

Review Article:

TAMADA Yoshifumi
Democratization in Thailand: Grappling with Realities

Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2003, viii+364p.

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This book depicts political changes in Thailand during the 1990s in great detail and provides valuable insights into the democratization process there. The author strongly criticizes the view that the middle classes were the main promoters of democratization

in Thailand and argues that on the contrary, the Thai middle classes, which distrust and despise the lower classes, have actually been trying to hamper full democratization. He also claims that political reform during the 1990s should be viewed not as progress toward full democratization but as the success of the shrewd Thai middle classes' attempt to hinder such progress.

Though these arguments have some validity, the author has overlooked two crucial points. First, democratization consists of more than one dimension, including range of political inclusion, quality of political participation, freedom of speech and press, and so on. It is quite possible that those who support certain aspects of democratization may oppose others. As the author himself argues, it would be erroneous to say that the middle classes in Thailand supported all the aspects of democratization all of the time during the 1990s. However, it is equally wrong to claim that the middle classes opposed all aspects of democratization all of the time.

Secondly, the middle classes are by no means a monolithic section of Thai social structure, which brings us to one very important question left unanswered by the author: if not the middle classes, exactly who was the main promoter of democratization in Thailand during the 1990s? It would seem to have been more fruitful and intellectually stimulating to analyze which portions of the middle classes supported or opposed which aspects of democratization under what conditions than merely try to negate the obviously wrong view that the middle classes supported all aspects of democratization all of the time under a similar monolithic and one dimensional view of democratization.

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