

But toward the end of his life, his intellectual powers seem to have been in decline. He no longer read the latest books, preferring instead to return to older and more familiar ones.

For many western observers, Sjahrir came to be seen as a man too westernized for the Indonesian political scene. Mrazek clearly dispels this simplistic notion: Sjahrir was much more complicated than that. But what was his long-term impact on the Indonesian political scene? In his introduction to the book, Mrazek notes that several readers of earlier versions drew the conclusion that Sjahrir was a man who had failed. Mrazek comments that he “[could] not disagree more” (p. 1) with this opinion. It depends, I suppose, on what counts as failure, or success. Mrazek’s Sjahrir did not seek conventional political success, and indeed was positively uncomfortable with it. So the fact that he did not achieve conventional political success could hardly be held against him. Did he have any lasting impact on Indonesian politics or its intellectual life? Probably not. It may be unfair to call him a failure, but it would be just as unrealistic to call him a success either.

This book could perhaps have been rather more vigorously edited. The exhaustiveness of Mrazek’s research in seeking out the details of Sjahrir’s life occasionally exhausted this reviewer. Fact is piled relentlessly on fact. Mrazek’s style is rather heavy, with a tendency to long and rather convoluted sentences. The illustrations are curious. Some are of obvious relevance but others do not seem to be: the Map of the Netherlands (p. 75), for instance, and the set of three Japanese drawings made during the occupation (pp. 213, 222, 246). But these are minor drawbacks. This is a book which those concerned with Indonesia in the twentieth century should have on their shelves, and read.

COLIN BROWN

Flinders University of South Australia

Angels and Devils: Thai Politics from February 1991 to September 1992—A Struggle for Democracy? By DAVID MURRAY. Bangkok: White Orchid Press, 1996. xxvii, 314 pp.

While this is not, by the author’s own admission, an academic work, this by no means removes it from consideration by academics, who will certainly be impressed with Murray’s detailing of the events of 1991 and 1992. This includes the period from the military coup of February 1991 to the elections of September 1992, containing between these two endpoints “Black May” of 1992. The strength is in the details, and Murray winds them up by raising important questions rather than providing quick and easy answers.

Murray portrays military coups in Thailand as a normal part of the Thai political process—as a mechanism by which the military maintains a stable position in its negotiation of power with Thai bureaucratic elites. It is stability and an avoidance of excesses by one group or another that Murray views as critical to parties involved in the “power-sharing” between the military and bureaucratic elites. Murray also raises questions about whether this system will change, since the elections of September 1992 suggest to him that traditional patron-client political behavior and not the pursuit of democratic change conditioned the outcome of the elections. The electorate, especially in rural areas, voted along traditional allegiances, and Thais generally sought stability and balance within the system, rather than to change the system itself.

Specifically within the urban sphere, however, the events of "Black May" of 1992 also point to the involvement in Thai politics of the growing Thai middle class. The interests of the Thai middle class are inseparable from the economic growth which Thailand has experienced in the past two decades, and the protection and furtherance of middle class economic gains and goals are increasingly tied to political participation, constructing a voice which must be heard and responded to by military leaders and bureaucratic elites. As Murray suggests, this circumstance makes questionable a scenario whereby economic growth follows democracy, and may indicate instead that democracy follows economic growth. Still, in rural areas caught in an economic and political system which has perpetuated and, in view of Thailand's economic growth, furthered a major gap between rural and urban wealth and power, local organizations are being formed to address local needs and concerns; and to do so requires gaining the attention of elite politicians and other leaders in Bangkok.

In view of Murray's study, one might suppose that there is limited hope for democracy in Thailand's poverty-stricken neighbor, Burma. It could also be suggested, however, that in Burma the growing demand for democracy, and the desire for a change to the system rather than simply change within the system, are irreversible trends to which the military regime must respond and from which it will inevitably have to back down. Again, as in Thailand, Burma's rural populations mobilize for political change at a slower pace than urban populations, and lean more toward traditional practices than toward change.

As Murray suggests, a part of the problem for rural Thailand is the command of media and the control of the flow of information, often limited to government propaganda, by ruling elites; such control necessarily limits the range of perceptions about key events and can mischaracterize these events. While it is sometimes suggested that the failure of rural populations to pursue democratic change reflects a respect and a need for "traditional" authoritarian rule, it is more likely the case that semidemocratic regimes such as in Thailand, and outright military dictatorships such as in Burma, keep the rural population silent by denying the general population free access to information, or by permitting access only to misinformation. The groundwork for real democratic development then falls into the lap of the middle class and other urban groups, isolated from rural populations by the tactics of the regime they seek to change. As a result, these governments and those who seek to justify them are able to paint middle class pursuits of democracy as self-interested or as the result of the misapplication of foreign concepts in an indigenous climate to which they are not suited.

A problem with the book, though not necessarily a critical flaw, is Murray's dependence on English-language sources. Despite this problem, Murray's study provides a good deal of material and makes for informative reading on a critical period in modern Thai history. Readers will find Murray's objectivity fair, and his observations insightful.

MICHAEL W. CHARNEY
University of Michigan

The Undetected Enemy: French and American Miscalculations at Dien Bien Phu, 1953. By JOHN R. NORDELL, JR. College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1995. xxviii, 205 pp. \$39.50.

Dien Bien Phu is one of the great battles of the twentieth century, showing how by force of arms a colonized people could compel the colonial overlord to withdraw.