricultural data and offer a contemporary account of changes taking place in Southeast Asian agriculture.

The authors identify four processes behind the agricultural transformation occurring in Southeast Asian countries: commoditization; globalization; "agriculturalization"; and relays and complementarities of agriculture among nations. These four processes have unevenly developed across the countries and have been influenced by various factors such as a range of national policies, a number of political events, wars, colonialism, regional and international agencies, and the ecological settings specific to the region. These processes bear out a unique feature of Southeast Asian countries: agricultural intensification and expansion go hand-in-hand, thereby contradicting the widely held belief that agricultural development intensifies only after expansion. "Agriculturalization" is the most interesting process discussed in the book. Research and statistical data confirm that there is an increase in labor migration as a result of the shift from agriculture to

industry and services, on which the income structure has become more reliant on such domains. On the other hand, this book also demonstrates that agricultural employment in rural areas is actually increasing in Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, and the Philippines. As such, the keyword “gambling” is used to describe the nature of the people who largely bet on the land.

The main feature of this book is its detailed use of data derived mainly from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAOSTAT) data sets between 1961 to 2007 and other figures that paint a contemporary picture of agriculture at the national level. In total, 138 figures account for a total of 187 book pages, and a large part of these are found in chapters 5 to 7 (these in fact make up the bulk of chapter 5’s “Agricultural Growth, Diversification, Intensification and Expansion,” chapter 6’s “Expansion and Intensification of Food Crops and Increase in Livestock Production,” and chapter 7’s “Expansion and Intensification of Cash Crops”). Chapter 7, with 51 figures, is the most important part of this book. Statistics on cash crops such as palm oil, coffee, rubber, tea, coconut, copra oil, cocoa, and sugarcane are used to explain harvested areas, ratios, yields, productions, and the amount of exports and imports by country.

However, as the authors mention through their analysis, FAOSTAT as well as statistics from other sources are prone to a number of errors and biases. For example, in regard to national statistics in Laos which I am most familiar with, there are considerable variations in the quality of the data across regions and years. My own fieldwork in Laos has led me to many villages where villagers claim that statistical data had not been collected until relatively recently. With land area, the large differences that exist in the collection of land area statistics (i.e. between data on authorized land certifications for household and data measured by survey, GIS, and GPS) are common. As such, it is not uncommon for the landholding size of household to be several times larger or smaller than that claimed in the certification. Moreover, villages that are located in remote areas might have frequently been omitted from the data gathering. Biases inherent in data arise from surveyors’ difficulties in gaining access to villages, and can result in underestimation of total agricultural land alongside exaggeration of the state of agriculture (as conducted in accessible areas and as presented in past records). Statistics can also underestimate agricultural activities during periods of political instability. An example of this would be Indochina during the tumultuous 1960s to 1970s, when authorities in charge of collecting statistics could not fully function at a time of war and conflict. When using statistical data, we need to keep in mind that they are just one of many instruments available for shedding light on aspects of agriculture.

The interpretation of data and items gathered and appearing in statistics are prescribed not only by common sense in the areas of expertise, but also the experiences of interpreters working in the regions. For instance, in chapter 5, the authors attribute an increase in the share of non-food production in 1970s Laos to opium production. Although opium may have been one form of non-food production that contributed to the fluctuations, these same fluctuations could also be attributable to the depletion of rice production. Although this tendency is not apparent in the statistics

presented in chapter 6, it is a well-known fact that agricultural collectivization, compounded by the severe flood in 1970s, devastated wet rice farming and consequently led to the starvation of large number of farmers. Factoring such ground level developments in Laos might have resulted in a better interpretation of statistics.

Although statistics obviously include potential biases and errors, it is also true that they are often the only data available from which we can infer geographical variations and longitudinal changes in agriculture. Although the findings of this book are neither groundbreaking nor innovative, *Gambling with the Land* is undoubtedly an informative reference on the agricultural transformation in Southeast Asia over the last 60 years.

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Student Activism in Malaysia: Crucible, Mirror, Sideshow

MEREDITH L. WEISS

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In April 2012, the amendment of the University and University College Act (UUCA) was approved in the lower house of Parliament in Malaysia. Before the amendment, UUCA had prohibited students from joining political parties and supporting political campaigning and protests. Although the amended law now allows students to engage in political activities outside campus, it is still restrictive because, for example, the new law gives each university the power to decide which organizations are allowed for student participation except political parties. But what is important here is that the Malaysian government has relaxed the UUCA, the restrictive provisions of which the government had hitherto refused to amend since its introduction in 1971. Against this background, the decline of the intellectual quality and the apathy of students in local universities have become increasingly apparent in recent times. The major parts of *Student Activism in Malaysia* read as an historical narrative, but also give us numerous suggestions and hints concerning current Malaysian politics and society.

The concept of “student activism” is ambiguous, as this book points out. While Weiss defines “student” as a collective identity and discussions of “student activism” in this book usually refer to students enrolled in tertiary-level institutions, the status of students is rather confusing “since they are expected to be future leaders, students’ potential may garner them respect and cultivate arrogance disproportionate to their age and experience, yet they remain for the moment still subordinates in society” (p. 3). On the other hand, Weiss argues that “efforts to define student activ-