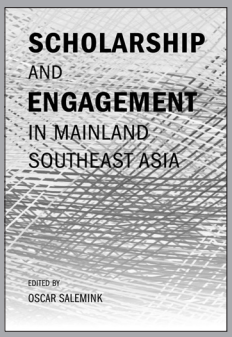
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Book Review:

Oscar Salemink (ed.).

Scholarship and Engagement in Mainland Southeast Asia: A Festschrift in Honour of Achan Chayan Vaddhanaphuti.

Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2016. viii+256 pp.
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It is a measure of the success of social science researchers who take their subjects to the "real world" that few now question the desirability, indeed necessity, of moving scholarship beyond the walls of academe. But this normalization also sometimes obscures some important differences. For example, the positions of applied anthropology versus engaged scholarship, consultancy in contrast to scholar activism, not only suggests different ways in which scholarship transcends the academic, applied and political realms, but also implies significant tensions between ways of so doing.

In bringing together a highly diverse set of essays on engaged scholarship and scholar-activism in mainland Southeast Asia, Oscar Salemink has provided an important platform for airing and exhibiting some of these tensions. He has done so with reference to, as well as in honor of, perhaps the region's most successful and influential engaged scholar – Dr Chayan Vaddhanaphuti – as well as in appreciation of the institutional basis for such work: the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD) at Chiang Mai University.

Despite its doubling as a festschrift, *Scholarship and Engagement in Mainland Southeast Asia* is anything but a hagiographic enterprise. All of the essays make appreciative reference to Chayan's

contribution, but they do so in diverse ways and, without exception, as a springboard to make scholarly contributions in their own right. Even the introductory chapter by Oscar Salemink, Charles Keyes' Chapter 1 on scholar activism and the afterword by Michael Herzfeld, each of which takes Chayan's work as its subject, nevertheless all make important points about engaged scholarship that go well beyond the person.

Several of the chapters in this volume stand out as important contributions to scholarship that engages with its subject politically, in the widest sense of applying knowledge and analytical logic in tandem with and in support of the interests and knowledge practices of downtrodden or otherwise marginalized groups. Different readers will no doubt find particular essays among the volume's eleven chapters the most insightful or stimulating, but for this reviewer three stand out among an already high quality field.

In Chapter 3, Katherine Bowie presents a very frank account of her PhD fieldwork during the 1970s during a period of great political tension associated with class issues in rural northern Thailand. These issues touched not only on the topic of her research, but also on establishment of her own position within the rural community in Sanpatong where she was based. Family politics as well as village politics shaped her often uncomfortable self-positioning. Further, by becoming involved with a mat weaving cooperative, her role and research took a practical turn. This experiential account of engagement provides the reader with a refreshingly honest and open account of the messiness of ethnographic research and the serendipitous rather than mapped-out path to meaningful engagement.

Chapter 6 is also an unusually reflective account, in this case not of research practice but rather of the funding of engaged research. Rosalia Sciortino gives a passionate, and understandably somewhat bittersweet account of the Rockefeller Foundation program's Learning Across Borders (LAB) program during the early 2000s. The sweetness is in the flexibility of regionally embedded programming that allowed the Foundation to take a strategic, principled and contextually tailored

approach to supporting engaged social science through RCSD and other organizations in the Mekong Region. This was in response to a regional integration agenda that was leading to new processes and locales of marginalization associated with large-scale infrastructure and neoliberal marketization within the Greater Mekong Subregion development program. The bitterness came not just with the closing of LAB by a new leadership regime at Rockefeller, but also with the wider global trend toward centrally programmed foundation funding in which the role of local researchers, engaged scholars and their institutions reverts to implementing the universalistic and hegemonic agendas of large international foundations.

Chapter 7 gives a fascinating account of heritage politics and the struggles over ownership of culture. In his own case study, the book's editor, Oscar Salemink, uses the case of the gong culture of central Vietnam to show how "spectacularisation" of performance takes intangible heritage of everyday cultural practice out of the hands of its originators, out of local context, and puts it under the control of state and international heritage masters. In the case of central Vietnam, this also has the political effect of truncating the co-evolution of gong culture with changed religious practices, in effect fossilizing it as "traditional" and associating it with the safe "indigenous slot" (to use Tania Li's term) of animist practices and beliefs, separating it from the Christianity adopted by highlanders in partial response to the tensions that emerged during the early 2000s around land and ethnic incursion by Kinh lowlanders and the Vietnamese state.

The other chapters in the book deal with equally diverse themes. In Chapter 2, Olivier Evard gives an historical account of the inversion of concerns over Khmu migration from Laos to Thailand, away from the French concern over loss of labor toward Thai concern over uncontrolled migrant incursions. Christopher Joll's Chapter 4 complicates assumptions that violence in southern Thailand can be attributed to mono-causal factors such as religion and ethnicity in an intrinsic sense. Meanwhile, in Chapter 5 Shigeharu Tanabe explores resistance to state and market dominance at the individual level through

meditative practices, specifically those associated with Phor Pan at King's Mountain in Mae Wang District of northern Thailand. A posthumously published chapter 8 by Ronald Renard parallels Sciortino's account of changed donor priorities, by detailing the successes of locally tailored alternative development in the field of drug control and the subsequent reversion by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to paradigms delinked from local livelihood realities. In Chapter 9, Mandy Sayan demonstrates in an essay on Kachin State the as yet frustrated potential of educational institutions away from the centre to emulate RCSD's success in engaged scholarship with and by ethnic minorities within the a more open polity in Myanmar.

Given this diversity of topics, initially the core of the book is not obvious beyond reference to Chayan and RCSD. However, several key themes hold it together. At the centre, and as reflected in the title, is the theme of engaged scholarship and both the commitment and political edge that comes with it. In many cases, this is related to the personal engagement of various scholars with their subjects, with Chayan's model role at the core. In others, the emphasis is more institutional, and RCSD features as a point of reference here. Other recurrent themes are also closely related to Chayan's own work but go well beyond his direct experience and expertise. These include minorities, nationality and citizenship. Historical perspective is also at the core of most of the contributions, some over a longer time period than others. Finally, and at the centre of scholarly engagement, is the agency of researchers and research subjects alike.

The only shortcoming of the volume is that no Thai or other Southeast Asian authors feature among the contributors. On the other hand, all of the chapters have been written by foreign scholars with strong credentials and longstanding engagement of their own in the region – despite the overly modest protestation of one (Michael Herzfeld) that he entered the regional field of study as an "interloper". If there is a follow-up volume or subsequent reflection on scholarly engagement, it would be most interesting to hear from those working within their own local and national contexts in the region.