

the 'war on drugs' reveal worrying aspects of modern Thai politics that cannot be overlooked if one wants to understand contemporary Thailand.

The entries on the royal family echo the biased view of the monarchy portrayed in the Thai media and historiography. Nowhere do we find information on the political role that the king and queen have played in recent Thai history. No mention is made of the partnership between the palace and a series of corrupt military-led regimes during the 1960s and 1970s. The fact that the king supported increasingly brutal counterinsurgency operations against an exaggerated communist threat during this period is not mentioned either. Is it true that Sirikit, as queen of Thailand, 'has acted with dedication and character', as the authors claim? Are these the words of scholars, or is this royalist propaganda? Do we need to know about the queen's many awards for her humanitarian work? Or would it be more interesting to learn about her personal connections to the village scouts, a mass rural patriotic fascist-style organization whose members swore personal allegiance to the royal family?

Choices, to repeat, must inevitably be made. But this volume shows a clear lack of the kind of knowledge of Thai history that goes beyond the nationalist/royalist discourse that is fed to the Thai people. Any student using this book must be warned: the *Historical dictionary of Thailand* must be treated with caution. For in-depth knowledge, students are advised to look somewhere else.

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Ryuto Shimada, *The intra-Asian trade in Japanese copper by the Dutch East India Company during the eighteenth century*. Leiden: Brill, 2006, xvi + 225 pp. [TANAP Monographs on the History of the Asian-European Interaction 4.] ISBN 9004150927. Price: EUR 77.00 (hardback).

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Ryuto Shimada was in the first batch of young scholars trained in the TANAP (Towards a New Age of Partnership) program that the Dutch National Archive and Leiden University set up in commemoration of the four hundredth anniversary of the creation of the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC, Dutch East India Company) in 1602 and the two hundredth anniversary of its demise in 1800. TANAP has trained PhD candidates from ten countries along the Indian Ocean rim and in East Asia, stretching from South Africa to Japan, where the VOC was active. These scholars make use of the extensive VOC archives in The Hague.

Shimada completed his thesis after eight years of research and published it

almost immediately in book form. Consequently the book exhibits some of the characteristics common to PhD theses. Its main strength lies in the extensive perusal of primary and secondary sources in several languages (mostly Dutch, Japanese, and English), and in careful support of the arguments presented with data. This strength is accompanied by some limitations, the first of which is the readership the author probably had in mind. PhD candidates must first and foremost please their supervisors and potential thesis examiners. These supervisors and examiners, particularly in the case of the TANAP program, are specialists in the field. One of the most common strategies candidates adopt is to focus narrowly on a specific issue and come out with some new arguments. Shimada has done just that. This reviewer considers this to be a limitation because in my view, books in the humanities and social sciences ought to be aimed at a readership broader than just a handful of specialists.

I found the book a tedious read because of its style of writing. Granted, it uses neither jargon nor complex mathematical equations, and the text is expertly polished. Nonetheless, reading the book required much perseverance. This is because much of it is spent on presenting factual information on one commodity, because the style of writing is descriptive rather than analytical, and because the relationship between each statement and the overall theme of the book is often unclear. The author probably spent much of his period of candidature overcoming the language barriers, wading through the primary and the secondary materials, and collecting a large enough body of data to fill the ten chapters while staying within the narrowly defined topic. Such an exercise is an impressive achievement in itself, but readers (other than those who are trained to find numbers inherently fascinating) may get the impression that the author has not adequately digested the materials or integrated them into a coherently structured understanding.

This said, however, Shimada's book can be considered an important groundwork for further studies of this potentially fascinating topic. I recommend that those who wish to read the book start from its final chapter. Called a conclusion, that chapter is also descriptive; although it is not altogether clear or insightful, it was here that I began to understand the rationale for the thesis and the author's understanding of the theme. In this chapter he reiterates that the VOC exported Japanese copper via Batavia to India (particularly Coromandel), where it was apparently used for buying Indian cotton textiles for export, and that copper was minted into small-denomination coins that were circulated for daily use among ordinary people. Shimada argues that an adequate supply of copper was a precondition for the growth of the modern economy, and that there was a moment of crisis at the beginning of the eighteenth century when Japan dramatically reduced its copper exports. He also draws three further conclusions. First, the VOC faced competition in the 1760s when the English East India Company began to export copper to South

Asia from Britain, where the industrial revolution had just begun – although because the quality of Japanese copper was superior, the VOC continued to derive steady profits from its copper trade. Second, the production of copper did not increase much in Japan during the eighteenth century because copper export was a deficit trade. The Japanese authorities exported the metal at lower prices than those they had paid the mines for the metal; the deficits were eventually transferred back to the miners, and therefore the copper mines did not have any strong incentive to raise productivity by developing new technologies, as was the case in Britain at that time. Third, the VOC played a key role in Asian economic development by connecting East, Southeast, and South Asia through intra-Asian trading – and, by so doing, promoting an international division of production.

Shimada ends the book with the following statement: 'This seems to point in the direction of a conclusion that an adequate supply of Japanese copper was a prerequisite for sustaining stability in the Asian economy, but that neither Japan nor the VOC ever did succeed in providing the Asian economy with an adequate volume of Japanese copper' (p. 173). Those readers who start from the concluding chapter, and find it interesting, can then read the preceding nine chapters. Reading the conclusion first will make it easier for them to maintain their interest in Japanese copper and to appreciate the many tables and graphs in the book. At the same time they will probably find the book's focus on one commodity and one dealer too narrow to draw any grand conclusion on the Asian economy. Completion of a PhD is, however, meant to be the starting point of one's academic career. The roles played by Japanese copper, Indian textiles, and the VOC in the economic changes in Asia during the precolonial era certainly constitute a fascinating field for further investigation. With more freedom of thought, imagination, and movement now as an independent researcher, Shimada will be better placed for conducting more insightful works on this fertile ground.

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