

beneficial for students or scholars of Southeast Asian studies, particularly in understanding the self-glorification of Thailand's benevolent internal colonialism that led to the present unrest in the south and other parts of the empire. Biomedicine was recruited to clean a traditional practice in overcoming the spectre of maternal mortality. It was also an integral part in the state's campaign to erase poverty and backwardness in fighting the Thailand Communist Party during the Cold War and, recently, in fighting the 'red germs' uprising in the middle of the empire's capital. I would not be surprised at all, therefore, if her suggestions relating to medical identities could be applied to other parts of the empire such as the north or the northeast regions.

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The rebel den of Nùng Trí Cao: Loyalty and identity along the Sino–Vietnamese frontier

By JAMES ANDERSON

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James Anderson's *The rebel den of Nùng Trí Cao* examines the efforts in the eleventh century of a Tai-speaking leader by the name of Nùng Trí Cao to carve out a sphere of authority for himself in the area of what is today the Sino–Vietnamese border, but which at that time was a frontier zone between regions under the control of the Chinese Song and the Vietnamese Lý dynasties. Methodologically, Anderson places his study within recent trends in frontier studies which have emphasised negotiation, broadly understood, as a paradigm for understanding frontier relations. In particular, Anderson sees Nùng Trí Cao as having sought to negotiate a space for himself in the Sino–Vietnamese borderlands through his interactions and conflicts with the Chinese and Vietnamese courts, at the same time that he sought legitimacy in culturally specific terms from his Tai-speaking followers.

After a short introductory chapter, Anderson begins his work in earnest with a chapter on the two main means by which the Chinese historically interacted with people on their borders, the tributary system and the *jimi* or 'loose reigns' system. These are topics that have been covered in detail before. Anderson presents this information to indicate what we could call the 'vocabulary' which someone like Nùng Trí Cao could use to 'negotiate' a position for himself between the Song and the Lý, as he had to communicate with each of these courts on terms which they understood, and those terms came largely from the tributary and loose reigns systems.

Having covered this basic information, Anderson then spends chapter 3 looking at Vietnamese relations with the Chinese prior to the eleventh century, and chapter 4

examining the position of Tai-speaking peoples in between the Chinese and Vietnamese realms in the same period. Anderson's aim in these chapters is to argue that Vietnamese and Tai rulers established their positions through negotiated interactions, and, in the process, addressed themselves to multiple audiences. Vietnamese leaders established tributary relations with China at the same time that they kept contenders to the throne at bay and sought to bring Tai-speaking chieftains along the Sino–Vietnamese frontier under their authority. Those same Tai-speaking chieftains, meanwhile, made efforts to safeguard their positions through their interactions with the Chinese and Vietnamese courts, all the while projecting an indigenous sense of power to their fellow Tai-speakers in the region. All of the above information serves as background for the extremely detailed coverage of Nùng Trí Cao's three rebellions that comes in chapters 5 and 6.

Through the book, Anderson makes extensive use of the existing Vietnamese and Chinese primary sources, all of which are in classical Chinese. This is one of the major strengths of this work. Another strength is its focus on Nùng Trí Cao. Appreciating the role of Tai-speaking peoples in this region is essential for understanding Sino–Vietnamese relations, and yet Anderson's book is the first major work to address this issue in detail. That said, while Anderson should be commended for identifying the Tai and seeking to incorporate them into the history of Sino–Vietnamese relations, I was not convinced by the author's main argument. Anderson states at the beginning of his book that Nùng Trí Cao 'fought for political differentiation with a set of titles that spoke two languages of power, indigenous terms of authority understood among his own upland neighbours and Confucian-patterned terms understood in the distant courts' of China and Vietnam (pp. 6–7). In the book, however, Anderson does not provide historically documented evidence of indigenous terms of authority. He cites modern works by Western scholars on Tai political systems and assumes from this information that the world that Nùng Trí Cao inhabited must have been the same. However, the historical evidence that Anderson provides about Nùng Trí Cao points to only one language of power, a Sinitic one. While part of this may be due to the fact that the sources are all in classical Chinese, linguists have long pointed out that Tai-speaking peoples were present in the Red River delta from a time as early as, or even earlier than, the people we call the Vietnamese. As such, it may very well have been the case that Tai, Vietnamese and Chinese leaders at this time had more in common with each other than they did with their own populations, populations which they may well have governed over more by virtue of force than out of any cultural legitimacy.

In sum, *The rebel den of Nùng Trí Cao* is a well-documented account of an important moment in Sino–Vietnamese relations, and it is a pioneering work in its focus on the role of the Tai-speaking chieftain, Nùng Trí Cao, in the relations between these two kingdoms. However, there is room for further examination in culturally categorising these Tai-speaking peoples in this particular historical time and place.

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