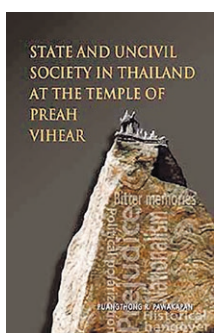


Uncivil society

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



Reviewed publication:

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'?

Nicholas Tarling, from the New Zealand Asia Institute (The University of Auckland), is an historian, academic, and author. (n.tarling@auckland.ac.nz)

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



Reviewed publication:

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

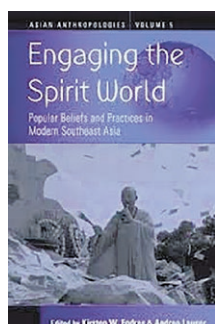
Part two, on clean energy, comprises five chapters, four of which are at the national level. Scholten writes on green innovation, Li Xiaohua studies the Chinese solar energy sector; Lima reports on biofuel developments in Brazil and its contested sustainability. Vermeer investigates causes of the slowing 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



Engaging the spirit world

As the contributions to this collection rekindled my early experiences 'in the field', reading through the ten chapters of *Engaging the Spirit World* was great fun. As the greenhorn I was, I laughed at my initial encounter with 'spirits' (*phii*) in Thailand, which so upset my girlfriend that she slapped me in the face. It spelled the end to my fun. I not only learned to take beliefs seriously – whether western, eastern, religious, or political – but also to realise that for the believers concerned these represented their living experience. In that sense, beliefs are as tangible as a bowl of rice and have to be explored concretely before we, 'servants of science', put any 'theoretical' *à priori* on top of them.

Niels Mulder



Reviewed publication:

Endres, K.W. & A. Lauser (eds.) 2011. *Engaging the Spirit World; Popular Beliefs and Practices in Modern Southeast Asia*, New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, ISBN 9780857453587 (hb)

IN SEVERAL EARLY CHAPTERS of the collection, researchers apparently struggled with the above caveat. Rather belatedly, they discovered that 'modernisation theory' about disenchantment, rationalisation, and its supposed correspondence with capitalism consisted of heaps of untenable hypotheses. This I experienced on Java while doing research among sophisticated members of the urban upper and middle classes in the late 1960s. To them, the practice of mysticism or the development of the secretive 'inner man' (*kebatinan*) was at least as real as their Dutch-taught 'rationality'. It spelled my escape from the intellectual straight-jacket of high-flown ivory tower assumptions.

I realised that the world is an enchanted place, with or without religion. Imagine the desert that life would be without fantasy and art, without dreaming and making love. We simply need these to sustain ourselves. Besides, don't most people in this world take the existence of an esoteric double – 'their soul' – for granted?

The intention of *Engaging* is to illuminate the wider context of the contemporary dynamics of religion in Southeast Asia. The flourishing of religion, urban mediumship, the worship of ancestors, heroes and deities, and the need to appease hosts of unfulfilled lives/souls evoked by unrestrained American barbarism in Vietnam – with which the editors are most familiar – led to inviting the contributors to the collection to relate and reflect on their research in Laos, on the Indonesian islands of Lombok and Java, in Vietnam,

Korea, Malaysia, Burma, Southern Thailand, and on Thai ghost films-cum-horror movies.

In the process of examining contemporary engagements with the world of spirits, ghosts and ancestors, most contributors bend over backwards to offer insights and fresh interpretations that seek to contribute to the theoretical discussion of the relationship between religion and modernity. To their credit, all of them take the phenomena they encounter 'in the field' seriously and engage with these as the point of departure for building 'grounded theory'.

Writing the last sentence made me conscious of the datedness of my vocabulary, as the ideas of phenomenology and grounded theory simply do not occur in the collection. The various researchers make an 'ontological approach' to their subject matter – which is fine by me – while proposing that modernity does not equate with the western ideal type of it. As a result, authors recommend 'alternative modernities' that assume their own characteristics depending on the (cultural) milieu in which they originate. Next to this, they recognise that the idea of the autonomous individual is an inapplicable construct to elucidate Southeast Asian personality. Life and self-definition thereabouts are strongly relational' and may make us aware that modern westerners are not such lonely monads, either.



A delightful observation proffered is the idea that spirits and all the beliefs that surround them are pleasantly flexible; whereas they do not escape from the wide realm of religion, they are impervious to dogma and doctrine. As a result, they can accommodate to any circumstance and practice of modern life. So, as we study them, we should be aware that they are in step with contemporary existence, which seems to me a rather basic field-anthropological assumption.

The book is composed with the expectation to contribute to the

re-enchantment debate. In order to do so, the authors assume that local traditions of engaging supernatural entities are important arenas in which the dynamics of political, economic and social change are confronted and negotiated. Accordingly, market relations, economic opportunity, social change, power struggles, etc., are brought into relation with the reconfiguration of local spirit worlds. In doing so, it bared the necessity of reshaping discourses on cultural identity, morality, power relations, and interpretative control, while challenging the concept of modernity itself. Altogether, these ambitions resulted in a loose plethora of stimulating ideas that make the collection well-worth reading.

During a possession session on Java, I did an interview with the Nyai Loro Kidul, the mystical queen of the southern ocean; in Thailand, my broad smile excited the tenth century Marshal of the Queen of Dvaravati so much that he threatened me with an accident on my way home – and I must avow that I drove more precautionary than usual; in the Philippines, reputed medium Mang Tinoy urged me to team up when he hopped around his audience as the playful Santo Niño (Holy Child Jesus). After many such experiences 'in the field', I was well-prepared to take my anaesthetist brother seriously when he volunteered that he regularly conferred with my Dutch-Reformed minister-grandfather who died when he (my brother) was three years old. Wherever we are, we live with fairies – and we need them dearly.

Niels Mulder retired to the southern slope of the mystically potent Mt. Banáhaw, Philippines, where he concluded his swan song, *Situating Filipino Civilisation in Southeast Asia; Reflections and observations*, Saarbruecken: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2012 (print-to-order ed., ISBN 978-3-659-13083-0). (niels_mulder201935@yahoo.com.ph)

Reference

1 Mulder, N. 2011. 'The Crux is the Skin: Reflections on Southeast Asian Personhood', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 1/2011: 95-116.

industry, as well as its clout, in China and the US. The largest producer of panels in the EU, Germany, the sector lost influence relative to automotive and machine tool exporters to the PRC. Vermeer takes into account the implication of the slowdown in hydropower for China's 2010 Copenhagen commitment to procure 15% of electricity from non-fossil sources.

The work concludes with an essay on the somewhat torturous notion of global energy governance and its evolution since early 20th century, a thing which in the words of the author "is highly diffuse and almost non-existent". Borrowing from Beriman's Earth System Governance, the author sees global energy governance at work where others tend to see the pursuit of national interest by the strongest powers.

Potential areas of cooperation

What to make of this vast and multi-authored study?

The editors of the work under review hint to potential areas of cooperation between these two large energy importers. However, this theme does not figure explicitly in the work. I find that unfortunate. Relations between domestic growth and international conflict about raw materials got, and still gets, most of the scholarly attention. Take for example the still influential study of Nazli Choucri and Robert C. North, *Nations in conflict. National growth and international violence*. San Francisco: Freeman (1975). They developed a model, and tested its observable implications empirically, for the era of Europe's second industrial revolution annex competitive colonization drive. They found strong linkages between and among the expansion of industry in western European countries, domestic pressure to go beyond borders to get access to resources, conflicting claims on territory and maritime trade routes,

alliance activity, military build-ups and militarized inter-state disputes. National level rival mobilizations around these conflicts were not mediated by parliament, leading to rallies and clashes between large, organized sectors of the domestic economy. These domestic contests played role in conflict escalation. The editors of the work under review take exception to the inevitability of a repetition of such a development. They hint to potential areas of cooperation between these two large energy importers. For many, turning around the causal linkage between growing resource use from conflict towards cooperation instead, may come as a surprise. Why? Ascending, middle-income, China is urbanizing its vast peasant population at an unprecedented rate. These low per capita energy consumers in the most populous country of the world used to depend on biomass for cooking and heating. Bringing these people to an urban environment will increase their per capita fossil consumption, which interacts with food and water supplies as well as emissions. Accordingly, it should not come as a surprise that China is destined to pass the US as the largest oil-importer in the next couple of years, increasing its still relatively low per capita rate of consumption. High-income, highly urbanized, Europe on the other hand, already operates on a high level of per capita fossil energy use. Indeed, World Energy Outlook 2010 estimates primary energy demand to increase by 36% between 2008-2035. As may be expected, most of that increase will come from Asian demand. In my opinion, these very characteristics of the Chinese – European dyad do not only imply a potential for conflict. They also create a bargaining field for cooperation on the basis of shared interests. Chinese and European economies are connected through a dense network of trade, investment and transport linkages. It is in the EU's interest

to assist China further improving its energy efficiency in the fossil sector. It would slow down the rate of resource depletion when current oil exporters with high population growth are increasing their domestic consumption. Today, Saudi Arabia is the only exporter with an oil-surplus production capacity.

Another area of cooperation between China and the EU is the emerging clean energy sector. China and the European Union try to escape from the fossil-carbon emission trap by developing domestic sources of clean energy. If successful, developing domestic sources of clean energy should further reduce the level of lateral pressure in each of them to compete for access to sources beyond borders. The joint development of clean energy points to the shared long-term interest in viability of both societies in the face of climate change. In the European Union, international energy cooperation also serves the latent objective to contribute to the creation of energy policy competence at the EU-level, with the potential spin-off of for strengthening the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Supported by, among others, the Chinese Academy and the International Institute for Asian Studies in Leiden, Amineh and Yang Guang have currently underway a shared research project on the trans-nationalization of Chinese oil companies and their involvement with local governments and institutions. We are looking forward to seeing what is happening on the ground in several large energy exporting countries of Africa and Latin America.

Henk Houweling, Associate Professor of International Relations, University of Amsterdam; Instructor at the Europe Institute of the University of Macau. (hwhouweling@gmail.com)