



in the Philippines adds to their success through assisting in preparing for medical missions and dealing with the aftermath of surgeries and diagnoses.

Roces maintains a strong focus on the narratives of Filipino migrants and interpretations of their own experiences. She moves away from the lens of labour to explore, in detail, the ways in which the migration experience presents opportunities for change, both for the migrants themselves and in their host and home countries. In focusing on agency in the migrant archive, Roces has made a valuable contribution to Filipino migration studies, both in her findings and method.

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## Thailand

### *Dynastic democracy: Political families in Thailand*

By YOSHINORI NISHIZAKI

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Yoshinori Nishizaki's *Dynastic Democracy* presents a novel interpretation of Thailand's political development over the past nine decades. He argues that the ups and downs of electoral democracy in Thai political history are inseparable from the endless power competition between two types of families: the conservative princely-bureaucratic families, who are connected and subservient to the Chakri dynasty, vis-à-vis the commoner-capitalist families, whose emergence, ironically, was inseparable from political reforms to make parliamentary elections more competitive. When electoral democracy is present, the commoner families emerge as the dominant power in the Parliament, giving Thai electoral democracy a strong dynastic character. Alternatively, when the conservative royalists viewed electoral democracy as too corrupt, they did not hesitate to intervene through unconstitutional and undemocratic means and temporarily bring down the democratic dynasty. Nonetheless, even during the temporary demise of the dynastic democracy, the conservative royalists must rely on some commoner families to support them. Therefore, regardless of who holds power at the pinnacle of Thai politics, political families always play essential roles in supporting the structure of the winning regime.

By placing family as the main focus of Thailand's political development, Nishizaki has successfully demonstrated the key role of family as a political organisation. Scholarly debates on the state-making process and democratisation often ignore the role of family in their analyses. Within the modernisation theory framework, family is seen as a relic of the ancient political past that has no position in contemporary state-making and democratisation. Using Thailand as a case study, *Dynastic Democracy* successfully challenges the domination of the modernisation narratives. The book demonstrates that family matters in determining political outcomes and can act as an alternative means to organise power. When party institutionalisation

is poor and political competition is fierce, political families can mobilise votes for political parties. The unintended consequence is that the opportunities for non-dynastic politicians to participate in elections are increasingly limited. As a result, the Thai Parliament has become a ‘family-dominated institution (p. 4)’.

*Dynastic Democracy* is a tour de force. Anyone who studies dynastic politics understands how challenging it is to construct a dataset of political families that records dynastic politicians’ blood and marriage relationships. Chapter 1 illustrates how Nishizaki creatively and meticulously utilised untapped resources—including politicians’ obituaries (cremation volumes), the Assets and Liabilities Declaration Accounts, and political families’ booklets commemorating their ancestors—to construct the genealogy of Thai political families. The result is an extensive dataset and mapping of the kinship networks of influential Thai political families that have had and still have power in the country. No less than 1,426 dynastic members of the Thai Parliament (MPs) representing 714 political families have been elected in elections between 1932 and 2020 (p. 7). Additionally, Nishizaki presents detailed family relationships and kinship networks for nearly fifty Thai political families and uses them to illustrate how complex and intertwined Thai political dynasties are.

In chapter 2, Nishizaki exploits the dataset to reinterpret the 1932 coup that brought down the Thai absolute monarchy. He contends that the leaders of the 1932 coup—that is, the Promoters—did not fully intend to displace the governing stratum because they shared familial relationships with the royalist strata they sought to eliminate through the coup. Chapter 3 refines Duncan McCargo’s (2005) concept of network monarchy. Nishizaki shows that the royalists who constitute the network monarchy are not only bound by ideological belief and loyalty to the Chakri Dynasty. They also intertwined in an intricate web of princely-bureaucratic kinship networks that had been developed for decades before the 1973 uprising. Chapter 4 convincingly demonstrates the irony of political reforms in Thailand. Various institutions put in place by royalist reformers to restrict the political manoeuvrability of the commoner families were used by the latter to strengthen their domination in the Thai Parliament. Chapter 5 describes how General Prayut Chan-o-cha junta government’s survival also depended on commoner families’ support, some of whom ironically supported the Shinawatra family in the elections before the 2014 coup. Chapters 2 to 5 contain abundant empirical information about the individuals who make up Thai political families and their relationships with one another. Consequently, the reader might occasionally feel overwhelmed and lost while trying to follow the storyline. Nishizaki, however, has reminded the readers that it is his analytical decision to describe the complexity and depth of the political families’ influence on Thai political development (p. xv).

Comparative political scientists will find chapter 6 thought-provoking. Nishizaki argues that the patrimonial culture that precedes the introduction of elections is responsible for the emergence, durability, and spread of dynastic politics in Thailand and the Philippines (p. 215). While the patrimonial culture argument is compelling, the analysis of the durability of dynastic politics in a democratic system is incomplete without understanding the mechanics behind the success (and failure) of political families in organising their resources to win elections and how the resources are being passed down from dynastic politicians to their family members,

especially over a long period of time. The transmission of family resources and networks does not happen automatically, especially when families involve non-family members in their political operations. Unfortunately, in his analytical choice, Nishizaki chose not to address the mechanisms underlying the variations in the size and continuity of Thai political dynasties (p. 11).

*Dynastic Democracy* speaks to a broad academic audience. This book should be a critical reference for scholars of Thai politics. The detailed information on kinship networks presented in this book is an invaluable source for understanding the intricate connections of influential families, which are integral to the contemporary Thai political fabric. Yoshinori Nishizaki's creativity and tenacity in collecting, coding, analysing, and visualising data from various archival sources serve as an excellent example for history, sociology, and political science students who want to conduct similar research in different contexts. Finally, this book provides food for thought for those who study dynastic politics in developing countries because it challenges several conventional wisdoms about the structural factors—such as regional economic variations—that lead to the formation of political dynasties.

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## Vietnam

*Single mothers and the state's embrace: Reproductive agency in Vietnam*

By HARRIET M. PHINNEY

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The aftermath of war in Vietnam gave rise to the phenomenon of older single women who 'asked for a child' (*xin con*) by requesting sexual relations with a man whom they did not intend to marry for the express purpose of becoming pregnant. In *Single Mothers and the State's Embrace*, Harriet Phinney examines how women's intentional choices in the 1980s and 1990s made *xin con* a legible category of social action, an object of state research and law, and a topic of popular discussion. Drawing on interviews conducted over two decades with 35 northern Vietnamese women, 31 of whom live in rural areas, Phinney compellingly analyses the intertwining dynamics of agency, governmentality, and subjectivity surrounding *xin con*. On the one hand, unmarried women's postwar decisions to become biological mothers reflected long-established cultural values and patriarchal structures that essentialised women as mothers. On the other hand, the pursuit of a different path toward motherhood and state support for doing so transformed ideas about gender and marriage that affected subsequent generations, including the women Phinney interviewed in Hanoi who asked for a child in the 2000s. The result is a powerful longitudinal