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Reprinting a Career

FOR SEVERAL YEARS, my wife had been arguing that it was time to park the car in the garage. In the 30 years we have lived in our house, we have never done so. That meant cleaning up. Together with unused furniture and little used bicycles, over 1,300 reprints were housed in filing cabinets in our garage. My reprints, sometimes called off-prints or tear sheets, are paper copies of reports and scientific articles that in the days before the internet and digital collections of the back issues of technical journals were the way scholars kept their colleagues' work at hand to inform their own research and writing.

I decided to review the reprints one at a time and save those that were important for their historic value, for sentimental reasons, or for future projects. I am a demographer whose career has focused on international, mainly Asian, population issues and organizations and included ten years living in Thailand and South Korea, beginning in 1971 toward the end of the Vietnam War. For several days I examined my career through the evidence of 40 plus years of reprints. The exercise was an archaeology of my professional life.

My doctoral dissertation was on attitudes toward death, and the first reprints in my collection concerned the sociology of aging and death. I dawdled over some pieces ("Age and Awareness of Finitude...") because they meant more at 70 than they had at 30. But I hadn't paid attention to this topic since obtaining my Ph.D., so most of those reprints were easy to let go.

My first professional position post-graduate school was as a research associate at Mahidol University in Bangkok. The next batch of reprints was articles about Thailand's history, society and economy. The reprints reflect my effort to become familiar with Thai culture and to become expert in the demography of Thailand. I remember how highly I regarded some of the articles at the time I saved them, but I hadn't looked at most of them in 20 years, never mind used them for serious work. Most were easy to let go, but I saved several for sentimental reasons. Benjamin Batson's edited collection of documents from the 1932 end of Thailand's absolute monarchy helped with research I did when I was first in Thailand and may be relevant again when the ailing 88 year old King Bhumibol Adulyadej dies. I saved my copy.

I had a large number of reprints of articles on the origins, implementation, and evaluation of Asian population and family planning policies and programs—a long standing professional preoccupation. I kept Tony Bennett's "How Thailand's Family Planning Program Reached Replacement Fertility" to use if I am asked about the history of family planning in Thailand, but let most of the others go. When HIV and AIDS became health priorities in the region, reprints on that topic in my files increased. Over the years I became more administrator and less researcher and writer; my reprints reflected my evolution and moved from technical demographic papers to articles on public policy and essays on management, budgeting, and strategic planning

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I saved "State of the Art Panhandling" on fund raising, and reprints that represented demographic research that I wish I had done. I kept reprints of David Phillips' papers describing how many people wait until after their birthdays or important holidays to die and a copy of Sam Preston's masterful research comparing the well-being of children and the elderly in the United States.

Why I originally kept some items is a mystery. I don't remember the mimeographed "History of the Siamese Malay Peninsular State of Pattani" as compelling reading when I was living in Thailand and visiting Pattani and other southern provinces, and it is less so now. It was easy to let go. If some reprints seemed important once, they no longer do. I have no idea what I saw in "Occupational Prestige and Consonant Simplification in Bangkok Thai." It befuddles me now, whatever it delivered 40 years ago.

My reprints favored friends over other specialists. There are more articles by John Knodel (University of Michigan and Chulalongkorn University) and Ron Rindfuss (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the East West Center) than others not only because they are world class scholars who share my interest in the demography of Asia, but also because our friendships predate my reference collection.

Early in my career, it seemed an achievable goal to know everything about the demography of Thailand and almost everything about the populations of other Asian countries. There were very few Thai population specialists in the early 1970s, and only one university population center regularly producing good quality papers and reports. (My fellowship was intended in part to help jumpstart research at a second Thai university population center.) A few university centers outside Thailand focused on Southeast Asian studies, but they paid little attention to population and health issues. Instead, their staff members studied and wrote about culture or the communist insurgency, especially in Viet Nam, of course, but also its spillover in Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand.

All that has changed. The Thai research institute at which I worked now has over 30 population specialists with doctoral degrees from universities around the world. This is an inspiring development, but it means that it is impossible to keep up on all the research that these scholars and their counterparts across Asia produce. Data collection has widened and research methods have become more sophisticated; simple descriptive analysis of population data has given way to complex multivariate models of the causes and consequences of demographic change that require time to understand and decipher.

My reprint collection illustrates how much I have changed over the past 40 years, but it also illustrates the remarkable changes that have taken in Thailand and the rest of Southeast Asia. A 1964 Rand Corporation report on "Certain Effects of Culture and Social Organization on Internal Security in Thailand" provides an example of a topic and an approach than now seems charmingly remote. Ditto many of the reprints on Vietnam, which describe in often simple minded terms the almost forgotten world of potential Asian dominos falling before an advancing communist insurgency. Today no one worries about communism marching across Asia. Even the region's communist societies are more concerned about global markets than regional conquest. Islamic extremism has replaced

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communism as the bogeyman of our time. Terrorist attacks have troubled Southeast Asia as much or more than other places. But Asia did experience a revolution. Cities grew; health improved; childbearing and population growth declined; education and per capita income skyrocketed. These changes are reflected in my reprints; more importantly they can be seen across Asia.

My reprints have been dealt with. The old file cabinets and most of their contents were tossed out at the town dump. A few items were sent to friends and some given to the local university library. But we have yet to park the car in the garage. I have to move the old furniture and find a new home for our bicycles.