
The publication of this book is both an exciting and frustrating event for students of Thailand and Southeast Asia. Erik Seidenfaden, an advisor to the Thai gendarmerie for forty years, probably had more first-hand knowledge of the culture and history of the Thai and related peoples than did any other European of this century. This work, the first of two volumes completed six months before his death at seventy-seven years of age in 1958, is a partial compendium of his learning.

The merit of the essay lies in its encyclopedic nature. Essentially, it is a detailed ethnohistorical mapping of all the Thai and reputedly Thai peoples of mainland Southeast Asia, interspersed with some uneven anthropological description and the author's informed prejudices. The second volume, as yet unpublished, is to be "a history of the Thai peoples."

Seidenfaden divides his Thai "tribes" into four major geographical groupings: Northern and Central Thai (Thai Lung, Thai Nam, and other Thai speakers of Yunnan); Western Thai (of Assam, Manipur, etc., including the Shans); an Eastern grouping (White and Black Thai, the Thai speakers of Hainan and the upper Tongking, etc.); and the Southern Thai (Laos, Black and Red Thai, the settlers of the Menam valley, and other inhabitants of the present Kingdom, etc.). An excellent summary of the "Non-Thai peoples of Thailand" is included, and a cursory description of twentieth century Siam, most of which is a discussion of geography, principal industries, scenery, and the like.

The reader's frustration in assessing this volume derives from the fact that Seidenfaden makes a number of generalizations about the Thai, all of which are crucial to the prehistory and history of Southeast Asia, but for which he provides little or no evidence. For example, he argues that the Thai, originally in Yunnan, were driven north during the first and second millennia B.C. by a Mon-Khmer group arriv-