

relegated to that subordinate role of influence without power which she sees as the province of most Burmese women.

This is a book which fails to live up to expectations. In style it is pedestrian, lacking in critical acumen and relying mostly on summaries of secondary material with comparatively little use of primary source materials. One looks hard to find any theoretical framework for the material. One of the problems may be that the author relies rather too heavily on data from exile groups such as Altsean and the All Burma Students Democratic Front while excluding others which may have provided a more balanced analysis. The author's view of civil society in Myanmar for example is totally incorrect, and out of date. A reading of some of the current materials from the last five years would have corrected this. The result is a rather dichotomous perspective conveying the notion that all outside Burma/Myanmar is good; while all inside is bad. This is a position which careful scholarship could not sustain. Even the updated and extensively revised volume by Robert H. Taylor, *The State in Myanmar* (London: Hurst, 2008) is missing from the bibliography as the author prefers the out-of-date 1987 edition. Also missing are many other similarly valuable volumes which would have given the author a more accurate view of what has been happening in the country in recent years. Contrary to Harriden's assertion, for example, there is a very vibrant domestic civil society, with many Burmese NGOs headed by older women. Others such as the government-aligned Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association with its network of 330 villages, do very good and necessary work in health care and do not deserve the negative critique meted out to them. Such associations in many Asian countries have long provided the means for women to help other women. Harriden's use of the out-of-date 1999 volume by the Transnational Civil Society Network is rather odd given that there is a great deal of material now available on developing civil society in Burma/Myanmar, including those by Seidel, Kyaw Yin Hlaing, and the International Crisis Group. A scholar updating a thesis for publication needs to be thorough.

There are many shortcomings with this volume, stemming perhaps from a lack of critical acumen, too heavy a reliance on secondary sources, and a flawed conceptual framework.

HELEN JAMES

*The Australian National University*

Thailand

*Land and loyalty: Security and the development of property rights in Thailand*

By TOMAS LARSSON

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Is the rhetoric that 'farmers are the backbone of the Thai nation' still relevant today? In *Land and Loyalty*, Tomas Larsson offers a nuanced analysis of the

emergence of the Thai state very much in conversation with recent critical scholarship (such as that by Andrew Walker and Tyrell Haberkorn; details below) examining how and why appeals to such rhetoric continue to legitimise the disparate work and goals of multiple state and non-state actors within Thailand.

The book begins with an overview explaining that Thailand has been hailed as a phenomenal success in land titling, particularly within Southeast Asia, but rather than stopping there, Larsson's objective is to address how this was enacted. Looking back to the 1855 Bowring treaty, he confronts the more popular images of the Thai state as 'patrimonial and predatory' by highlighting the processes through which property rights were enacted.

Through review of newspaper articles, archival records, official correspondence, and policy documents, Larsson carefully considers how security threats have shaped Thai property rights and regimes, and how this in turn has influenced the modern Thai state. By interrogating the Thai state's reactions (and non-reactions) to security threats — such as the interests of colonial British or French powers, or the perceived threat of communism and the American push to counter it — Larsson sheds light on a novel interpretation of the emergence of the modern Thai state and its relationships with citizens and non-citizens.

Perhaps provocative for scholars of contemporary Thailand is this historical positioning of the Thai state, which will be particularly controversial for those who have considered the Thai state as the purveyor of the global market and developer of mega projects that continue to marginalise poor, rural farmers. Larsson illustrates that it was the Thai state and monarchy, in its sometimes xenophobic policy influences (perceived security threats from foreigners, and particularly the Chinese, living in Thailand) that deliberately produced a country of smallholder farmers as opposed to facilitating companies or foreigners to hold large tracts of land. This vision of the Thai state during this time — as a conservative force for smallholder farmers — resonates strangely enough with present-day rhetoric from non-governmental organisations, and with the back-to-agriculture movement that would wish to see farmers gain title over 'sufficient' land for sustainable use, but not necessarily to larger areas of land. Larsson's interpretation is rather different from the usual political economy interpretation which might be expected to emphasise either the power of landowners, or the way that the Thai state has a history of exploiting small farmers.

Chapter 3, 'Weapons of a weak state', also offers a potentially challenging rereading of the Thai state — not as oppressor or authoritative regime — but as a 'weak' actor in its relationships with other states, relying on its weaknesses strategically (cf. James C. Scott's notion of 'weapons of the weak') in its dealings with colonial powers (see also: Larsson's 2007 'Intertextual relations: The geopolitics of land rights in Thailand' article in the journal *Political Geography*).

Conceptually, Larsson argues that his 'securitisation' approach allows for a more nuanced examination of events and non-events that produce or influence the present (pp. 3–4). A memorable example of a non-event that might be easily overlooked — but nonetheless had material implications for the development of property rights and the large number of smallholders in Thailand — is the government's failure to implement a land tax in Bangkok in 1917. He investigates this non-event through a rereading of an archived memorandum on the drafting of the Bangkok land tax decree

(examined in documents held in the Thai National Archives, see chapter 4 ‘Conserving smallholder society’). Analysis shows that the land tax failed because of Thai fears that the extra financial burden of the tax would be prohibitive for Thai farmers or smallholders, and thus, the tax would facilitate more land acquisition by the Chinese (p. 77).

In chapter 5, ‘Combating specters and communists’, Larsson considers how, after the end of the Second World War, the perceived threat of communism was a major factor in influencing land policy and land titling ‘on the ground’. New areas of Thailand were targeted as a way to counter the perceived communist threat. With the enactment of 1954 Land Code, and the land titling offices reaching out to rural farmers, access to credit was made easier because the new land deeds could be accepted as collateral by financial institutions.

‘In a nutshell,’ he argues, ‘Thai farmers can thank the imperialists for getting land, and the communists for getting access to capital. Without these security threats to the central Thai state, very different political and economic logics could easily have become the drivers of resource allocation and institutional development ...’ (p. 147). In addition to what these security threats contributed to, it is the author’s focus on the ‘could have’ — the contingency — that I also want to flag as an overall strength of the book. Small non-events (and events) such as those discussed above contributed to the formal recognition of the large number of smallholders in Thailand. Larsson’s attention deepens our understanding of how security threats relate to institutional development, as he maintains that these relationships and processes are not necessarily straightforward, and vary considerably across different contexts, a condition illustrated in comparative work on Burma, Japan, and the Philippines.

This book will provoke debate and critique. For instance, debate should ensue when read alongside the recently published *Revolution interrupted* (2011) by Tyrell Haberkorn. Haberkorn examines land tenancy in northern Thailand focusing on the 1973–76 period, questioning the continued silence around the series of assassinations of farmers associated with the Farmers Federation of Thailand. Larsson’s interpretation of the general development of small-holders in Thailand contrasts with Haberkorn’s reading of the specific case of land tenancy in northern Thailand and the exceptions it presents, such as how some elite families were able to amass land. Andrew Walker’s argument for the middle-income peasant in *Thailand’s political peasants* (2012) provides yet another distinct analysis of the positioning of increasingly well-to-do farmers as the ‘backbone of the Thai nation’. While distinct in time period, discipline, and goals — these three books are indicative of a resurgence of agrarian studies in Southeast Asia. Their similarities and divergences taken together offer a substantially revised and nuanced account of agrarian history in Thailand.

Finally, while Tomas Larsson’s *Land and Loyalty* was written for a broader political economy of development audience, the detailed archival work and innovative arguments mean that this book should be required reading for scholars with an interest in agrarian history as well as those with interest in the relationships between the Thai state and its ‘backbone’.

VANESSA LAMB

York University, Toronto