

historians are split on whether the low carbon footprint of indigenous communities in the past was due to ecological wisdom or a lack of technological wherewithal. In other words, was inter-species harmony ever a conscious, moral human choice?

At a conceptual level, the book deploys the term ‘Anthropocene’ unproblematically as an era of unprecedented collective human power to reshape the non-human natural world. It takes human power as a given without seriously considering ecological pushback. By using the Anthropocene as a metaphor for human dominance, the book neglects the term’s geological roots that spoke of ‘deep time’ punctuated by mass extinctions. Such past extinctions remind us that it is precisely at one’s most powerful that one is most vulnerable. This epoch is balanced on the precipice of a deep past that did not include humans, and a deep future that may not do so as well. Distancing the term from geology leans this book towards the pursuit of a ‘good Anthropocene’; an academic inclination that has been roundly critiqued and a notion that is still debated. Can we step back from our own self-destructive desires?

The book’s advocacy appears to be for a responsible wielding of power especially by political elites, industry and high-income consumers. A few essays deal with such constructive interventions. Michele Chong offers an exciting vision of forested eco-bridges friendly to both humans and our close monkey cousins. Aidan Mock connects Singapore’s fledgling environmental movements with international climate goals and pushes for a local Green New Deal. Similarly, Bertrand Seah argues for divestment from fossil fuels and a re-investment into green financing. State-led environmental education received attention in a joint chapter by Al Lim and Feroz Khan, while Mathias Ooi views personal and peer re-education as crucial to cultivating a new environmental ethos. All these suggestions are urgent, insightful and well overdue. Future inquiries along these lines may also consider how these actions re-position urban centres such as Singapore vis-à-vis its agrarian neighbours. In short, what does the globality of this epoch mean for Singapore?

The questions that this book provokes attests to its value. At its core, the book is less about the Anthropocene than the deep, ethical implications of eating a chilli crab. There is much in this articulate and timely volume to spark discussion in class and book clubs; to foster new appreciation of Singapore’s multi-species hybridity; to begin a true accounting of what Singapore’s progress has cost. It is meant to and should be widely read.

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Fighting for virtue: Justice and politics in Thailand

By DUNCAN MCCARGO

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Once again Duncan McCargo invites us to explore yet another understudied arena of Thai politics, this time its judiciary. Drawing on court records, hundreds

of hours of ethnographic observations of court cases, and interviews with judges, lawyers and defendants, McCargo reveals the intertwined relations between Thailand's judicial institutions and the monarchy. In April 2006, King Bhumibol gave a speech, called one of the most important of his reign, in which he called on judges to help resolve the country's political problems. Subsequent years saw a growing politicisation of Thailand's judiciary. Focusing on the final decade of King Bhumibol's reign between 2006–16, McCargo explains how a judicial system has developed in which judges could allow anxieties over the monarchy to take precedence over common sense, let alone over questions of freedom of expression. Mincing no words, McCargo writes that judges have failed because 'their political interventions were inept and inflammatory, while their punitive treatment of supposed dissidents was unconscionable' (p. x). While willing to issue draconian judgments in defence of the monarchy, McCargo notes that Thai judges have been unwilling to issue rulings against military coups in defence of the constitution.

The book is essentially divided into three parts. The first part explains how the judiciary developed from its foundation under the absolute monarchy in 1891, differentiating particularly the primary system of Courts of First Instance, Courts of Appeal and the Supreme Court from the newly created Constitutional Court. Examining how judges are recruited and socialised, the first chapter reveals the extent to which judges see themselves as representatives of the King. Secure in the virtue of their high status, their training is based on rote memorisation of legal codes rather than an ability to debate contemporary legal philosophy.

Chapter 2 examines the historical connections between the monarchy and the courts. Thailand has the sixth largest prison population in the world and the third highest percentage of its population behind bars; its conviction rate is 95 per cent (p. 90). Rather than reform practices that produce these high levels of incarceration, McCargo notes that Thailand has pursued a twin-track policy of draconian incarceration combined with generous royal amnesties. The Buddhist-inflected pattern of the king releasing tens of thousands of prisoners on special occasions reinforces an ideology of royal benevolence, rather than liberal claims to legal rights.

Chapter 3 describes how the increasing judicialisation of political conflict after 2006 created new challenges for the courts. Despite the king having expressed his concerns about their abuse in his 2005 birthday speech, the decade saw an explosion of lese majeste cases; there were 478 lese majeste cases in 2010 alone (p. 24). Indirect applications of the lese majeste law expanded under the 2007 Computer Crime Act. Instead of easing polarisation, courts came under growing criticism for protecting the monarchy over the rights of free speech.

The second part of the book examines three well-known trials involving charges related to treason and national security, each trial linked to a fabricated 2010 plot to bring down the Thai monarchy. Chapter 4 considers the lese majeste case against magazine editor Somyot Prueksakasemsuk. As McCargo explains, Somyot was found guilty and given a ten-year jail term for two articles which he did not write, which did not refer directly to the monarchy, and which were published in a magazine for which he was not the legal editor. Chapter 5 examines the use of the Computer Crime Act case against former broker Katha Pajariyapong who was found guilty and sentenced to four years for making two web-board postings involving the

king's health which were alleged to have spooked the stock market; as McCargo explains, Katha's messages could not possibly have undermined national security, weakened popular faith in the monarchy, or influenced the stock market. Chapter 6 explores the case of Jon Ungpakorn and nine other NGO activists accused of violating national security for a 2007 peaceful protest alleged to have disrupted parliamentary proceedings. In each case, McCargo explains why 'these defendants should never have been charged with any crime, and that the laws under which they were charged were not fit for purpose' (p. 108).

In the final part McCargo shifts attention to various controversial rulings made by the Constitutional Court. Countering arguments that the Constitutional Court was comprised of activist judges hostile to Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, McCargo discusses political rulings that favoured the Thaksin administration prior to 2005 and muddled rulings that enabled his sister to survive nearly three years as prime minister. As McCargo argues, the court's rulings were not grounded in consistent legal arguments, but instead reflected the monarchical network's own shifting relationship with the Shinawatras.

With this book, McCargo has produced a fascinating analysis that is sure to provoke controversy. McCargo is never one to look for easy answers. He presents simultaneously sympathetic yet critical accounts of Thailand's judges, faulting them for failing to defend constitutionalism, democracy, or human rights. Nor does he spare defence lawyers who made arguments based on human rights before judges who may have been more sympathetic to arguments based on contrition (begging the question of the defendants' own intentions). The book's conclusions are provocative, albeit seemingly contradictory. Although the entire book makes clear the need for judicial reform, McCargo makes a claim for 'a radical anti-legalism' in which countries 'are run by elected politicians and not by courts' (p. 218). This vexing claim lingers on with the reader long after the book is closed, leaving the reader to ponder the ever-intertwined relationship between law and politics. McCargo's disturbing exposé of how deeply rooted the Thai legal system remains in the logics of absolute monarchy rather than democratic principles makes this book a must-read for scholars and activists of Thailand. This book will also be of broad interest to readers of political science, legal studies, history, political anthropology and religious studies.

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Royal capitalism: Wealth, class and monarchy in Thailand

By PUANGCHON UNCHANAM

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'Après moi, le deluge', said France's King Louis XV, warning of a revolution that was brewing. While most monarchies of the world went into extinction due to the