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# From Peasant to Pedicab Driver: A Social Study of Northeastern Thai Farmers Who Periodically Migrated to Bangkok and Became Pedicab Drivers

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munities of Nagano Prefecture and "central tendencies" for the nation. Reviewing the whole, the author states that the human problems modernity has imposed upon the Japanese are "overwhelmingly" like those imposed upon Americans and Europeans, an observation that is not likely to evoke much disagreement.

To me, the most interesting part of this book is the considerable discussion it gives to trends of change in Japanese attitudes toward pleasure and happiness. I write this review in Japan and can report that the quest for pleasure and happiness that Plath describes has grown considerably more intense in the four years since his research ended. (It may be useful to add that incomes have also increased, thus allowing the pursuit of certain pleasures. The occasional information Plath gives on finance is quite out of date.) Happiness seems to be increasingly regarded as a worthwhile goal or even the primary goal of life. It is now a recurrent theme of popular songs, movies, advertisements, and the rallying cry of the several new religions that have grown to great size in the past few years.

My remarks here have not all been complimentary. I nevertheless recommend this book to those interested in Japan or in man's use of the after hours. Its author is a trail-breaker in multiple ways.

*From Peasant to Pedicab Driver: A Social Study of Northeastern Thai Farmers who Periodically Migrated to Bangkok and Became Pedicab Drivers.* ROBERT B. TEXTOR. Foreword by Harry J. Benda. (Cultural Report Series No. 9.) New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1961. viii, 83 pp., appendixes, 1 map, 4 photographs, 3 tables. n.p.

*Reviewed by* JOEL M. HALPERN, *Brandeis University*

Although the number of studies dealing with various aspects of rural life in Southeast Asia has increased notably in recent years our knowledge of urban areas is still deficient. As far as this reviewer is aware, aside from studies of Chinese communities in Thailand this is the only contemporary monograph dealing with Bangkok. It originally appeared in 1956 as one of five studies in a publication of the UNESCO Research Centre on the Social Implications of Industrialization in Southern Asia (the other reports were on Bombay, Dacca, Delhi and Djakarta), and as a pioneering study it is welcome and useful but leaves much to be desired. The body of the text consists of but 46 pages, preceded by two prefaces and followed by two appendixes, one of which is a 30-page questionnaire formulated in the course of the investigations. This questionnaire was subsequently dropped since, according to the author, "what was to have been a full-fledged survey has become instead simply a monograph that is somewhat more systematic than the average impressionistic anthropological report." Nevertheless, the author documents his remarks by using terms such as higher, lower, greater, less, as in Table II, when referring to the differing emphases of the Northeastern and Bangkok subcultures.

The monograph also considers the economic situation of the pedicab driver and his relationship with his home community. As the subtitle indicates, primary emphasis is on those who have come from the relatively impoverished and backward Northeast region. Several photographs of samlors and drivers are a helpful inclusion, since pedicabs have been banned in Bangkok since 1960. A wide range of topics is dealt with in brief, including information on the nature of the vehicle itself, a description of the types of passengers and statistical information on the occupation, in addition to an analysis of

the drivers' origins and reasons for coming to Bangkok. Relations with the police and kinship and friendship ties, including parking gangs, are summarized. Relatively detailed treatment is given income and expenditures and associated food habits. Clothing and housing conditions are recorded, with particular attention to health attitudes. The monograph concludes with information on recreation, related exposure to mass media, political activity and Buddhism.

Given the space limitations within which the author operates these various topics are well treated and will hopefully provide a point of departure for future occupational studies in the Bangkok area, especially those of unskilled labor groups composed primarily of migrants. Insights are also provided into rural-urban relationships and particularly the mobility of the drivers in this respect. There are a number of points which are, however, unclear. In discussing parking gangs it is stated that relatives, fellow villagers, and friends tend to park together (p. 23). The following section on group affiliations maintains that migration to Bangkok occurs in small kin or friendship groups as well as individually. In a previous section on kinship is the statement, "the driver's kinship connections will be with members of his (bilateral) personal kindred, which might include relatives as distant as the quinary degree, or possibly even more distant" (p. 21). This being the case it would be desirable to know something of the overlap of kinship, friendship, and residence (groups) and their function in parking gangs and migration groups as well as in other urban contexts. Such analysis would certainly shed light on ideas of "loose structure," which have been prevalent in the literature on Thailand.

With regard to field techniques it should be noted that drivers were formally interviewed in the office of the Division of Registration run by the Bangkok police. Textor asserts that this procedure was not as undesirable as might appear at first glance since "almost any working- or peasant-class Thai *expects* to be kept waiting each time he goes to a government office." He further states that instead of a brusque official reception the informant spent some time with a friendly interviewer who spoke with him in his own dialect and that, by contrast, had the driver been interviewed at his parking stand business time would have been taken. Well, perhaps, but the explanation is not totally convincing. Fortunately the author also used traditional anthropological field methods.

A serious lack is data on the landlords who provided dormitory lodging for the drivers and rented them their pedicabs. More substantive material is also lacking with regard to individual life histories. Since the author has had six years of field experience in Thailand, much of it in the Bangkok area, it would have been helpful to be provided with background information on Bangkok itself against which to evaluate the changes taking place in the situation of the countryman turned pedicab driver.

Many Thai officials are acknowledged, from the Prime Minister on down, but the government obviously did not support this study as fully as might have been expected. Perhaps a key reason was lack of trained Thai anthropologists and sociologists. Sensitivity to the cultural values of the host society is naturally important, but is so much gained by calling what appears to be a bribe offered by the drivers to the police a "special informal surcharge" (p. 19)?

These issues raise a broader problem: the political and social roles of the anthropologist in the country in which he is working. In Thailand this may be less acute than elsewhere because of the absence there of a period of foreign political domination. Nevertheless, as anthropologists begin migrating to towns the question will become increasingly important.