
Christopher E. Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954*. Richmond Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1999. 418 pp. ISBN 0-7007-0622-4.

In this impressive volume Christopher Goscha examines the important, but previously little studied, role Thailand played in the Vietnamese revolutionary movement during the colonial era. He makes a strong case for the significance of the Thailand connection, particularly during the immediate post-Second World War period.

From the early 20th century, effective French security efforts forced Vietnamese revolutionaries to seek shelter abroad. Japan, for a time, and China were major centres of revolutionary activity. As for Thailand, Ho Chi Minh's sojourn in the northeastern provinces of the country in the late 1920s as a Comintern representative is well known, but Goscha places Ho's efforts in a broader context and provides many new details. Along the way he examines the historical origins of the several different types of Vietnamese communities in Thailand, making clear why the Vietnamese in northeastern Thailand ultimately were the strongest supporters of radical nationalism.

Goscha explains clearly, too, the ambivalent attitude towards Vietnamese revolutionaries held by Thai leaders both before and after the 1932 coup d'état. Although Thailand had fought with Vietnam over control of Cambodia in the 19th century, most Thais naturally tended to sympathize with fellow Asians opposed to European colonialism. More significantly, they deeply resented the French seizure of Cambodia and Laos—territories they considered rightfully their own—a tangible reason to make common cause with France's enemies. Still, Thai leaders knew that their own interests dictated co-operation with their more powerful colonial neighbours, so any official support the revolutionaries received remained limited and largely covert. The Thai government's anti-communist stance served as a further restraining factor.

All this changed drastically in 1940 when Premier Phibun Songkhram seized the opportunity presented by France's defeat in Europe to press Thailand's claims on French-held territories

along the Mekong River. As part of his campaign to regain the 'lost territories', Phibun encouraged Indochinese people to express their support for Thailand's position by crossing the border. Some in fact did so, and were able to establish personal links with key Thai political figures.

A further boon for Indochinese activists came with the emergence of the pro-Allied Free Thai movement, led by Pridi Phanomyong during the latter part of the Second World War. Not only were key northeastern politicians loyal Pridi supporters, but the underdeveloped region was little frequented by Japanese forces and was accordingly the best site for guerrilla training camps and secret airfields. The abrupt end to the war in August 1945 meant that the weapons flown in by the British and Americans were not used against the Japanese, but did become part of an arms bazaar in postwar Thailand. Most of Pridi's supporters—particularly the politicians from the northeast who were of Lao ancestry—were inherently sympathetic to Indochinese revolutionaries and resentful of France's success in reclaiming the territories Thailand had obtained with Japanese help in 1941. Accordingly, the postwar Thai governments permitted the Viet Minh and other Indochinese independence movements to operate freely and openly. The Thais also profited handsomely by selling them weapons and other supplies. Goscha argues convincingly, based on a detailed account of Viet Minh operations in Bangkok, that this supply line was a key factor in sustaining the Vietnamese war against the French prior to the communist victory in neighbouring China in 1949.

As is well known, the official Thai stance toward the Viet Minh changed drastically under the post-1947 military governments, but Goscha demonstrates that this shift was gradual. He contends that it was not based primarily on ideological opposition to communism or anti-Viet Minh sentiment within the Thai Army. Instead, he points to domestic political concerns—particularly, a French-encouraged fear that the Viet Minh would actively support Pridi's faction—the allure of American aid, and security concerns connected with the communist victory in China. By 1950, Thailand and revolutionary Vietnam had become enemies, aligned with the opposing sides

in the Cold War. Soon the Thais and Americans would back their own contenders for power in the newly independent states in Indochina.

The reasons why scholars previously have failed to explore fully Vietnamese revolutionary activities in Thailand are obvious. The relevant sources are in several languages and scattered in archives around the globe. Also, many aspects of the highly secret activities involved are either not documented at all, or known only through memoirs of dubious reliability. Goscha successfully surmounted these various problems in producing this meticulously researched and smoothly written book. It belongs on the reading list of all serious students of 20th-century Southeast Asian history.

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