

Unlike the P4D, the P4P issued binding decisions that were appealable to the Minister of Labor. Unions, eager to win favorable decisions, exerted political pressure on governments to side with workers. The government could influence P4P decisions through both their representatives on the tripartite committee and via the Minister of Labor. This system, Ingleson argues, delivered “better results for workers than they would have otherwise achieved” (126). Among the gains that workers won were Lebaran allowances, industry and regional minimum wages, and the gradual elimination of race-based and discriminatory practices.

Workers and Democracy succeeds in its goal of demonstrating that unions were more than appendages of political parties. But in foregrounding unions as industrial organizations, Ingleson also gives short shrift to their role as political actors, and risks unintentionally reinforcing elements of New Order labor historiography (see Ford 2010). As Ingleson argues, working class gains depended on the freedoms that organized labor gained with the transition to parliamentary democracy. These expanded freedoms affected not only what workers could do in the workplace – e.g., organize unions – but also, and perhaps more importantly, how unions could participate in the public sphere. In contrast with Dutch colonial rule and even the early years of independence, unions could now directly influence politicians through democratic politics. Political maneuvering was a key element in union strategies to win better compensation and working conditions from the labor dispute resolution institutions. Indonesian governments unquestionably supported improvements in labor conditions based in part on principle, but they were also undoubtedly making cold political calculations, especially once the PKI’s and Sobsi’s stars began to rise. The extent to which unions were involved in elections also remains a question, as is the extent to which unions leveraged their links to political parties to win pro-labor policies. A more robust analysis of unions as political actors would have strengthened Ingleson’s analysis of Indonesia’s labor movement during the parliamentary democracy era.

References

Ford, Michele (2010) “A Victor’s History: A Comparative Analysis of the Labor Historiography of Indonesia’s New Order.” *Labor History* 51:4, pp. 523–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0023656X.2010.528991>.

Ingleson, John (1986) *In Search of Justice: Workers and Unions in Colonial Java, 1908–1926*. Cambridge: CUP.


Ingleson, John (2014) *Workers, Unions, and Politics: Indonesia in the 1920s and 1930s*. Leiden: Brill.

Suryomengolo, Jafar (2013) *Organising Under the Revolution: Unions & the State in Java, 1945–48*. Singapore: NUS Press.

doi:10.1017/S1479591423000128

Thai Politics in Translation: Monarchy, Democracy and the Supra-constitution

By Michael Connors & Ukrist Pathmanand. NIAS Press, 2021. 256 pages. Hardback, £65.00 GBP, ISBN: 9788776942847. Paperback, £22.50, ISBN: 9788776942854

Motoki Luxmiwattana 

Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University, Shinjuku-ku, Japan

(Received 15 December 2022; accepted 15 December 2022)

Saying that conservatism, both as an ideology and a political project, plays a major role in Thai politics is an understatement to any observer of Thai politics. There has been rich research in the English language

into understanding the various aspects of what could be categorized as part of the Thai Right, from certain state/institutional bodies, nationalism, social movements, and, in the recent years, the monarchy itself. Nevertheless, the understanding as to precisely what Thai conservatism may entail on a more ideational level – as a “social imaginary” (p. 39), to use the editors’ words – may have been limited, partially because of the tendency to collapse modern Thai politics into “Manichean [...] interpretations and speculations” (p. 17) of a conflict between the democratic people and the authoritarian monarchy. Closer inspection occasionally reveals that actors typically considered conservative may have been influenced by ideas usually categorized as liberal in a broader context (Connors 2021).

This edited volume by Michael K. Connors and Ukrist Pathamanand seeks to address that issue by offering the readers access to selected writings on Thai conservatism, most of which appear in English for the first time. As a whole, the book takes conservatism seriously, not dismissing it “as mere rationalisations of venal interests with little intrinsic quality” (p. 4).

The Introduction and the first chapter, *Debating the Bhumibol Era* and *Understanding Thai Conservatism* respectively, provide the context for the following writings. The first chapter is a short overview of the position of conservatism in modern Thai history, with particular focus on the late King Bhumibol, and of how they have been conceptualized and debated thus far. The second chapter is a more direct introduction of the book, with the editors introducing the chapters and, crucially, the background of the authors. Given the nature of many of the authors (most notably Pramuan Rujanaseri who was pivotal in the early 2000s anti-Thaksin movements), the book does not simply capture conservatism as described and analysed by Thai (liberal-leaning) academics – it also reflects Thai conservative thought as closely as possible. Here, the editors propose the notion of the “supra-constitution,” taken from one of the translated chapters, as an overarching framework to understand these eclectic pieces written at various points in time. The concept serves well to link together the broad range of topics through the long timespan of the book, as skeletal as the concept may be.

Nevertheless, collapsing these various articulations of ideas into a singular term, especially when the conventions and norms it entails “might not be tangible or expressly written” (p. 22) may at times obscure important differences among the conservatives. Indeed, the editors point out themselves that they may have “given excess meaning” (ibid.) into the concept. The concept as it appears in the original writing seems to be a categorization of Thai constitutions, aiming at finding a semblance of order in their chaotic life cycles. Expanding the concept to the ideational realm in broader society may be at odds with the editors professed conception of the Bhumibol reign, that there were “multiple transformations of national identity and competing political projects” (p. 17). In the present formulation, anyone or anything could be construed as part of the spectral “supra-constitution,” together serving the monarchical power rather than being in competition with one another.

The Thai Supra-Constitution, originally a lecture delivered by Somchai Preechasilpakul, a legal scholar from Chiang Mai University, is translated as the second chapter. Puzzled by the wittily termed “supreme law only for a temporary period” (p. 62), Somchai sought a framework to understand the Thai constitutions, and concluded that since 1932, “Thailand has really only had three constitutions: a parliamentary version, an authoritarian version, and a mixed parliamentary-bureaucratic polity version” (p. 42). Which category a given constitution belonged to was determined by the power relations between the parliament, the state bureaucracy and the monarchy. The history of this interplay has given rise to a set of rules that have led to “the drafting of a constitution [occurring] in the knowledge that it will, sooner or later, be revoked” (p. 62). Such is the “supra-constitution” of Thailand that “soars above, and which directs the changes of the Thai constitution in contemporary Thai politics” (p. 63).

The third chapter, *Political Discourse on Thai Democracy*, was written by Nakharin Mektrairat, currently a sitting member of the Constitutional Court of Thailand, often described as a key institution of conservative-authoritarian politics (Mérieau 2016). In that sense, while this piece is a qualified academic work, it also serves as a window into a conservative social imaginary. Certain word choices in Nakharin’s description of the “Western School of Thought” occasionally betrays this – “its dry explanations” or “bland and evidence-free introduction” (p. 86) being some of the more assertive

examples. The writing is nevertheless a well-rounded overview of the intellectual terrain of the conservative Traditional School and the progressive Western School immediately following the 1932 Revolution, as well as the intellectual influence they had on Thai academia at large.

The fourth chapter, *National Ideology and Development of the Thai Nation*, written by Kramol Thongthammachart, takes a more policy-brief like direction. Following a brief discussion of the definition and necessity of national ideology, Kramol outlines what a Thai national ideology may look like, including its implementation. His conception of *traí phak* (tri-allegiance to the nation, religion and monarchy) is deeply conservative, almost to the point of stereotypical (p. 104). Interestingly, his ideas in other aspects he terms *jatumak* (four-path) appear “centrist” for the lack of better term, or even progressive in the Thai context given his clear support for democracy (pp.104–105).

The fifth chapter titled *Thai-style Democracy: Concept and Meaning* is an analysis of Thai military thinking by Chalermkiat Phiu-nuan. Chalermkiat argues that, for the military, “‘democracy’ is not an end, but merely a ‘desirable’ means for the greater cause: the preservation of the Thai State” (p. 119). In this worldview, the extent of democracy (political participation by the public) should be allowed or limited depending on the circumstances and the extent of threat to the state. Such understanding is perhaps why Chalermkiat takes care in distinguishing the sentiments and governance style among different military leaders (pp. 122, 127–28), their commonality notwithstanding.

The sixth chapter, *Civilizing the State: State, Civil Society and Politics in Thailand* by Pasuk Phongpaichit, is the only work in the collection that has been published in English before. Pasuk points out that the Thai state has, rather than declining as in the “‘death of the state’ literature” (p. 148) and as the political liberalization of the 1990s Thailand may suggest, likely adapted, and possibly strengthened, its scope of control. The focus of the analysis here is less ideational, encompassing both formal and informal channels of power used by the Thai state when facing societal resistance. This makes Pasuk’s brief discussion of the civil society’s thoughts stand out all the more. Ostensibly anti-statist figures quoted here such as Thirayuth Boonmee (p. 155) and Anek Laothammatas (p. 162) became pro-coup intellectuals in the 2000s – the former being a major critic of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the latter currently serving as the Minister of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation. Further exploration of this possible link between the disillusionment of civil society with formal democracy and contemporary conservative thought – an ideological shift that may very well be “well-trodden” (Winichakul 2008, 575) – may pave a way to better understand how or why “those of a liberal persuasion could tragically believe that the monarchy and military might serve to break a political deadlock or deal with an authoritarian figure” (p. 34).

The seventh chapter by Pramuan Rujanaseri, *Royal Power*, is likely the most consequential writing in this collection, in terms of its real political implications (pp. 34–35). The content itself, in many Thai academics’ words, offers nothing particularly new. The chapter refers to the conservative reading of Thai kingship since ancient times – that it inherently had limits (“repeatedly asked for forgiveness from the people”, p. 166) and that Western form of governance is challenging it. While subtle, Pramuan’s retelling of the royal virtues contains a critique of Thaksin, emphasizing fairness, sense of sufficiency, and honesty – qualities which Thaksin allegedly lacked. Pramuan seems to have attempted – and likely succeeded – in popularizing this particular conservative worldview. Devoid of academic jargons, it emphasizes the linkage between the King and the people and provides a relatable depiction of the King’s working life (pp. 184–86).

The final chapter, aptly titled *Historical Legacy and the Emergence of Judicialisation in the Thai State*, is Saichon Sattayanurak’s attempt to trace the historical sources of the contemporaneous expression of royalist politics by the Thai middle class. As one of the leading intellectual historians in Thailand, Saichon draws from writings across various times to reconstruct the “culture of political thinking of the Thai middle class” (p. 188) in both its nature and historical trajectory. As the editors point out, Saichon reads such dependence on royal and judicial power not necessarily as an expression of elitism, but as “an indicator of the structural weakness” (p. 37) – a “squeezed middle” seemingly waging a war against both those above (the economically extractive ethnic-Thai government) and below (the unenlightened lower class who put corrupt politicians in power). While somewhat assertive

at times when making claims regarding the middle class as a whole, the chapter illustrates how prevalent such mode of thinking seems to be among the members of the social class in question.

All in all, the variety of the writings – both in terms of their content and context – is impressive. However, precisely because of this commendable variety, the editors’ notion of “supra-constitution” as presented in the book may not be the most suitable overarching framework to conceptualize Thai conservative thought as a whole. Perhaps a typology of conservatives (or “isms”), based on the different concepts or forms of articulations employed, could be overlaid on the shared motif of the “supra-constitution” identified in this book to make the spectre more tangible. Nevertheless, the book is a valuable collection of texts that can function both as standalone analysis of Thai politics and primary references for further study on Thai conservatism.

References

- Connors, Michael K.** (2021). “Towards a History of Conservative Liberalism in Thailand after the 1932 Siamese Revolution: An Ideological Analysis.” *Asian Studies Review*, pp. 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2021.1973366>.
- Mérieau, Eugénie** (2016). “Thailand’s Deep State, Royal Power and the Constitutional Court (1997–2015).” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 46:3, pp. 445–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2016.1151917>.
- Winichakul, Thongchai** (2008). “Nationalism and the Radical Intelligentsia in Thailand.” *Third World Quarterly* 29:3, pp. 575–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590801931520>.

doi:10.1017/S1479591422000547

Face-veiled Women in Contemporary Indonesia

By Eva F. Nisa. Routledge, 2023, p. 254. Hardback, US\$170.00, ISBN: 9781032159461. eBook US\$47.65, ISBN: 9781003246442.

Aan Diana , Desi Nuralim  and Aulia Geger Jagat 

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung, Indonesia

Corresponding author: Aan Diana; Email: aandiana2021@gmail.com

(Received 7 July 2023; accepted 8 July 2023)

The niqab, or *cadar* in Indonesian, remains a center of controversy in some parts of the world, particularly in Western countries (Fattali and Smith, 2023; Piela, 2021; Zempi, 2016; Zempi, 2019).¹ The niqab was even banned in several European countries, such as Austria, Belgium, Denmark, and France, because of its association with religious extremism, gender oppression, and self-segregation (Zempi, 2016). What is even more surprising is that the *cadar* is not always acceptable even in Muslim majority countries such as Indonesia.

Adapted from her ethnographic doctoral dissertation, Nisa’s monograph addresses the practice of face-veiling in the Indonesian context. Studying Indonesian Muslim face-veiled women that belonged to the Islamic revivalist movements, namely various Salafi groups and the Tablighī Jamā‘at, Nisa’s study reveals the context in which increasing numbers of women are wearing *cadar* in Indonesia. Drawing on an extended period of fieldwork from 2008 to 2010 in urban Jakarta, Makassar (South Sulawesi), and Yogyakarta, and additional visits to the field from 2011 to 2019, Nisa’s key findings shed light on why these women decided to wear the *cadar*, embodying strict religious disciplinary practices, and the consequences of their decisions. As the meanings and practices of Islam in

¹The authors are grateful to Fikri Yanda for insightful comments on an earlier draft of this review.