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Book Review: Mien relations: mountain people and state control in Thailand

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given schema. However, I felt that something a little more adventurous could have been attempted as a means of overcoming such easy but somewhat misleading labels as 'spectacular' and 'ordinary' consumption; or to show more clearly the increasingly important role of consumption itself in reproducing social and spatial divisions; and so on. In this light, perhaps the final full chapter of the book (Chapter 7 – 'Consumption and urban regeneration') manages to develop a more integrated vision, pulling material together in a more successful manner than previous chapters achieve.

There is, of course, a rapidly growing number of books on consumption and the city, after a lengthy period of considerable neglect. Jayne's book stands out as one of the first attempts to summarize the field for an undergraduate audience, and it does a generally convincing job. Compared to Miles and Miles (2004) – 'a book which will surely stand as its major competitor' – it is designed in a way that is intended to appeal to students, and probably has the edge in terms of its pitch and accessibility. It is a well-written and attractively produced book, which deserves a place on most general 'urban' reading lists, as well as on more specialist consumption-orientated urban courses.

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Miles, S. and Miles, M. 2004: *Consuming cities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Jonsson, H., 2005: *Mien relations: mountain people and state control in Thailand*. Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press. xiv + 198 pp. £29.95 cloth, £12.50 paperback. ISBN: 0 801 44338 5 cloth, 0 801 47284 9 paper.

This carefully researched book focuses on Thailand, but should interest anyone studying ethnic minorities and the politics of state control in general. It applies cultural and ethnographic approaches to explaining how

one ethnic group in Thailand has shaped its identity in the face of modernity and increasing state control. It argues that this ethnic group is not being 'swept away' by outside forces; nor is it clinging to romanticized images of its past. Rather, people can both modernize and hold onto their identity through various complex means.

The front cover of the book already gives an indication of its theme. Members of the Mien minority in Thailand gather for a festival of sport. But the team-members wear Arsenal Football Club shirts, and the games are a mixture of western and Thai. Clearly, here is the mixture of modernization combined with social identity this book seeks to analyse.

The book is noteworthy for two key reasons. First, it demonstrates a historical and dynamic analysis of social identity and state formation, and hence differs from many existing approaches to social identity by emphasizing how perceptions of identity within a group are often shaped by how outsiders have framed them. Second, the book is the first in-depth ethnographic study of the Mien in Thailand, and this is an important step.

The Mien (sometimes called 'Yao') are often best known as one of the 'hilltribes' that so many tourists go to visit on treks and bus trips in northern Thailand. This image, of course, is only partial. The Mien originate from southern China, and have migrated to Southeast Asia since the mid-nineteenth century. One reason for this movement is the exemption of the Mien, and other groups, from the state, and being branded as 'savages'. Jonsson (p. 11) writes: 'Defining 'savages' was not simply about marginalization; it was a general process of aligning cosmography, society, and politics in the consolidation of the state.' Indeed, the current perception of the Mien as 'hilltribes' reflects this history in the unfortunate term 'tribe' and in the high-altitude, shifting cultivation form of settlement classically associated with the Mien, and the historic production of opium.

This book reviews and adds to these historic summaries of the Mien with scholarly attention to anthropological debates, and their connections to the formation of landscape and social identity. 'Mien identity and social formation are in and of history, and they inform particular historical understandings among Mien people' (p. 10). During the nineteenth century, the importance of formally delimited nation states was less important than the emergence of ethnic terrains called Yao or Mien. In the twentieth century, the importance of how minorities appeared to others became more important. For example, there is a notable quotation from the diary of the British Consul in Chiang Mai during the 1930s of how he would insist that Mien villagers displayed for Siamese royalty should be washed twice daily (p. 48). These discussions provide admirably detailed documentation of histories and reports of the Mien as they became legible to state administrators and anthropologists. There are also references to the Mien in relation to other groups such as the Lawa and Hmong, and the influence of changes in neighboring Laos. Indeed, the importance of the cold war and Vietnam war on defining hill settlers as potential communists or 'inveterate migrants' needing to be settled (p. 66). The representation of the Mien (and other groups) within Thai research and 'development' has reinforced this classification and boundary between the state, accepted citizens, and people with problematic histories.

This historical description is then considered in terms of what this history means to the Mien today. One important theme is the challenge of defining identity when an ethnic group is not linked to the space of a nation state. Here, various examples of asserting identity and negotiation are used to define ways the Mien have established boundaries with the state. For example, one village expressed this through a conflict over a wildlife sanctuary on land that had been used for years by a Mien village. The Mien felt affronted by the restrictions on using a road

through the sanctuary for taking children to school, and by park rangers demanding money illegally from vehicles. These concerns coincided with the desire of many upland farmers to be seen as responsible citizens (p. 135). Various responses were made: letters were written to politicians; farmers spoke of their eco-wisdom; and ultimately, villagers marched single-file to occupy and destroy some of the park's administrative buildings.

A second theme is the relevance of history itself in social identity formation. The Mien are defined in part by other people's histories of them: as upland migrants, as tourist attractions, or as people who are not linked to national space. Jonsson uses the statement of one Mien woman that households should send their pigs to vote for them in national elections to good effect. Comparing this to the famous cultural ecology book, *Pigs for the ancestors* by Bruce Rappaport (1968) concerning Papua New Guinea, he writes: 'Focusing on "pigs for the ancestors" is likely to convey a closed world of society, ecology and ritual ... outside history and regional dynamics. The ecology of "pigs for the polling booths" better captures their situation of democratic participation in the modern nation-state better as well as their despair in the context of the state's theatrics of public representation' (p. 155).

This quotation summarizes much of the book's overall tone and argument. The Mien are indeed overwhelmed by the state, and their lack of power in determining their own outside image. But rather than add to this by analysing the rituals and 'Mien-ness' expressed through themes such as religion, agriculture or clothing, it is better to analyse the Mien's relationship with other people and this powerlessness. Looking at these tactics allows us to see what we think is 'different' about a group. Rather, it allows a more dynamic appraisal of how social identity is formed historically, both from within a social group, and via the imposition of identities from outside. For this reason, *Mien relations* advances our under-

standings of social identity and how this relates to political representation.

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Rappaport, R.A. 1968: *Pigs for the ancestors: ritual in the ecology of a New Guinea people*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Livingstone, D.N. and Withers, C.W.J., editors 2005: *Geography and revolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 440 pp. US\$45 cloth. ISBN: 0 226 48733 4.

This collection of essays, emerging from a conference in Edinburgh in 2001, is of unusually high quality. Such a distinguished line-up of authors promises much and, as a rule, the chapters deliver. This is in part also due to the fact that the volume's editors were apparently successful in persuading the press to produce a somewhat longer book than is now typical. Instead of packing five or 10 more essays into the extra pages, they wisely decided to allow the authors of the 11 chapters more room to develop their arguments. The result is a generally fascinating and insightful read, even for the non-specialist. Specialists in the subject of 'revolutions', however, may be disappointed. As the editors essentially admit in their excellent introduction, the essays do far more to advance our understanding of geographies of knowledge (and geographic knowledges) than to advance the study of revolutions. The concept of revolution is not explored in a serious way after the introduction, serving chiefly as a convenient, if loose, thematic thread for the substantive chapters. Most of the authors explicitly refuse to give a final opinion on whether the respective changes and upheavals discussed in their chapters are in fact 'revolutions'. On the other hand, however elusive, the word 'revolution' remains an indispensable concept for a wide range of disciplines. This book, too, prolongs and reproduces the textual life of a term the editors and

the authors seem to agree has no stable core of meaning. In this sense, at least, ironically, *Geography and revolution* is anything but 'revolutionary'. The book would have been more accurately entitled 'Geography, knowledge and change', or something along those lines. At best, the reader comes away with a clearer sense that revolutions, whatever they are, are always geographical. Nevertheless, the collection is so good that this whole issue soon recedes into the background, and one hardly cares any longer what it is called.

Part 1, 'Geography and scientific revolution: space, place and knowledge', is composed of four chapters, all of which touch in different ways on geographic aspects of what have come to be understood as scientific revolutions. Particularly interesting are John Henry's account of how 'national styles' were discernable in English and French approaches to experimentation in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and James Moore's discussion of the traces left by Darwin's and Wallace's different orientations toward the British imperial project in their writings on natural selection and evolution. Charles Withers' contribution offers a somewhat broader frame for thinking about geographies 'of' as well as 'in' scientific change, calling into question along the way the notion of 'national styles' used by Henry. Here as elsewhere, differences of approach occasionally rise to the level of at least implicit disagreement, but the authors clearly share a broad awareness of the complex interplay of spatial relations and the production of knowledge. This first part of the volume is a solid and very readable (in this respect, too, John Henry's piece stands out) overview of some of the best recent research in geographies of (and in) scientific knowledge. As such it would serve well in graduate seminars.

Part 2, 'Geography and technical revolution: time, space, and the instruments of transmission', is the most uneven of the three parts, including one of the strongest essays as well as the least convincing. The essay by Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift on 'revolutions in the times', is