

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.

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*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.

From Indochina the repercussions quickly spread to Algeria, and then to other corners of the Third World. And yet, such an opportunity would never have presented itself to General Vo Nguyen Giap, commander of Vietnamese forces, if the French had not decided to position such a large contingent in a distant mountain valley, supplied only by air.

Nordell, former professor of history at Pennsylvania State University, aims to answer the question of why the French “chose to make a stand at a location that, with hindsight, held such apparent risks” (p. xii). He focuses almost entirely on the brief period 20 November–9 December 1953, when the French first parachuted into Dien Bien Phu, began erecting defenses and repairing the old airstrip, obtained reliable intelligence which called their prior military assumptions about the enemy into serious question, yet rejected the idea of evacuating the valley before becoming surrounded. The battle itself did not begin in earnest until March 1954, and culminated in the surrender of the entire French garrison on 8 May, the same day that the Indochina conflict was scheduled for deliberation at the Geneva conference.

Since Nordell is hardly the first person to address this question in print, we open this book looking for fresh documentation and/or analysis. The only new evidence comes from recently declassified U.S. archival documents (National Archives, U.S. Army, U.S. Air Force, Eisenhower Library), quoted at great length by the author. Mostly formal reports, they reveal how dependent American officialdom remained on French briefings, raising the question not addressed by Nordell of why, after nine years of escalating involvement, Washington had failed to cultivate its own sources of information in Indochina.

Large quantities of relevant French documentation have been released during the past decade, especially at the Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre (Vincennes). Information has been dribbling out of the Chinese archives and appearing in western language articles. Memoirs and narratives have appeared from Hanoi which shed new light on Vietnamese responses to French actions in late 1953. None of this material is used by Nordell.

*The Undetected Enemy* is divided into a chronological narrative and a forty-three-page epilogue, in which the author reviews the various ex post facto explanations for French behavior, but offers the reader nothing original by way of analysis. We are left to infer the key French error: refusing to believe that General Giap could supply his battle force of four divisions approaching Dien Bien Phu in December. Several influential French staff officers looked forward to fortifying Dien Bien Phu as a lure, against which Viet Minh battalions would throw themselves repeatedly and be chewed to pieces as in a meat grinder. As it turned out, the Viet Minh eschewed human-wave tactics and eventually strangled the French positions with siege trenches and superior artillery coverage.

Nordell mentions but does not discuss in detail at least three other reasons for the French defeat. First, General Henri Navarre, the Indochina commander-in-chief, violated the principle of concentration by committing major forces simultaneously at Dien Bien Phu and in central Vietnam. Second, serious slippage existed between General Navarre in Saigon and the French government in Paris. Navarre didn't even bother to notify Paris of his 20 November parachute landings until after the event. When he briefly considered evacuation two weeks later, Navarre ruled it out as too much of a blow to French prestige—a political evaluation that ought to have been the prerogative of Paris. Finally, although Navarre and others feared China as the “wild card,” they nonetheless proceeded to underestimate the quantity and quality of

Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh. Only recently have archival materials emerged to give substance to this particular French miscalculation.

Except for the American reports from French briefings, this book offers readers nothing that has not already been said by a long list of French participants in the Dien Bien Phu fiasco or examined by subsequent historians of the event. The best account is still Bernard Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu* (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1967).

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*Mad Dogs, Englishmen, and the Errant Anthropologist: Fieldwork in Malaysia.* By DOUGLAS RAYBECK. Prospect Heights, Il.: Waveland Press, 1996. xi, 248 pp. \$10.95 (paper).

An account of field research in the first person, this book is both a reflexive ethnography of Kelantanese Malay society and a text on ethnographic field research methods. On balance, Douglas Raybeck is much more concerned with describing practical field research methods than producing a thorough ethnography or testing particular ethnological propositions. The reflexive aspect of the ethnography and the concentration on ethnographic methodology are obvious in the first two chapters, where the author discusses the holistic virtues of anthropology, describes his own recruitment into the field of cultural anthropology, and details the circumstances that led him to choose Kelantan, Malaysia as the site for his doctoral dissertation research.

In the next five chapters, he describes and discusses particular culture-based problems he and his wife experienced while locating and gaining entrance into an appropriate Kelantanese community, settling into the community, developing practical methods for collecting appropriate and accurate data, and sorting out ethical issues related to ethnographic field research. The eighth chapter discusses the importance of extended periods of ethnographic research, and illustrates this point with a crisp description of work and social activities in his Kelantanese community through the course of an entire year. The ninth chapter deals with the concept of gendered roles in Kelantan Malay culture and its impact on how productive ethnographic research must be conducted. And the next to last chapter illustrates the importance of relating village ethnographies to the wider nation-state with a discussion of how Kelantanese villagers conceptualized and reacted to the national election campaigns, elections, and the subsequent ethnic riots in 1969. Of course, the final chapter deals with the problems of culture shock experienced on returning to one's native society and culture.

There is a good but too brief ethnographic description of Kelantan Malay culture embedded in this work on ethnographic methodology. It includes description and discussion of village factions, privacy, house architecture, clothing, entrepreneurship, the pace of life, conversation, chess, kinship, entrepreneurs, hard and soft deviance, cock fights, bull fights, shadow plays, house moving, gender roles, and relations with the Chinese of Kelantan. The interesting ways in which the distinctive Kelantanese dialect varies from standard Malay are not even briefly described. And there are a few inevitable flaws of fact and spelling, including the statement that Brunei is "just across the Malacca Strait" from Kelantan (p. 173), and the misspelling of Heather Strange's last name (p. 181). But these small flaws are hardly noticeable because of