format of several of these articles, which lack formal introductions and/or conclusions, omissions which obscure the larger scholarly conclusions of the articles and prevent them from speaking to the themes of the book in any sort of comprehensive way. The theme of “localization” has great potential to finally bridge the gap between the Impact-Response/Tradition-Modernity Approaches and the Autonomous Approaches/Responses to Orientalism highlighted by the editor in his introduction to this volume. Unfortunately, while the discerning reader catches glimpses of “localization” applied in this volume, the essays neither speak to one another nor address the major themes emphasized in the introduction. While this flaw does not take the luster off of the significant and original archival research contained in most of these articles, it does leave each article standing alone and outside of the main theoretical theme of the book. In short, the essays in this book are well worth reading as windows into the specificities of different aspects of Vietnamese history, but as an ambitious proposal for a new paradigm by which to examine Vietnam’s interactions with the West, the lack of adherence to the book’s major cohesive theme causes the volume to fall short in the end.

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There is a story, apocryphal but revealing nevertheless, that a researcher once went to a library in Thailand looking for a copy of the constitution. After a long and fruitless search he approached the enquiries desk for help. “Where have you been looking?” the librarian asked. “In the legal section,” the frustrated researcher responded. “Oh, I’m sorry,” said the librarian, “but in Thailand the constitution is kept in the serials section.”

With eighteen different constitutions, in the space of only eighty years, writing a book about the constitutional system of Thailand is a daunting task. This volume rises to the challenge effectively, providing a comprehensive analysis of Thailand’s governing system, including both specific constitutional provisions and the broader parliamentary, administrative and judicial context. Legal discussion is nicely integrated with even-handed political analysis. This is an invaluable resource for scholars of Thai politics, administration and law. Wisely, most of the detailed constitutional discussion focuses on the 1997 “people’s” constitution and the current 2007 constitution, which was put in place after the military coup that ousted controversial Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. There is plenty of constitutional detail and comparison of different approaches in various charters, but not so much that the reader
is swamped. Detailed tables of legal cases, statutes, constitutional sections, treaties and decrees at the beginning of the book enhance its accessibility and usefulness as a reference volume.

The volume opens with a history of legal and constitutional development in Thailand, from pre-modern times to the present. Some readers will baulk at the rather clichéd royalism of the pre-modern section—with the formulaic invocations of King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn as great reformers and modernizers—but it is useful in placing Thailand’s ongoing grappling with royal power at the centre of constitutional analysis. The decades following the revolution of 1932, which brought about a constitutional monarchy, are handled deftly, mapping out Thailand’s distinctive pattern of constitution-coup-constitution alongside important social and political developments. Two main types of constitution are evident in this period: “administrative charters” that are brief, short-term documents typically used by the military to formalize their grip on power; and full “democratic constitutions” that provide for government by an elected parliament (33). Post-coup charters have typically granted coup makers immunity from prosecution and “courts have also rebuffed attempts to have a coup … ruled unconstitutional” (27), thus embedding disposability within Thailand’s legal system. However, the authors argue that this pattern may be changing, with an increasing public sentiment that only full democratic constitutions can provide a legitimate basis for government. You can never say never when it comes to a coup in Thailand, but I think the authors are correct to argue that any future coup makers will move quickly to put in place a constitution that, despite plenty of self-serving clauses, has most of the trappings of liberal democracy.

Having traced out this history the book examines Thailand’s constitutional system in a series of thematic chapters covering parliament, the executive, local government, the courts and human rights. This is a comprehensive discussion of the development and current shape of Thailand’s governing systems and, importantly, includes ample consideration of the palace and the military, “extremely powerful forces … which fall outside current constitutional oversight mechanisms altogether” (111). I found the discussion of emergency powers a particularly useful account of the limits of constitutionalism in Thailand, especially the Internal Security Act of 2008, which “moves Thailand further than before down the path of making the rule of law an exception, clothing the Executive and the military with legal immunity, and arming them to the teeth with a veritable panoply of security laws” (118). The summaries of high-profile cases considered by the Constitution Court and the administrative courts are also highlights, especially as so many of these cases have played a part in Thailand’s tumultuous politics over the past decade. Nevertheless, some of the discussion in these core chapters is rather detailed and dry; rather than reading them in their entirety, many readers will find them more useful for extracting specific pieces of information.
There is one issue that comes up regularly on which I found myself questioning the authors’ approach. They point out, quite rightly, that the elimination of corruption, in its many forms, has been a constitutional preoccupation in Thailand. The 1997 constitution established a series of independent watchdog bodies and the 2007 constitution contains a “litany of virtues for civil servants, State officials and politicians” (109). However, the authors seem a little too uncritical in accepting the dominant discourse of corruption. In particular, the book makes regular reference to the “pervasive and taken for granted” (49) scourge of vote buying in Thailand. Their conclusion is pessimistic: “it seems apparent that attempts to regulate electoral malpractice out of existence are doomed to failure” (82). This is not the place to go into a detailed discussion of the extent to which the widespread distribution of cash before elections amounts to vote buying; however, I would have welcomed a somewhat more critical perspective on the discourse of electoral corruption itself, especially given that the discourse has been such a useful tool for both constitution drafters and coup makers. Disparaging electoral democracy—and casting doubts on the fitness of voters to make informed decisions—has been an important component of Thailand’s constitution-coup-constitution cycle. Rather than taking electoral corruption as a given, it may have been more productive to explore how politically produced images of corrupt politicians and easily manipulated voters have helped to destabilize Thailand’s constitutional order.

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In her Revolution Interrupted, Tyrell Haberkorn presents a detailed and disturbing account of the rise in the mid-1970s of the Farmers’ Federation of Thailand and its destruction at the hands of Thai landowners backed by police and bureaucrats. Her study focuses primarily on farmers in the rich agricultural region of northern Thailand, and especially those living in the Chiang Mai valley. Whereas most rural people in Thailand work the land they themselves own, many of those in the Chiang Mai region, like others in parts of central Thailand, have been and are tenant farmers. It was among these farmers that a significant movement, one that Haberkorn terms “revolutionary,” emerged in the mid-1970s.

In the immediate post-World War II period the significant rise in demand and commensurate rise in prices for agricultural products, and especially rice, led some wealthy people to buy up significant amounts of land in the