

The Political Economy of Siam 1851-1910. Edited and Introduced by Chatthip Nartsupha and Suthy Prasartset. Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, 1981. § 4.-

The Political Economy of Siam 1910-1932. Edited and Introduced by Chatthip Nartsupha, Suthy Prasartset and Montri Chenvidyakarn. Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, 1981. § 3.-

A major obstacle to a better understanding of Thailand has always been the language problem. Especially there is a scarcity of translated older documents and materials on Thai economic and political history. Even though a wealth of documents is available in various archives (some also on microfilms) and libraries, the foreign scholar has first to go through years of strenuous language studies before he is able to use this material competently. Thus, these books - a well-edited collection of excellent documents - fill a broad gap as a valuable source for Thai studies. The authors, all of them university professors, deserve high credit for compiling and introducing this unique selection to local and foreign readers.

Furthermore, and in contrast to many other collections of historical documents available on Southeast Asia, the editors of these two volumes were not just gathering interesting sources at random but had a clear theoretical perspective in mind, namely to provide an empirical base for a political economy of Siam. Hence, the rich material is organized under headings like: emergence of commodity production and trade, monetization of the economy, the state of technology and its implications, control of land, labour and the fiscal system, collusion between merchant capitalists and *sakdina* ("feudal") lords, the exploitation of the peasants etc. Other informative chapters deal with the failure to raise agricultural productivity, the lack of industrialization and infrastructure or the problems arising from economic and social instability.

The documents reflect a lively picture of former living conditions and regulations in Thailand. In addition, they help the reader not only to understand the contemporary problems of the country much better but also to perceive more recent events in their proper historical perspective. For example, one interesting source documents a peasant revolt in Northeastern Thailand which occurred in 1902. The Royal government issued a notice with the headline: "Forbidden to be Alarmed by Rumours", a caption which is still very appropriate for Bangkok's day-to-day politics in the 1980's. The document continues: "Those believers (the rebels) were Laotians who flocked to Bangkok, Ayuthya and Prachin Buri, and were employed as farm helpers", an indication of early political unrest among rural wage labourers. In Chiangmai, where a similar revolt occurred in the same year a (Danish) captain Jensen was sent along with a police force to suppress the (Shan) rebels. "The Shan people differ from ordinary enemies and do not gather in certain areas but scatter in the bush. They must be investigated . . . , not fought by means of confrontation." Early guerilla tactics and psycho-warfare? And finally: "The people should not take any rumours seriously or be panicked. . . . Such rumours have occurred in

every reign ..." (Vol.I, p.367-369).

Even more up-to-date sound the writings of Praya Suriyanuwat who wrote lucidly at the turn of the century: "The growth and development of Siam which is principally dependent on farming more than anything else at present, will progress rapidly or slowly depending on the amounts of benefits that the farmers receive. ... The ideas of the science of economics can be applied correctly only if they are first based on an understanding of the real and actual living conditions of the people ..." (Vol.I, p.399). One wishes that these thoughts might find their way into the next 5-Year-Plan.

The obligatory question, namely whether such a political-economy approach is really fitting for this kind of topic can be answered positively in this case. As the knowledgeable introduction proves, such a concept provides not only a useful analytical framework but also creates the linkages that facilitate the understanding of past social and economic events.

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JAE-HYEON CHOE: Die Dynamik der Klassenbildung im modernen Korea.
(Bielefelder Studien zur Entwicklungssoziologie, Bd.16).
Saarbrücken, Verlag Breitenbach, 1982. 347 pages, DM 38.-

The present work of Choe, which was his Ph.D.-thesis at the University of Bielefeld, aims at showing that a macro-sociological survey of both internal and external conditions in traditional Korean society (from the middle of the Yi dynasty to the beginning of the colonial period under Japan) can analyse class formation in modern Korea.

His first critique goes back to the theories of the "Asiatic mode of production" for the Yi dynasty in Korea (1832-1910), where, according to Choe, private land ownership prevailed since the 17th century. Although the concept of "Asiatic feudalism" proposed by Choe can say much with reference to Korea, it can not in reality distinguish that concept from the "Asiatic variety of feudalism" which was a sophisticated conclusion from the discussions about the "Asiatic mode of production" held in Leningrad in 1931. If we accept Choe's arguments (the dominant role of private land ownership, the spreading of commodity production, the disintegration within the aristocratic class (Yangban), and the enhanced social mobility), we find ourselves asking the following question: why the "germ of capitalism" in Korea could not transform itself into a capitalistic society as in Japan?

At this point Choe introduces the concept of "strategic groups" from his mentor Hans-Dieter Evers, which means that some social groups in traditional society dissolve their own social status and role for the sake of preserving common revenue, power and privilege.