

BESTSELLERS

ASIA BOOKS TOP 10

FICTION

- 1 *Call Me By Your Name* by Andre Aciman
- 2 *Animal Farm: The Illustrated Edition* by George Orwell
- 3 *The Tattooist Of Auschwitz* by Heather Morris
- 4 *The Reckoning* by John Grisham
- 5 *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman
- 6 *Past Tense* by Lee Child
- 7 *Good Omens* by Gaiman & Pratchett
- 8 *The Little Prince* by Antoine De Saint-Exupery
- 9 *One Day In December* by Josie Silver
- 10 *Milk And Honey* by Rupi Kaur

NON-FICTION

- 1 *Sapiens: A Brief History Of Humankind* by Yuval Noah Harari
- 2 *Mindset: Changing The Way You Think To Fulfil Your Potential* by Carol Dweck
- 3 *Homo Deus: A Brief History Of Tomorrow* by Yuval Noah Harari
- 4 *21 Lessons For The 21st Century* by Yuval Noah Harari
- 5 *Thinking, Fast And Slow* by Daniel Kahneman
- 6 *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About The World - And Why Things Are Better* by Hans Rosling
- 7 *The Power Of Habit: Why We Do What We Do, What We Do, And How To Change* by Charles Duhigg
- 8 *A Brief History Of Time* by Stephen Hawking
- 9 *Grit: The Power Of Passion And Perseverance* by Angela Duckworth
- 10 *The Art Of Thinking Clearly: Better Thinking, Better Decisions* by Rolf Dobelli

NEW YORK TIMES

(PRINT AND E-BOOKS COMBINED)

FICTION

1. *Summer Of '69*, by Elin Hilderbrand. (Little, Brown)
 - The Levin family undergoes dramatic events with a son in Vietnam, a daughter in protests and dark secrets hiding beneath the surface.
 - THIS WEEK: 1
 - LAST WEEK: —
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 1
2. *Where The Crawdads Sing*, by Delia Owens. (Putnam)
 - In a quiet town on the North Carolina coast in 1969, a young woman who survived alone in the marsh becomes a murder suspect.
 - THIS WEEK: 2
 - LAST WEEK: 1
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 41
3. *The Reckoning*, by John Grisham. (Doubleday)
 - A decorated World War II veteran shoots and kills a pastor inside a Mississippi church.
 - THIS WEEK: 3
 - LAST WEEK: —
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 19
4. *City Of Girls*, by Elizabeth Gilbert. (Riverhead)
 - An 89-year-old Vivian Morris looks back at the direction her life took when she entered the 1940s New York theatre scene.
 - THIS WEEK: 4
 - LAST WEEK: 6
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 3
5. *Mrs. Everything*, by Jennifer Weiner. (Atria)
 - The story of two sisters, Jo and Bethie Kaufman, and their life experiences as the world around them changes drastically from the 1950s.
 - THIS WEEK: 5
 - LAST WEEK: 2
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 2
6. *Before We Were Yours*, by Lisa Wingate. (Ballantine)
 - A South Carolina lawyer learns about the questionable practices of a Tennessee orphanage.
 - THIS WEEK: 6
 - LAST WEEK: 7
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 41
7. *Unsolved*, by James Patterson and David Ellis. (Little, Brown)
 - A string of seemingly accidental and unrelated deaths confound FBI agent Emmy Dockery.
 - THIS WEEK: 7
 - LAST WEEK: 5
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 3
8. *Little Fires Everywhere*, by Celeste Ng. (Penguin Press)
 - An artist upends a quiet town outside Cleveland.
 - THIS WEEK: 8
 - LAST WEEK: 10
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 39
9. *The Tattooist Of Auschwitz*, by Heather Morris. (Harper)
 - A concentration camp detainee tasked with permanently marking fellow prisoners falls in love with one of them.
 - THIS WEEK: 9
 - LAST WEEK: 11
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 41
10. *Good Omens*, by Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett. (Morrow)
 - Aziraphale, an angel and rare-book dealer, and his demon friend Crowley try to circumvent the end of the world.
 - THIS WEEK: 10
 - LAST WEEK: —
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 1

NON-FICTION

1. *Educated*, by Tara Westover. (Random House)
 - The daughter of survivalists, who is kept out of school, educates herself enough to leave home for university.
 - THIS WEEK: 1
 - LAST WEEK: 4
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 70
2. *Unfreedom Of The Press*, by Mark R. Levin. (Threshold Editions)
 - The conservative commentator and radio host makes his case that the press is aligned with political ideology.
 - THIS WEEK: 2
 - LAST WEEK: 1
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 5
3. *The Pioneers*, by David McCullough. (Simon & Schuster)
 - The Pulitzer Prize-winning historian tells the story of the settling of the Northwest Territory through five main characters.
 - THIS WEEK: 3
 - LAST WEEK: 3
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 7
4. *Becoming*, by Michelle Obama. (Crown)
 - The former first lady describes her journey from the South Side of Chicago to the White House, and how she balanced work, family and her husband's political ascent.
 - THIS WEEK: 4
 - LAST WEEK: 7
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 32
5. *The Mueller Report*, by The Washington Post. (Scribner)
 - Redacted findings from the special counsel's investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and potential obstruction of justice by the president.
 - THIS WEEK: 5
 - LAST WEEK: 6
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 9
6. *Howard Stern Comes Again*, by Howard Stern. (Simon & Schuster)
 - The radio interviewer delves into some of his favourite on-air conversations from the past four decades of his career.
 - THIS WEEK: 6
 - LAST WEEK: 5
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 6
7. *Born A Crime*, by Trevor Noah. (Spiegel & Grau)
 - A memoir about growing up biracial in apartheid South Africa by the host of *The Daily Show*.
 - THIS WEEK: 7
 - LAST WEEK: 11
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 49
8. *Sapiens*, by Yuval Noah Harari. (Harper)
 - How *Homo sapiens* became Earth's dominant species.
 - THIS WEEK: 8
 - LAST WEEK: 13
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 74
9. *Songs Of America*, by Jon Meacham and Tim McGraw. (Random House)
 - Pulitzer Prize winner Jon Meacham and Grammy Award winner Tim McGraw explore how America was shaped by music.
 - THIS WEEK: 9
 - LAST WEEK: 2
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 2
10. *Killers Of The Flower Moon*, by David Grann. (Doubleday)
 - The story of a murder spree in 1920s Oklahoma that targeted Osage Indians, whose lands contained oil.
 - THIS WEEK: 10
 - LAST WEEK: —
 - WEEKS ON LIST: 68

BOOK REVIEW

■ JIM STENT

The roots of it all

A retired Australian diplomat provides a historical analysis of Thai politics

When diplomats write books, as often as not they reminisce about momentous international events they have witnessed. Unlike such books, in *Thailand: History, Politics And The Rule Of Law*, retired Australian diplomat James Wise explores the conflicts and perplexities of Thai politics, explaining how tensions between traditional Thai and modern value systems transplanted from the West play out on the political stage. Wise provides in this book just enough of the history of modern Thailand over the past two centuries, plus occasional references to earlier periods, to support his analysis of the roots of Thai political conflict.

Thai indigenous traditional values emphasise order, duties, hierarchy, community, patron-client relations and smooth personal relationships; transplanted “modern” values emphasise equality, individual rights and equal treatment before the law regardless of personal status. The co-existence of these two different value systems in Thailand, Wise maintains, has led to the “hybrid nature of political authority in Thailand”.

None of this is new to anyone who is familiar with social-science literature on Thailand. The strength of this excellent book lies in its clear explanation of how the clash in modern Thai history between the values of the West and those of traditional Siam have shaped the particular character of Thailand's hybrid political institutions and given rise to the elitist coups, popular protests, weak political parties built around strong personalities rather than policy platforms, and the powerful role of the military that have marked the Kingdom's modern history. Wise's objective is to “make sense of Thailand on its own terms”.

Thailand: History, Politics And The Rule Of Law supplements but does not substitute for the excellent English-language histories of Thailand by David K. Wyatt, Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit and B.J. Terwiel. Wise relies on those standard histories and those of many other secondary sources in the English language for the historical context of Thailand's “hybrid” political institutions. To these, Wise adds conclusions from the extensive interviews he conducted in researching the book, and by his own observation of Thai politics and society over years of diplomatic service in Thailand. His book offers thought-provoking, culturally empathetic and non-judgmental insights into Thai political history that fulfil the author's professed aim to provide the “why” at a cultural level for the “what” of Thai political history.

In conventional Western political theory, a modern government consists of three branches: executive, legislative and judiciary. Wise maintains that this model does not adequately explain Thai politics, nor why Thai politics differs from the politics of most other developing nations.

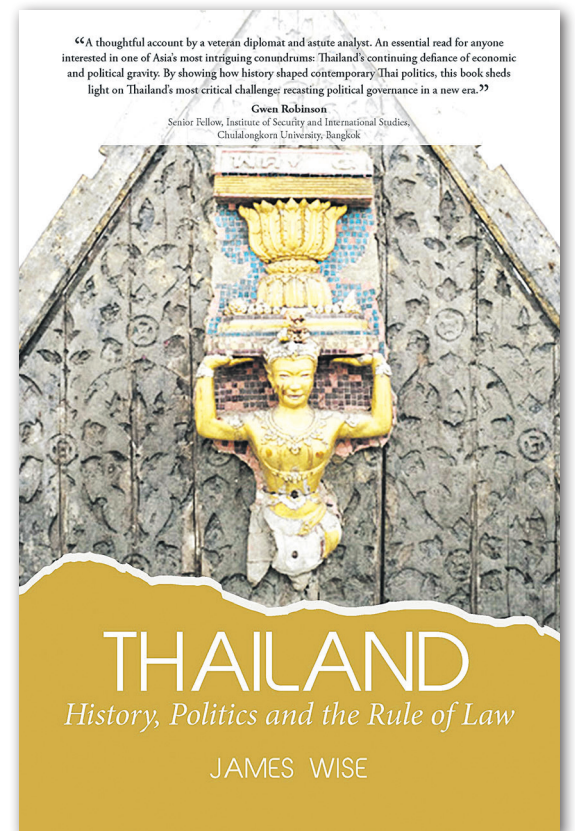
A key difference is that, unlike in most developing nations, Thailand's traditional political system and social structure were not replaced by a colonial regime, nor did Thailand experience an anti-colonial independence struggle infused with Western values of self-rule and democracy. In Thailand, Wise writes, foreign institutions “were grafted onto a traditional political system. They were not substitutes for a traditional political system. Western ideas influenced Thai political culture, but they never crushed established ways of thinking”. Compared to most developing nations in which foreign institutions did to a great extent replace traditional legitimacies, in Thailand contemporary political legitimacy stretches back essentially uninterrupted for centuries.

Thailand after the revolution in 1932 did organise a government with a constitution setting up the three branches of executive, legislative and judiciary. Wise demonstrates with numerous examples that throughout Thai history the legislative and judiciary have not only been weak compared with Western models, but parliamentarians and judges have never effectively stood up for the independence, rights and authority of their institutions. And in Thai society and politics, personal relationships are of utmost importance; political parties have coalesced around strong personalities rather than around coherent sets of ideas.

Wise maintains that Thai political culture can only be understood if one adds the monarchy and the military to the Western model of executive, legislative and judiciary. It is this five-branch model that brings together Thailand's traditional legitimacy, deeply rooted in a strong awareness of Thai cultural norms and national identity, with transplanted Western (“modern”) concepts of governance. But the two legitimacies have co-existed uneasily.

Each legitimacy has had its attraction for both the nation and for every Thai individual. This uneasy co-existence has led to oscillations in Thai politics since 1932 between popularly elected governments and authoritarian governments coming to power in military coups. Standing above the fray has been the revered institution of monarchy, playing a key stabilising role.

Wise balances this account of political-culture instability with a listing of the real achievements of successive Thai governments, both elected and authoritarian, in modernising the economy and improving living standards of the Thai people, particularly over the past half-century of national focus on modernisation. Thailand now ranks as an upper-middle-income nation. As a result of major uplifting of standards of living, Wise states that for “many Thais the state has been as comforting as it has been threatening”. Thai citizens have been appreciative of the state's opening of educational and economic opportunities, and of its provision of physical security.



Thailand: History, Politics And The Rule Of Law
James Wise
Marshall Cavendish International
312pp

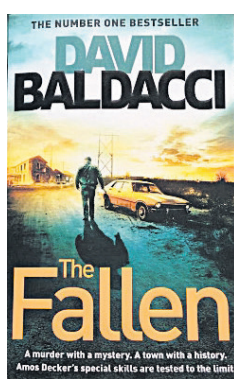
The last part of the book delves in depth into problems of the rule of law in Thailand, including one constitution after another being adopted, only to be replaced by another constitution a few years later. As in his analysis of political institutions, Wise anchors his discussion of Thai law firmly in the nation's traditional culture, and particularly in its Buddhist culture. Where Western concepts of law emphasise rights and equality, traditionally Thai conceptions of law focused on the duties of individuals within communities to bring about harmonious social relations, and assumed that a well-ordered society was hierarchical, reflecting the laws of *karma*. These two different approaches to law have often resulted in conflicts.

In the introduction, Wise states that *Thailand: History, Politics, And The Rule Of Law*, focused as it is on political history, culture and institutions, does not “touch on economic or religious developments”. As it is a Bangkok-focused account of Thai history, it also does not go into the regional aspects of Thai history and politics. Given how politics and economics have strongly influenced each other in modern Thai history, and given the importance of regional identities and tensions, these do limit the scope of the book. One hopes that in a future edition of the book, Wise will perhaps reflect on how these factors have influenced Thailand's political development over the past century.

Nonetheless, *Thailand: History, Politics And The Rule Of Law* is a well-written, well-argued and timely disquisition that should be read by everyone who has an interest in Thailand's political history. Some may find Wise's account overly sympathetic to Thai approaches to politics. The criticisms of Thai governments levied by Western observers and embassies, however, indicate the need for a more balanced interpretation of events. In bringing out this book, Wise has filled this gap admirably.

REVIEWS

■ BERNARD TRINK



The Fallen
by David Baldacci
Pan
500pp
Available at Asia Books and leading bookshops
325 baht

Sanguinary holiday

Statisticians note that people have been growing older and taller for millennia. With exceptions, early humans died in their 20s and were 5ft tall. Queen Victoria was 150cm while Napoleon was 163cm. We began ageing and shooting up with better diets. Both are still increasing.

Now the age is 90 for both genders, 188cm for men, 172cm for women, which might well change by 2100. Several contemporary writers, however, are jumping the gun. Lee Child and David Baldacci have respectively made their literary heroes — Jack Reacher and Amos Decker — 195cm. Will this be the future? Are women over 172cm more appealing.

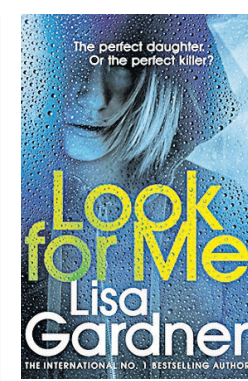
To match his height, the author has Decker topping 136kg. To readers who haven't followed Baldacci's series about the sleuth, he was a football player when struck on the head. The blow rattled his brain, which gave him a perfect memory. This was the good news. The bad news was that a killer murdered his wife and son. Revenge was swift.

Cop-homicide detective-special agent Decker and partner Alex Jamison are ace crime fighters. In *The Fallen* they take their vacation in Barronville, Pennsylvania. The peace and quiet of a small town appeals to them. In the event, it offers anything but. Turns out more bodies turn up than the local authorities know what to do with. It's up to the holiday-seekers to come to the rescue.

Their investigation reveals that there's dirty work abroad. Among other things a scam to defraud the insurance companies by offing holders of policies and collecting the money. In the major case, money has been hidden on an estate, the greedy man then dying. The staff, no less than the heirs, are turning the place up and down for the cash. Two lose their lives in the process.

Decker and Alex figure it all out, of course. That their quarry is confined to a wheelchair is only a speed-bump to the solution, saving the wrong police suspect a lot of bother.

At his best with intrigues in high places, *The Fallen* can't be faulted for turning to plots not concerning national security.



Look For Me
by Lisa Gardner
Arrow
403pp
Available at Asia Books and leading bookshops
325 baht

D.D. solves another

Among our traits is that we like some people, while others dislike our fellow human beings. A fraction we love and hate. Love enough to marry. Hate enough to what? Hurt him in some way? Kill him?

This reviewer read a news story of a co-ed stabbing a classmate to death and chopping up her body, then disposing of the pieces in different parts of the metropolis. Caught, she told the police her motive. The victim had made a play for her mate's boyfriend. She hated her for it.

Had she not been grassed, she'd still be free. She fits no profile, is in no database. It's for crime thriller authors to think up clever ways for their literary sleuths to find the culprit. It is no secret that cops read such stories for hints about how to conduct their investigations.

Yank Lisa Gardner is professionally and publicly regarded as one of the top cops-and-robbers writers in the field. I like her plots about families, showing how different from one another each member is.

Set in New England, *Look For Me* focuses on a family murder. Four bodies. Not the eldest daughter though. Did Sarah run for her life? Or is she the perpetrator?

Detective D.D. Warren is tapped to solve the case. Clearly a hate crime, what did the family do to deserve being massacred? If innocent, why hasn't Sarah shown up by now? The work of more than one killer — a gang? A robbery gone wrong? Revenge — for what?

Trust the scrivener to answer each question in turn. Every victim had friends and enemies. Lovers are rousted. All are questioned. News of a fatal accident in the past is uncovered.

Latinos were involved. They are rounded up. A chapter is devoted to biographical sketches of each. D.D. finds the missing girl, a student at Smith College.

For your information, the author has 30 novels to her credit. Her next will be *Never Tell*.

She's been blessed with Lee Child's vote of approval, her future as a scribe is secure.