

lively manner. By doing this, he provides more detailed information about Duch than Chandler or Bizot. In addition, the book brings readers to an understanding of a few other points. First, it presents the Cambodian political culture of patronage and the strings that were used during the Khmer Rouge and continue to dominate the Cambodian political landscape until today. Second, Duch shared a psychological belief with other Khmer Rouge cadres of exclusively following one idea and giving no credence to any other view. He strictly followed the Khmer Rouge's ideology and policy, which resulted in the tragedy of cadres following orders without critical consideration of its impact. Hinton, as well as Chandler, agrees that it was "unquestioning obedience to authority." Third, the articulation of Duch as either man or monster is not valid because the complexity of Duch's character proves that he was a combination of both. Hinton carefully discusses evidence and perspectives on both sides.

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## *Siamese Melting Pot: Ethnic Minorities in the Making of Bangkok*

EDWARD VAN ROY

Singapore: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017.

Throughout the nineteenth century, observers estimated that non-Thai residents made up more than two-thirds of Bangkok's total population. Yet, by 1919, excepting a substantial Chinese minority, the census depicted an overwhelmingly "Thai" city. Almost everyone of Khmer, Lao, and Mon ancestry was considered Thai, and the city's other non-Thai residents were undercounted dramatically (see Grabowsky 1996, 50). On paper, it would appear that a diverse and cosmopolitan city had rapidly homogenized. This was not just statistical sleight of hand. Over the first half of the twentieth century, a growing proportion of Bangkok's local-born residents were speaking Thai, acting Thai, and identifying themselves as Thai. How did Bangkok's ethnic landscape shift so quickly? What logics underpinned Bangkok's nineteenth-century cosmopolitanism, and what new logics replaced them in the decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century?

Based on decades of ramblings on foot combined with a thorough survey of published materials on the city's communities, *Siamese Melting Pot* offers a persuasive account of the demise of

ethnic pluralism at the hands of ethnic nationalism. After an introduction (Chapter 1) that sets the scene of “Old Bangkok” (1782–1910) and previews the conceptual interventions discussed in more depth in the conclusion (“Retrospect,” Chapter 8), each chapter focuses on an ethnic category or set of categories: Portuguese (Chapter 2), Mon (Chapter 3), Lao (Chapter 4), Muslim (subdivided into Cham, Persian, Arab, Indian, Malay, and Indonesian; Chapter 5), Chinese (Chapter 6), and others (Khmer, Vietnamese, Thai Yuan, and Farang; Chapter 7). Each chapter offers a social history of the movements, settlements, occupations, leading members, and court affiliations of one or more ethnic categories and concludes with some reflections on the diminishing salience of those categories over the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Edward Van Roy makes two powerful contributions to the history of ethnicity in Siam. First, he makes the case that a certain spatial logic underpinned the physical arrangement of ethnic settlements in Early Bangkok. He identifies two principles to this logic and connects them (rather loosely) to the mandala model of political power in premodern Southeast Asia. One spatial principle is intuitive: the higher one’s status, the closer one’s residence to the city center. The royal palaces were clustered around the city pillar, surrounded by princely houses and nobles’ residences. These were interspersed with small neighborhoods of palace attendants, palace artisans, and military specialists. Beyond were settlements of merchants, petty artisans, laborers, and agriculturalists (pp. 4–11). These zones were not strictly delimited—they changed according to the needs of the rulers, and they overlapped significantly as the city grew—but this concentric spatial order signaled to nineteenth-century observers the social status of an ethnic settlement. The farther you lived from the center, the lower your status was likely to be. As a result, people of the same ethnic category often lived in settlements of varying distance to the center, depending on their rank and occupation. For example, Lao war captives of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were divided into at least three categories for resettlement. Royalty were hosted (as captives of honor) at or near the king’s Grand Palace and the viceroy’s Front Palace in the center of the city; communities of skilled artisans (including gold- and silversmiths, woodworkers, and court performers) were positioned nearby; and peasant farmers were assigned to the city’s fringes and beyond (pp. 106–107).

The other principle of Old Bangkok’s spatial order is less intuitive. Van Roy shows that the city was roughly divided into southerly and northerly divisions, which were associated, respectively, with the king and the viceroy. Sojourners, settlers, and captives of all ranks sought or were assigned to a royal patron. Those affiliated with the king were usually settled in the city’s southern zone, while those associated with the viceroy were settled to the north (pp. 4–12). In the late eighteenth century, for example, consecutive waves of Mon migrants affiliated alternately with the king and the viceroy. As a consequence, they were settled in the city’s southern and northern zones, respectively (pp. 87–90). Sometimes war captives were given to officials at the royal court or the viceregal court; these communities were likewise situated near or beyond their patrons’

residences in the city's southern and northern zones (e.g., pp. 157–158).

Van Roy shows that these spatial principles began to unravel in the late nineteenth century. Patronage relations were gradually replaced with a free market for wage labor, and restrictions on residence and mobility were steadily loosened. Although some neighborhoods preserved an ethnic character, and many later migrants settled together, the hierarchical logic of Bangkok's spatial arrangement is no longer obvious. Van Roy offers a needed correction to the historical scholarship that largely overlooks the links between ethnic identity, geographic location, and political affiliation in Old Bangkok. His evidence for these findings, scattered across the book, doubles as a comprehensive local history of Bangkok. Nearly 75 ethnically identified neighborhoods are given dedicated attention (ranging from less than a page to more than five pages each). Helpfully, over two dozen maps allow the reader to visualize both the principle and the practice of these spatial arrangements. (Unfortunately, though, some are a bit blurry in my copy of the book.)

Van Roy's second major contribution is to explain the mysterious disappearance (or dramatic attenuation) of the ethnic communities that were so prominent in the nineteenth century. The contours of this disappearance vary from people to people, and the author addresses the circumstances specific to each in its respective chapter, but two overall explanations are most compelling.

First, a "commercial," "free market" system gradually replaced a "patrimonial," "feudal" one. For ethnic communities of peasants, artisans, and nobles, this meant the dissolution of patron-client ties (or, as Van Roy prefers, "master-minion" ties) that had previously specified their place of residence and primary occupation. Instead, wage labor replaced bound labor (as "slaves" or "serfs"); individuals replaced communities as the primary unit of production; and one's residence and chief occupation were no longer matters of state control. In the nineteenth century, for example, Mon communities were assigned specific responsibility for conducting patrols and staffing the kingdom's navy. But by the end of the century, these institutions were centralized, and the Mon workers were gradually replaced with diverse conscripts and salaried staff (p. 100). Likewise, many Lao and Malay descendants of war slaves, no longer bound to work the land for a specific master, established their own farmsteads on newly reclaimed land of dubious value on the city's peripheries (p. 129). Economic privileges were likewise untethered from specific merchant communities. After the Bowring Treaty of 1855, the Hokkien Chinese community's special access to official posts and lucrative trade ventures dissolved along with state trade monopolies. This benefited European and American firms as well as the other Chinese "speech groups" (p. 186). By the early twentieth century, ethnic identities no longer structured key economic and social relationships as before, and most ethnic settlements gradually dispersed. These factors affected all ethnic communities, but especially those without strong international networks.

The second overall explanation for the gradual assimilation (or "integration"—see p. 198) of Bangkok's ethnic communities—the more significant factor, in the author's estimation—is the advent of a strain of ethnic nationalism that put a new premium on being "Thai" (pp. 39–41). There

were both top-down and bottom-up pressures at work. The royal court attempted to resist extra-territorial claims on its residents with ancestral ties to (what became) European colonies by recasting them as “Thai.” At the same time, an increasingly nationalist ruling class began to eliminate ethnic institutions such as Mon temples and Mon-language temple curricula (p. 97). Some ethnic communities, such as the descendants of Lao war slaves, were eager to shed their low-class ethnic associations (p. 129). For others, the ethnic distinctions so prominent in the nineteenth century were gradually replaced in social significance by other divisions. For example, ethnic distinctions among Bangkok’s Muslims were eventually superseded by doctrinal divisions (pp. 135–136). Likewise, crackdowns on secret societies and the formation of pan-Chinese organizations weakened rivalries between Chinese speech groups. By the mid-twentieth century, whether one’s sympathies ran Communist or Nationalist was a more contentious matter (pp. 196–197).

This brings us to the title of the book. The “melting pot” metaphor is often criticized for “whitewashing” difference in contexts like the United States, where ethnic and (especially) racial categories remain socially significant. It is, perhaps, on these grounds that other readers have panned Van Roy’s title. On this point I wish to come to his defense. It is precisely the author’s point that most descendants of the ethnic communities so critical to social interaction in the nineteenth century had become unhyphenated “Thai” by the middle of the twentieth. Ethnic distinctions for Theravada Buddhists such as Mon, Lao, and Khmer faded the fastest, but even most Bangkokians of Chinese and Vietnamese ancestry retain little memory of it. For the most part, Bangkok’s Christians and Muslims no longer identify themselves as ethnic Christians and Muslims, but as Thai Christians and Muslims. True, some communities have preserved local traditions, and some have retained certain markers of difference—observations that Van Roy makes with interest in the book—but the vast majority of Bangkok’s citizens, despite their diverse ancestry, now self-identify only or primarily as Thai. Perhaps the melting process is yet incomplete, and new ingredients are continually added. But phone books, tax records, and legal documents no longer identify each Bangkok resident with an ethnic label as they did, as a rule, in the nineteenth century. Explaining how this came to be is Van Roy’s second major contribution and, in my view, his most significant.

Ethnic identification has always been a messy, ad-hoc practice, and *Siamese Melting Pot* does the subject justice by refusing to sweep the mess under the rug. Yet, a few conceptual questions stand out to this reviewer as ripe for further discussion. Van Roy defines ethnic identity as the product of in-group determinations (pp. 67, 236) and characterizes the state’s involvement in ethnic communities as “benign neglect” (pp. 29, 234), but at the same time he acknowledges the role of the state in constituting categories (e.g., pp. 86–87). How can we reconcile internal and external factors in the constitution of ethnic categories? The author asserts that Bangkok’s royalty and nobility were “Thai” by default (p. 15), but he treats ennobled ethnic leaders and royal consorts from neighboring kingdoms as representatives of their peoples. Could these stranger-elites have

claimed two ethnic identities at once? Or, is it possible that they eschewed ethnic self-identification altogether, preferring to claim membership in a “race of royalty” (*chuea-chat kasat*)? The author gives intermarriage its due in the chapter on the Portuguese, but elsewhere it is largely overlooked. Most Chinese migrants were men, for example, and intimacies with non-Chinese were commonplace. This surely had an impact on the integration of Chinese in Bangkok—but how? Finally, Van Roy makes a strong case on a macro level that ethnic divisions wilted in social importance over the early twentieth century, but the motivations and mechanisms of ethnic boundary-crossing on the micro level are less clear. There is no parallel, for example, to Kasian Tejapira’s fascinating study on the mid-nineteenth-century efforts of some Chinese to become Thai, some Thai to become Chinese, and the state’s occasional toleration of such moves to facilitate administration (Kasian 1992).

The book is productive, then, because it leaves the reader eager to explore even further the historical interconnections between ethnicity, power, and space. So, for its incomparably rich treatment of Bangkok’s diverse array of old neighborhoods, its compelling account of the obsolete logic of Bangkok’s ethno-spatial layout, and especially its powerful explanations for the gradual transformation of ethnic subjects into Thai nationals, this book is a success.

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