

and foodscapes deserve a seat at the kitchen table of food studies alongside well-established sites such as France, America and China.

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## Thailand

### *The lost territories: Thailand's history of national humiliation*

By SHANE STRATE

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Shane Strate's book does not just provide new insights into the '1893 crisis', Thailand's irredentism during the Second World War, and the campaign to 'recover' Preah Vihear temple in the late 1950s; it lays out an entirely new framework for understanding a persistent dynamic of Thai history that continues to dog Thai politics to this day.

In this important work, Strate essentially asks the question: If Thailand was truly never colonised, why does colonialism play such a prominent role in Thai historical narratives? He answers the question by presenting a framework that links national trauma/humiliation with national redemption. Within this schema, the *chosen trauma* provides a narrative framework of the *chosen myth* that periodically animates a discourse of *national humiliation* which sometimes suggests a path to *national redemption*. The myth is 'Thailand was never colonised'. The chosen trauma is the 1893 incident where the rapacious French coloniser 'steals' large tracts of what is today Laos and Cambodia. The nation suffers a national humiliation that is redeemed when valiant Thai soldiers seize back four territories from France in 1941. National humiliation is re-instilled when Thailand is 'forced' to return the four territories as payment of admission to the United Nations in 1946. Thailand gets another chance to recover a sliver of its national honour on the issue of Preah Vihear in the late 1950s, but once again suffers humiliation when the World Court rules that the temple belongs to Cambodia in 1962. The national humiliation discourse is once again invigorated by ultra-nationalists in 2008 after the elected government supported Cambodia's bid to have the Preah Vihear temple registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Strate's work is important because it effectively uncovers and unites into a single framework what historians have generally treated as unconnected, epiphenomenal trends and moments in modern Thai history, connecting the dots of extraterritoriality, irredentism, and anti-foreignism. Strate is right to say that there is a paucity of historical work on Thai domestic politics during the Second World War, and he draws widely from many archival sources as well as from newspapers to paint a none-too-complimentary picture of how Thai chauvinists created the ideological atmosphere conducive to Thai imperial aspirations during the war. Strate uses the

same framework of national humiliation to fruitfully examine the conflict over Preah Vihear more than a decade later. So there is much that is new for students of Thai history to discover in this book.

Just as importantly, the author clarifies and deepens our understanding of Thai historiography, shedding some light on a lot of events and dynamics that don't make a lot of sense within what he calls the 'Royal-Nationalist' narrative. The author provides a much-needed corrective, showing how Siam did more than merely survive, but in fact became a competitor in the imperialist game. He makes the case that the elite employed 'ethnic chauvinism, political witch hunts, or religious persecutions' — all still alive and present in today's Thailand (p. 2).

Strate's work brings up a lot of questions. For instance, Strate suggests that the Bangkok elite were carrying out their own 'neo-imperialism' project which they 'disguised as a movement to liberate people and redeem the country's honor' (p. 13). The ideological tool they used was ethnic or racial categories. Thai irredentists stripped away what they considered mistaken ethnic identities (Lao, Khmer, Kha, etc.) and made them racially Thai and legally Thai citizens. So one wonders what the Thai state officials were doing on the ground in these four provinces as part of their neo-imperialist project, and how that contrasted with what they had been doing, say, in the Northeast for half a century.

Throughout the book, the author indicates that there was massive support for the country's irredentist agenda by citing newspaper editorials, polls, and letters while warning the reader not to take these sources at face value. Gauging public opinion, he reflects in the final chapter, 'is a very difficult task' (p. 193). He then says flatly: 'Thailand lacks a space for public opinion. The state manufactures images that serve to legitimise its power and also creates channels for communicating them ... there are no ideological spaces wherein images created by the state can be challenged or evaluated.' As such, the public outpourings he describes throughout the book are actually 'performances of sorts' — an apt description of the current military government's ongoing disastrous performance. One begins to wonder whether anything purporting to be 'public' in Thailand is real or whether it is merely one manufactured performance after another.

Shane Strate's book reveals for us a central mainstay of Thai state ideology for more than a century — the discourse of National Humiliation — that continues to stymie efforts to make any progress toward a better Thailand.

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*Communities of potential: Social assemblages in Thailand and beyond*

Edited by SHIGEHARU TANABE

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Shigeharu Tanabe's edited volume aims to reveal prominent features of contemporary community movements in Southeast Asia, especially in Thailand and