<Book Review>


**Author(s)**

Yoshihara, Kunio

**Citation**


**Issue Date**

1998-12

**URL**

http://hdl.handle.net/2433/56689

**Type**

Departmental Bulletin Paper

**Textversion**

publisher

Kyoto University
This is a study of the emergence of village organizations in north and northeastern Thailand. The author argues that contrary to the wide-held view, Thailand has structures and that they have been used to develop the cooperative organizations which supplement and sometimes compete with the market. The major cooperative organizations discussed are a rice bank, a cooperative shop, and a rice mill (see, for example, Chapter 6 for the formation of such organizations in a village in the Northeast).

The book is fairly well organized and crisply written, but there are a few confusing, possibly contradictory parts.

1) The author (as well as many recent scholars of Thailand) argues that the thesis that Thailand is a loosely-structured society is wrong, by pointing out the existence of cooperative groups (p. 4). Although those who argued that Thailand was a loosely-structured society may have been a little carried away in arguing their case, they did not mean that Thailand did not have structures. They meant (this was definitely the case of John Embree, who initially proposed the thesis) that compared with such countries as Japan, Thailand was loosely-structured (or to put it another way, individuals were less constrained by group rules). The author is well aware of the fact that Thailand lacked cooperative economic organizations in the past (p. 122).

2) In the formation of cooperative economic organizations in rural Thailand, the author emphasizes the initiative of villagers. He is right in arguing that without villagers’ participation, such organizations would not be viable and that they cannot be attributed solely to the initiative of external organizations (governmental and non-governmental). But the author also acknowledges their contribution (p. 124). One wonders which has been pivotal, villagers’ new awareness or external assistance. The author would be more convincing in making his case if he could show that there are a number of substantive cooperative organizations which have developed for economic purposes without external assistance.

Having finished reading the book, one may wonder what is the author’s point for rural development. He seems to be too obsessed with cooperative economic organizations, without explaining why they are important. Consider a rice mill. Why cannot it be a market organization? A typical argument is that the rice growers gain by getting their rice processed more cheaply at their mill than at a commercial outfit. But this is often not the case. And if it is, it is often because their rice mill receives government subsidies (a form of income transfer). Why should the villagers get involved in cooperative organizations and spend a lot of time there, instead of improving the method of production on their own or doing something else which contributes to higher productivity?

Economists are generally interested in cooperative organizations not as an alternative to the market but as something which strengthens it. For example, if the interest rate charged by an outside merchant is too high, instead of creating a saving association (which the author discusses as cooperative organization), it might be better if some villagers prove themselves to be trustworthy to the merchant and act intermediaries between him (or her) and the villagers who need money. In this case, cooperative arrangements do not have to be village-wide. As the author points out, the Thai community was a social unit and economic relations were dyadic in the past (Chapter 2). Nothing is wrong with that. Why does economic cooperation have to be village-wide? What matters is the emergence of cooper-
tive arrangements which reduce the costs of trans-
actions.

One final point is the relative importance of the 
cooperative village organizations the author discus-
ses in rural development in Thailand. He is well 
aware that they have to compete with market orga-
nizations and thus cannot freely develop. Since the 
Thai government is not very interventionist and 
there is virtually no discrimination against Chinese, 
compared with other Southeast Asian countries, 
market organizations are fairly strong in villages in 
Thailand. The author discusses certain areas 
where village-wide cooperative organizations can 
develop (such as cooperative purchase and 'pool-
distribution type organizations'; see Chapter 6), 
but how important are they in rural development? 
There is no question that they are marginally im-
portant, but it seems that they are overshadowed by 
market organizations.

The book may be a little weak in relating its find-
ings to the body of analytical knowledge on rural 
development, but it shows what type of cooperative 
economic organizations are evolving in a Thai vil-
lage and why. It contains a great deal of factual 
information on rural organizations and presents its 
analysis in readable fashion.

(Yoshihara Kunio 〈吉原久仁夫〉・CSEAS)

Carl A. Trocki, ed. Gangsters, Democracy, and 
the State in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asian 
Program Publications, Cornell University. 1998, 
94p.

There are five chapters in the book, including the 
director's introductory chapter. There is one chapter 
on Burma, another on Thailand, and two on the 
Philippines. On reading through the book, however, 
one wonders how these four chapters are related. 
Only two of them seem directly related to the title.

The gangster, a word which appears in the title, 
is ordinarily understood as a member of organized 
crime. He uses thugs and weapons (or threatens to 
use them) to get what he wants from others. The 
title might convey the impression that such persons 
run the democracy of Southeast Asia today. But 
that is not what is meant. A local boss is consid-
ered also as a gangster since he uses the means of 
violence under state control (e.g., police) in order to 
get what he wants, and it is argued that such per-
sons run the democracy of Southeast Asia. This is 
claimed for Thailand by James Ockey in "Crime, 
Society, and Politics in Thailand" and for the 
Philippines by John Sidel in "Murder, Inc., Cavite: 
Capitalist Development and Political Gangsterism in 
a Philippine Province." They do not, however, claim 
that the whole country is run by gangsters. They 
admit that in Bangkok or Manila, where a sizable 
middle class has emerged as a result of past 
economic development, the influence of gangsters is 
small. But they maintain that gangsters wield large 
power in provinces and that this puts an indel-
ible mark on the democracy because power lies there 
rather than in the metropolis (e.g., in Thailand, 90 
percent of the seats in the Parliament are allo-
cated to local provinces, p. 52).

Is gangsterism a passing phenomenon? James 
Ockey says that the middle class is becoming frus-
trated, but that the influence of chaopho [local 
strongmen] will decline because of the expanding 
middle class and the increasing scrutiny of their 
activities by media reporters. John Sidel ends his 
chapter on a less optimistic note. He maintains 
essentially that, although bosses keep changing, 
bossism will remain. He shows that this is the pat-
tern established in the postwar history of Cavite. 
The director tends to side with Sidel rather than with 
Ockey (p. 15).

If gangsterism is an entrenched phenomenon in 
local politics in Thailand or the Philippines, one 
cannot be optimistic about the future of democracy 
in these countries. At present, Indonesia is also 
moving in the direction of democracy and many peo-
ple predict a rosy future for the country because of 
it, but what has happened in the Philippines and