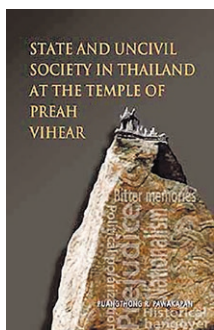


Uncivil society

This short book discusses what Shakespeare's Hamlet [Act 4, Scene 4] might have termed 'an egg-shell', something small over which armies of 'mass and charge' might contend. But nationalism has made frontiers an even more sensitive matter than in the great playwright's time, and the popularisation of politics can conduce to outright conflict. The tussle between Thailand and Cambodia over the temple of Preah Vihear – which led to some loss of life, notably in 2011 – is a case in point. As Dr Puangthong R. Pawakapan suggests, it raises other issues too, given, for example, the fact that the two countries are members of ASEAN and that the regional organization is aiming to make itself more people-centred.

Nicholas Tarling



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Puangthong R. Pawakapan. 2013. *State and Uncivil Society in Thailand at the Temple of Preah Vihear*. Singapore: ISEAS, ISBN:9789814459907

A FULLER UNDERSTANDING of the issue arguably calls for a longer history than the author has room for in her nevertheless telling book. The relations of the two countries have often been unhappy. A diminished Khmer state faced Thai dominance even before the Vietnamese appeared on the scene. It was to preserve what remained that subsequently led the king to accept French 'protection' in the 1860s. The French colonial venture in 'Indo-China' – an amazingly aggressive operation – put on a show of regaining the monuments of the Khmer empire. Angkor was one, Preah Vihear another. The conflict with Thailand did not end with the blockade of the Menam in 1893, but in a treaty of 1907 France secured Cambodia's 'lost provinces', Siemreap and Battambang. In 1908 a boundary commission agreed on



the Dongrek range as the basic frontier line, but allotted the temple to Cambodia. That perhaps helped to appease the *parti colonial*, which wanted to go further, and Khmer monarchists who wanted some counterpart to an intensified protectorate.

In the Japanese phase, Thailand regained the provinces, but, very reluctantly, returned them to French-protected Cambodia after the war. With the defeat of the French in Vietnam and their virtual departure from Indo-China in the 1950s, Cambodia had to make new arrangements for ensuring its independence and territorial integrity. That became the diplomatic objective of Sihanouk. Though he might not fit Hamlet's characterisation of Fortinbras, 'a delicate and tender Prince', he was percipient as well as persistent. Both Thailand and South Vietnam fell into an American sphere. That made him more concerned about his neighbours, not less.

The dispute with Thailand over Preah Vihear he took to the International Court of Justice. In 1962 that decided the question of the ownership of the temple itself in Cambodia's favour – to the fury of Thailand's strongman, Sarit – but the court did not decide on the frontier. That left a disputed territory of truly eggshell size.

With the end of the Cold War, and the re-creation of a non-Communist Cambodia, Thailand looked to improved relations, which would give its rising industries a market and promote its 'Golden' dreams for the region in a new and more acceptable form. Perhaps over-ambitiously, Cambodians and Thais sought to make the temple an emblem of a new relationship. It would also be a tourist centre, and making it a World Heritage site is a recognised way of promoting heritage tourism.

The arrangements, however, became a focus for the political disputes in Thailand that pitted primate city against countryside, middle-class against peasantry, conservatives against Thaksin, and, on the streets and at the airport, 'Yellows' against 'Reds'. The Yellows took up Preah Vihear as a national cause, sustaining it even after Thaksin was displaced in 2006, and indeed after the Democrat Abhisit became Prime Minister in 2008.

The historiographical community, like others, was divided. The author of this book was one of a group headed by the respected Charnvit Kasetsiri that endeavoured to undercut nationalist misinterpretations and offer a more reasoned and better supported background to the affair. Her book now does the task for us. It is also a good advertisement for good history and its public importance.

As her title suggests, she raises some other considerations. Civil society organizations are widely thought essential to democracy, but the activities of the People's Alliance for Democracy suggest that they may also undermine it. The events of 2008-11 are thus not only part of the turbulent history of democracy in Siam/Thailand since the original coup of the Promoters. They may also have wider implications for other would-be democracies and for ASEAN itself. Its essential basis is the burying, if not resolving, of inter-member disputes. Can that be sustained if they are dealt with 'uncivilly'?

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Geopolitics of energy

Secure oil and alternative energy is the second and last volume coming out of a research project shared by the KNAW and the Chinese Academy of Sciences respectively. In their introduction, the editors argue that shared interests of China and the EU create conditions for cooperation between these large energy importers and point to the obstacles to overcome.

Henk Houweling



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M. Parvizi Amineh and Yang Guang (eds.) 2012. *Secure oil and alternative energy. The geo-politics of energy paths of China and the European Union*, Leiden: Brill, ISBN: 9789004218574 (hb)

THE WORK DIVIDES its 13 articles into two parts, respectively entitled "Geopolitics, geo-economy and energy" and "Renewable energy and sustainable development". The papers are written by specialists, often drawing from their ongoing research, yet address a larger audience. The editors have cast their net wide. At the regional level, Cutler and Umbach each focus on Caspian-Central Eurasian energy, though from a different perspective, while Sun Hongbo studies energy linkages between China and Latin America with the focus on Venezuela. The work has three chapters on Iran as foreign policy actor and oil exporter. At the national level, Rakel reports on elite change and its impact on the foreign policy orientation of Iran since the presidency of Ahmadinejad. Yu Guoqing studies Chinese – Iranian relations since the conclusion of the 1942 Friendship Treaty between Persia and the Kuomintang government. Currently, Iran is substantial oil supplier to China. Unlike China, Japanese – Iranian relations, studied by Raquel Shaoul, are severely constrained by Japan's alliance with the US. Despite America's inability to supply oil to Japan, its government has duly

supported US sanctions on Iran since 2005. Zhao Huirong and Wu Hongwei follow up the theme of Umbach and Cutler with a case study of Chinese – Kazakh bilateral political economy of oil and gas deals, competing with the geo-political interests of particularly Russia. Chen Mo, reflecting on the long bilateral relations between China and Angola, writes on the current exchange relation between them of oil for infrastructure. In the 1970s Chinese-Russian competition in Angola landed China on the same side as the US, both supporting UNITA of Savimbi.

Clean energy

Part two, on clean energy, comprises five chapters, four of which are at the national level. Scholten writes on green innovation, Li Xiaohua studies the Chinese solar energy sector; Lima reports on biofuel developments in Brazil and its contested sustainability. Vermeer investigates causes of the slowing down of the hydro-energy projects announced in the 2008 National Development and Reform Commission's plan. Hydropower is the largest source of efficient renewable energy. He finds that the 2007 change from high to low electricity prices, affecting investor's rate of return, is one cause; the fragmented policy making machinery, driven by conflicting national and provincial actor interest, resettlement costs and concerns about responses to environmental impacts of the often large projects, are part of the equation. At the same time solar and wind energy equipment producers pressure for the expansion of their business. The recent trade conflict between the EU and China about solar panel subsidies testifies to the link-up between the industry and the Chinese government. The disappointment expressed by the US for the EU's compromise with China, highlights the global importance of solar

