

with the United States, the most influential power in the Pacific Theatre at the time. After violence and riots in Thailand, conservative elites and Chinese capitalists collectively had ‘political amnesia’ and banded together to cement royalist nationalism and economic hegemony over the country.

This monograph offers an important contribution to the study of Thai history, the Chinese diaspora, colonialism in Southeast Asia, and the influence of global superpowers on domestic politics. Scholars in these fields will find the book useful and a compelling read. Beyond academia, this book coincides with the growing current political discourse in Thailand on what it means to be a ‘nation’. Wongsurawat’s account will undoubtedly help many understand the historical causes of the political and economic forces that shaped Thailand into what it is today.

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Rituals of care: Karmic politics in an aging Thailand

By FELICITY AULINO

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Rituals of care lays out a detailed study of care practices for the aged in Northern Thailand, focusing particularly on how the intersection of karmic duty and ritual action can open up new ways of thinking about social and moral agency. The book’s goal is to develop a framework for thinking about social action and social transformation by using this Thai context ‘for understanding the hierarchical and ritualistic components of mutual aid and moral life as lived, as well as clues as to how transformation can occur at individual and collective scales’ (p. 18). Throughout the book Aulino analyses these clues, which include ethnographic pieces from her fieldwork, tenets from Buddhist philosophy, and other academic studies of Thailand in order to piece together a meticulous and multi-layered argument about the embodied nature of care.

The research for this book draws from 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork that Aulino conducted in 2008–09 in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai. This was a time of political instability and social unrest, reflected in street protests and military crackdowns. Aulino originally set out to study end-of-life care, but through her work volunteering with an organisation she calls the Older People’s Organization (OPO), she realised that her understanding and interest in care had much wider inflections beyond her original research question. She doesn’t give a lot of detail as to how or why she chose to study Thailand in the first place, how she got access to this organisation, or what her research looked like in terms of her methods and day-to-day life in the field. In this sense the book is not a traditional ethnography — we do get glimpses of people’s lives in Northern Thailand through ethnographic vignettes,

but the focus seems to be more on using these vignettes to bolster her theoretical argument.

The most ethnographic chapter is the first one, which describes in intimate detail a family's caring practices for their mother, a Thai woman in her 80s, whom Aulino met while working with OPO. Aulino positions this chapter as a phenomenological account by describing the everyday tasks involved in caring for the aged. This chapter lays the foundation for her argument about care as habituated physical acts which are repeated in a karmic framework to become rituals of care and embodied practices. She argues that these embodied practices of care have been overlooked in anthropological studies of care, which have tended to focus on what people say and not what they do. In this way Aulino makes a convincing argument to move away from universal ideas about care and to decouple the relationship between care and intention by focusing instead on care as a patterning and embodiment of habitual action. In chapter 2 she discusses the work of Buddhagosa, a fifth century commentator on Buddhist Pali philosophy, to delve into an Abhidhammic theory of mind in order to show how 'intention is karmically and interpersonally conditioned' (p. 50) in everyday practice in Thailand.

Aulino expands the relevance of her theory of care beyond the care for the aged in chapters 3 and 4. She argues that if we pay attention to the care of the social body, we can understand social relations through power-infused habituated patterns of action. She draws on the Thai landscape of volunteerism to show how individuals care for the social body by maintaining harmony. Again the focus is not the intent of care but on how the habitual actions of care are the 'spontaneous and embodied root of moral activity' (p. 77).

In the last chapter, Aulino examines and unpacks the contradictions inherent in care. Here she pieces together her arguments in previous chapters to make a case for understanding structural violence from the perspective of structures at play in specific societies with different logics of care and different habituated actions. She explains structures themselves as 'nothing but habituated action' (p. 126). In the Thai case, karma helps to reinforce moral order and social action which encourages social conformity and the following of ritual patterns, themselves a form of care for both the self and society. She sees care as fundamental to understanding how things are, but cautions that it should not be an apology for repressive regimes.

Aulino's framework of rituals of care fulfils her goal 'to challenge and refine core anthropological concepts' (p. 4) by giving us more complicated and culturally specific ways to think about concepts such as social agency, structural violence, and care. She weaves together an impressive array of sources and ethnographic evidence to create her multidimensional theoretical argument, using a concise and articulate style of writing. The case for the essential role of care as a locus of moral agency and action is clear and convincing. However, more ethnography describing how care plays out in other contexts that she alludes to, such as political organising, would have helped to strengthen the links of her argument by shedding light on how care works in an everyday habitual and ritual sense to bring about societal change beyond the contexts normally associated with care, such as eldercare.

Rituals of care is directed as a critique of social theory in the lineage of Western Christian hermeneutics and would be of interest to anthropologists and scholars of

Southeast Asia and Buddhist Studies. This book is an important and innovative theoretical contribution to a growing body of work on critical studies of care by anthropologists and feminist STS scholars. Aulino's work clearly demonstrates that there is no universal orientation for a moral calculus of care, but instead that care has the potential to be the locus for radical societal change through the 'transformation of mundane habituated practices of providing for others' (p. 5).

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A sandy path near the lake: In search of the illusory Khemananda

By KOVIT KHEMANANDA, Edited and Translated by GRANT OLSON and CHALERMSEE OLSON

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This autobiography of Kovit Khemananda has travelled through a number of hands to make it to English readers. The Thai version was dictated to its Thai interviewers, and that account has been carefully translated and interpreted by the editing team of Grant and Chalermsee Olson. The subtitle of the book is therefore fitting in ways even beyond those intended by the editors, as the idea that this autobiography is an account of Kovit Khemananda's life 'in his own words' is itself an illusion. This additional illusory aspect of the book, however, makes it all the more compelling, as the relationship between translator/editor and subject plays no small part in the story's appeal. *A sandy path near the lake: In search of the illusory Khemananda* may be of interest to a broad audience, from those interested in this unconventional thinker's contributions to Buddhist practice to those seeking an insiders' account of the role of prominent monks in the tumultuous era of 1970s Thailand.

The first chapters provide an account of Kovit's childhood in Songkhla, in which we get glimpses into some of the characteristics that would stay with him throughout life, such as an inclination toward following his own mental preoccupations and a tendency toward loneliness. These early pages offer a grounded account of everyday life in southern Thailand in the pre-Second World War era, punctuated by the occasional insight or retrospective realisation, such as when he reflects upon how his own childhood perceptions of the natural abundance of his surroundings conflict with academic accounts he would later read about the region's poor soil (p. 21).

Subsequent chapters recount Kovit's early years in Bangkok, first as an architecture student at Chulalongkorn University and then as a decorative arts major and student leader at Silpakorn. His account of his experiences leading the student body at Silpakorn during the politically tumultuous 1960s foreshadows an ongoing reluctance to engage directly in politics. When sent a letter of solicitation by the Red Guard, he presented it to the deputy rector of the school, fearing association