Imperial Amnesia
Britain, France and “the Question of Siam”
By Nigel J. Brailey

One theme of this book is the preservation of the independence of Thailand during the age of imperialism. It suggests that the crucial years were 1902-05. It also argues that, among others, the Thais themselves, King, Princes, bureaucrats, played a crucial role, alongside their Western advisers and some of the European diplomats. It is a unique story, since all Thailand’s neighbours lost their independence. It is also a story that reminds us of the role personalities play in history.

The book has a second theme. Placing the decisive shift in the early years of the new century, the author argues its importance, not only for the maintenance of the independence of Siam, but for the development of the relationships among the great powers that helped to bring about the War of 1914. The case he brings is a contestable one, but its controversial argument, drawing on some unusual sources, will be essential reading for all those, historians and others. Interested in the origins of that conflict.

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Nigel Brailey was born on 11 November 1942, and spent his entire academic career in two institutions. One was the School of Asian Studies of the University of London, where he took first his BA and then his Ph.D. The other was the history department at Bristol University, where he lectured from 1 September 1969 (being appointed a few months after securing his doctorate) until 31 July 2005. Even on retirement he retained the status of an honorary research fellow, which embodied a continued scholarly productivity cut tragically short by his death from cancer in 2008.
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