

11-1-2015

## Dayley, Robert A. & Neher, Clark.D. Southeast Asia in the New International Era, 6th edition. Boulder: Westview Press, 2013.

William Jones

*Mahidol University International College, Thailand, william.jon@mahidol.ac.th*

Matthew P. Copeland Ph.D.

*Mahidol University International College, Thailand, matthew.cop@mahidol.ac.th*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Jones, William and Copeland, Matthew P. Ph.D. (2015) "Dayley, Robert A. & Neher, Clark.D. Southeast Asia in the New International Era, 6th edition. Boulder: Westview Press, 2013.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 7 : No. 1 , Article 29.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol7/iss1/29>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of International and Global Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact [phuffman@lindenwood.edu](mailto:phuffman@lindenwood.edu).

**Dayley, Robert A. & Neher, Clark.D. *Southeast Asia in the New International Era*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition. Boulder: Westview Press, 2013.**

This work is the latest edition of a text first published by Clark Neher some 24 years ago. Robert Dayley joined Neher as a co-author in 2009. As surveys of contemporary Southeast Asian politics are few in number and all too quickly out of date, this revision of a now-standard work produced by two well-established experts in the field is most welcome. An introductory text, the volume consists of twelve chapters – a brief historical overview of Southeast Asia, followed by profiles of eleven regional states. Country comparisons are drawn on the basis of state institutions and social groupings, state-society relations and democracy, economy and development, and foreign relations. The approach is a bit formulaic, but it allows the authors to cover considerable ground while developing their central theme – that sweeping changes have taken place in Southeast Asia since the end of the Cold War.

Despite the breadth of content covered, the text has some obvious shortcomings. The pro forma histories used to introduce each country are fairly basic, and despite six rounds of revisions, the work contains more than a few dubious propositions and interpretive inaccuracies. One wonders, for example, how Thailand, a military-run polity with deepening economic problems, can still be characterized as “an exemplary case study of how third-world countries can advance economically while attempting politically to achieve stable democracy” or how Malaysia under Najib Razak can be described as “Southeast Asia’s most admirable achiever.” Further problems arise in part from the book’s structure. The country-by-country approach employed by the authors leaves little space for addressing trans-national politics and intra-regional affairs, remarkable given the growing role of ASEAN and evolving plans for an ASEAN Economic Community. Additionally, standardized chapter content has resulted in an inordinate amount of attention being paid to some issues (like democratization, one of Neher’s pet career interests), while other topics – social movements, environmental politics, minority relations and civil-military struggles, to name but a few – remain largely uninvestigated.

Uniform chapter length fosters the erroneous impression that Southeast Asia’s eleven regional states stand in relative parity and can be meaningfully compared. This is manifestly not the case. The political geography of Southeast Asia is remarkably heterodox; tiny sultanates coexist with republican behemoths. Even similarly-sized states situated in close proximity have little in common; Brunei, a tiny oil-rich kingdom with a population of less than half a million people, is fundamentally different from Singapore, a trade-based secular city-state, and both bear little comparison with neighboring polities. Decades back, the mainland’s socialist states gave up practicing, let alone pretending to share, state socialism. Southeast Asia’s free-marketers, in turn, consist of both well-to-do state-capitalist oligarchies and far less affluent, military-run kleptocracies. While prevailing legal frameworks and institutional arrangements suggest a common European heritage, the political realities of regional states are perhaps better understood with reference to local political cultures and practices, a point made clear by Tony Day in his 2002 study *Fluid Iron: State Formation in Southeast Asia*.

With regard to intra-chapter content/themes, the roles of national militaries and democratization come to the fore as areas in which a more robust inquiry would lead to greater insight. The great degree of political diversity that is mentioned in the text is one of the hallmarks of Southeast Asia. As such, in the chapters devoted to Thailand, Myanmar, and the Philippines, themes of democracy and democratization should be more than simply mentioned; indeed, the fitful development and trajectories of democracies in these countries deserve some

greater introspection. Upon consideration, we were reminded that in Southeast Asia, the notion of Eurocentric, statist state conceptions tend to fall by the wayside upon sustained inquiry. Rather, law, culture, legitimacy, and use of force are integral parts of Southeast Asian nation-building and play a subaltern role in current circumstances of democratization within the region's more "liberal" countries. That said, a review of Steven Lukes' (1974) formulations of power from the 70's-80's stands as a prescient analytical tool. Lukes argues that power, authority, and legitimacy hinge on cultural cognitions; he asserts that leadership wields sufficient ideological power to influence and shape the perceptions of citizens such that individuals tend to perceive outcomes that might benefit those in power to be "natural" or "ordained" outcomes, even when – and perhaps particularly when – such outcomes are not in the best interest of the citizens themselves. This is quite relevant in that traditional hierarchies and patron-client relationships (both of which serve to solidify the power of those in leadership positions) are often cited as reasons why democracy in Southeast Asia is beset by revisionism and rollback. Underneath the somewhat generic terms "hierarchy," "patron-client relationship," and "democracy," however, lie intriguing relationships of power that do not hinge solely on might, force, or culture but on a nuanced character that is shifting, in an era of greater connectivity and wealth accumulation. This shifting character presents itself in the normative discourses of rulers of Southeast Asia's "liberal" countries, in narratives calling for continued military intervention, and in the ongoing social injustice perpetuated by references to "traditional models" of morality, history, and the like. It is these relationships of power and this shifting character that merit closer investigation than the text provides.

Asking why seemingly "democratic beacons" within Southeast Asia continue to endure dramatic setbacks and authoritarian or violence prone recidivism, Peter Dale Scott's (2009) conceptualization of "parapolitics" and shadow forces of criminality, illicit economies, and fragmented sovereignty existing side by side with the formal state of law, economy, and institutions demonstrates an intriguing view into the larger socio-political economy. Within this context, the "deep state" of criminality and the illicit economy that it supports – symbiotic and, at times, both secured by and a part and parcel part of the formal state and its authorities – provides key insights to the underbelly of democratic politics in many of the region's states. In some states such as Myanmar, the deep state is overt and quite easy to see in the regime's support or acquiescence to drug syndicates, which wield significant military capacity to carve out large autonomous regions within the state and engage in illicit activities ranging from illegal drug manufacturing and international distribution to illegal logging and gem trading. In the Socialist states, the deep state is the state itself, as represented by the party and its hegemonic role in the economy as well as in social and political affairs.

In Southeast Asia's democratic trailblazers, Thailand and the Philippines, more nuanced yet nonetheless profound deep state tendencies come to the fore. In the case of Thailand, the authors provide an account of the traditional framework of Thailand's identity as a "bureaucratic state" and consider some of the changes wrought since the 1973 uprising and Thaksin's challenge to traditional authority.<sup>1</sup> However, Thailand's 10 years of intractable political conflict

---

<sup>1</sup> Modern Thai history can be generically classified into three major periods and their corresponding political economy typologies. 1. Fred Riggs in his seminal study *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity* argued for the supremacy of the civil bureaucracy as opposed to extra-constitutional forces. 2. The 1973 student uprising which displaced military junta of Thanom Kittikachon and Praphas Charusathien led to an interim three year period of democratic civilian led politics. 3. The democratic rise of Thaksin Shinawatra in 2001 began a period which continues to present which scholars consider to be reflective of a challenge to Thailand's traditional power

would be better served by considering the profound roles of Thailand's military and monarchy and the shadow economy of socio-political chaos and order. While in their attempt to determine the causes of political strife in contemporary Thailand, the authors rightfully locate the source of conflict within Thailand's weak rule of law, constitutionalism (and failure thereof), and Thai culture (p. 59), the authors do so without considering contested power factions within Thailand's polity – factions that exercise extra-constitutional powers on a daily basis and are clearly sustained by the funding generated by political protests and by 'paramilitary' interventions, such as those occurring in 2010 and 2014.<sup>2</sup> As such, a real examination of democracy in Thailand is lacking. Further, the funding of political factions by the police and military – themselves operators and facilitators of international crimes ranging from drug and oil smuggling, logging, extortion, to human trafficking – plays a significant role in the inability of the civilian government to heal or tame unruly elements of its state or to exert sufficient political authority (including veto power) over institutions such as the military and monarchy – as represented by the Privy Council.<sup>3</sup> This power of the monarchy over the state is evidenced by the recent arrest and conviction of Metropolitan Central Investigation Bureau Police Chief Pongpat Chayaphan, arrested on charges of "defamation" of the monarchy (for which any Thai citizen can be imprisoned for 15 years), though it is likely that the actual cause for his arrest was his implication of the royals in his illicit dealings in gambling and oil trading. Likewise, the military's power (and abuse of power) is evidenced by the highly publicized involvement of high ranking Army brass, local politicians, administrators, and police in the unfolding Rohingya<sup>4</sup> and human trafficking scandals.<sup>5</sup>

Regarding the Philippines, the authors point correctly toward the thesis of an "anarchy of families"<sup>6</sup> and the politics of "fiefdoms" (p. 189), yet the question of how an eclectic democracy with expensive elections continues to function in such a desperately poor country is not investigated. While patron-client relationships are the focus of their inquiry, a more in-depth view is provided by McCoy (2009) regarding Philippine elections and the state's connections with illegal gambling or "*jueteng*" and drug smuggling rings; McCoy finds that the profits generated from such operations are equivalent to half of the government's annual budget

---

bases of the military, bureaucracy and monarchy. This is meant to connote a clear division of periods and typologies but rather different strains of political/economic hegemony that coexist, intertwine and current conflict.

<sup>2</sup> Since civil unrest began against P.M. Thaksin in 2005, Thailand has been periodically convulsed by periods of extreme political violence. Generically, the political groupings are termed 'yellow shirts' whom support the military and monarchy and 'red shirts' whom support Thaksin and electoral politics. In 2010 'red shirts' occupied various districts in downtown Bangkok protesting for early elections and an end to the rule of P.M. Aphisit Vejjajiva which ended in military violence and the deaths of over 90 protestors. Conversely, in 2014/15 protests by 'yellow shirts' led by former Democrat politician Suthep Tuegsuban launched protests in Bangkok demanding the ousting of democratically elected P.M. Yingluck Shinawatra which led to the 2015 coup and current military government.

<sup>3</sup> Since the ascendancy of Thaksin in 2001 a highly critical voice of his rule has been Privy Council Chair General Prem Thinsulanont [retired]. It has been alleged that the Privy Chair has been instrumental in opposing various Thaksin proxy governments and political parties as well as blocking attempts to manipulate military appointments by civilian politicians.

<sup>4</sup> Rohingya refer to a Muslim ethnic minority in the Northwestern Myanmar state of Rakhine. These people have been denied citizenship in Myanmar and are considered to be persecuted. The degree of the persecution has led tens of thousands to flee Myanmar for Malaysia and Indonesia and become subject to human trafficking and numerous human rights abuses.

<sup>5</sup> In June 2015 Thai Army Lieutenant General Manus Kongpan was arrested on charges of human trafficking. This investigation was in response to mass graves being 'discovered' along the Southern Thai border with Malaysia.

<sup>6</sup> This thesis asserts that several dozen large, landed Filipino families have been instrumental in forming the Philippine nation state and its civic institutions.

(McCoy 2009, 227). Furthermore, the role that illicit activity has on marshaling votes during campaign canvassing and financing is highlighted, demonstrating that the illicit economy provides both higher employment than the country's largest industry and that the shadow economy funds political campaigns and provides links from the local to national political stage by supplanting traditional familial linkages of a patron-client nature. Similarly, Thailand's "grey economy" has been estimated by Chulalongkorn economists (Phongpaichit, Piriyaangsan, & Treerat, 1998) to constitute more than 40% of the country's GDP – a figure that is presumably higher now, almost two decades from their study. The reason that these shadow and grey economies wield so much power is that they serve to further deepen the pockets of the shady figures who subsequently insert themselves into legitimate politics, thus effectively controlling large portions of the country. This phenomenon is best demonstrated by Thailand's Kunpleom family in the Chonburi region, who have transformed themselves over the course of two generations from a clan of gangsters to a cohort of upstanding local and regional politicians with legitimate and effective control over an entire province.

One final critique of the text is presented here: while it goes without saying that states in the region have changed quite a bit in the post-cold war period, there does not appear to have been a discernable pattern of democratization or improved state-civil relations among Southeast Asian states. A shift away from military rule in Myanmar is offset by a slide into conservative authoritarianism in Thailand; Indonesia democratizes as ruling elites in Malaysia throw up new constraints to representative politics. There are also grounds for questioning the "end" of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, as the region is still beset by a host of legacy issues and concerns – politicized militaries, domestic security perceptions, ethnic divisions, and cultures of impunity being some of the most obvious examples.

The book adds little to the field of Southeast Asian studies, though this is ultimately not its purpose. It is instead an introductory text, one which does a fair job of explaining a complex set of regional states to students. This said, the work is a touchstone, a useful starting point for further inquiry. Students or persons with a general interest in the history and context of the region will find this book appealing and easy to access, as it does not overuse academic jargon and is quite accessible in its approach, layout, and content.

William J. Jones  
Mahidol University International College, Thailand  
[william.jon@mahidol.ac.th](mailto:william.jon@mahidol.ac.th)

Matthew P. Copeland PhD  
Mahidol University International College, Thailand  
[matthew.cop@mahidol.ac.th](mailto:matthew.cop@mahidol.ac.th)