

Book Reviews

Devare, H. (2015). *Ganga to Mekong: A Cultural Voyage through Textiles*. Singapore: Manohar/ ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute.

The intimate relationship between women and textiles is no surprise; however the bond between Hema Devare and the art of cloth weaving goes far beyond. Having the privilege of traveling to many places around the world and Asia in particular, Devare has had opportunities to observe differences and similarities of clothing culture. She eventually was able to decipher the trace of cultural connection between her native country, India, and Southeast Asia—the plateaus of two great rivers, the Ganga and the Mekong. What is very intriguing about this connection is that it still shows and shines in its unique form, requiring only very keen eyes to be able to spot it.

Different from other sorts of belongings, textiles were more universal and mobile, which easily allowed them to transmit cultures. They have been the media through which messages and influences from one culture were sent to another. It is not only the style on a piece of cloth that tells stories, but the way that it was made (the number of strings, dyeing and weaving technique) and the way it was used (when and how it was used, and who used it). For example, the social hierarchy of people in both India and Southeast Asia is well reflected in the hierarchy of clothing and textiles in the two cultures.

Following each line and chapter, one can see how exhaustively the author collects evidence from which she meticulously interprets and draws conclusions. Besides observing what people of these two cultures are still wearing nowadays, the author attentively notices old photos, ancient paintings, murals, and even historical manuscripts such as religious writings, folktales, and literature. When the story of Gautama Buddha describes the dress of Amrapali, a renowned courtesan, as a “...richly woven semi-transparent sari”, the author takes the hint of the weaving techniques in the ancient time. In this book the history of trade between the two areas as well as the roles subsequently played by Western colonizers greatly explains how the cultures of the two areas were exchanged and even how it diffused to the Western hemisphere.

Devare was right when she described a feeling of *déjà vu* she had when she traveled and saw what the people of Southeast Asia wore, in reality or in photos and paintings. Every string of cotton, silk, and even silver and gold, and every pattern showing off on these pieces of cloth tells how closely these two cultures have been interwoven.

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Storey, I. (2015). *Thailand's Post-Coup Relations with China and America: More Beijing, Less Washington*. (Trends in Southeast Asia #20). Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute.

This recent publication offers an intriguing external perspective on Thailand's political changes in the recent past. Ian Storey focuses on the period since the May 2014 coup. He examines tensions between the U.S. and Thailand that began even before the coup, as the two countries' interests diverged in regard to their position towards China. Specifically, Thailand has not fully supported the U.S. "pivot" policy that seeks to strengthen formal ties with its Asian allies in light of China's perceived strategic threat. This is because China has become an increasingly strong ally for Thailand, particularly in terms of trade and other economic issues but also militarily. The U.S. condemnation of the military junta's takeover and the slowness of any return to democracy have exacerbated this strained relationship. Another blow to relations between the two countries occurred when the U.S. State Department placed Thailand on the Tier 3 watch list in its *2015 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report* for the second year. The Thai government felt that its major efforts to reduce trafficking since the 2014 TIP report had gone unrecognized, especially compared with surrounding countries such as Malaysia and Myanmar which are given Tier 2 status (according to some, for the U.S.' own strategic reasons). Military cooperation, long a feature of the U.S.-Thai relationship, suffered during this period; and the strength of Thailand's current ties with China lead some to conjecture that China may replace the U.S. military's presence in some strategic locations.

Storey maintains that the underlying current affecting all aspects of the U.S.-Thai relationship is their "diverging threat perceptions" of China. While the U.S. sees China as a competitor and strategic threat, Thailand has received support from China throughout recent political turmoil. No criticisms of the military government or calls to return to democracy are heard from this ally; only swift recognition of the new government and continued normal bilateral relations. Trade and investment links have strengthened. Storey provides many examples of evidence of the China-Thai relationship, including the return of Uighur refugees to China, the establishment of joint Thai-Chinese air force training exercises, the "rice for rail" agreement, and others.

This publication series from the ISEAS–Yusof Isak Institute has included articles with clear explanations and straightforward analysis of Thailand's recent political history. They are understandable for those who know little about Thai politics or for those who have been mystified by recent events. We recommend this series, both for academics and for the general reader, and look forward to additional publications as they become available.

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