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The Journal of Shinawatra University's main objective is to publish high quality, peer-reviewed previously unpublished papers on topics related to the fields of Liberal Arts, Business and Management, Information Technology, Management Technology, Public Administration, Health Science and Nursing, Mass Communications and Education.

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**Printing** Sahai Blok and Kan Phim

# Journal of Shinawatra University

Volume 3, Number 1, Jan-Apr, 2016

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## Editor's Introduction

Welcome to the Volume 3, Number 1 issue of the *Journal of Shinawatra University*. The *Journal of Shinawatra University* is a double-blind, peer reviewed academic journal accepting papers from any recognised field of academic inquiry. Although most papers recently have been rooted in the field of management studies, broadly defined, that reflects only the papers received for consideration rather than the intention of the editor.

In this issue, I am happy to be able to include one invited paper, two peer reviewed papers and four book reviews. In the invited paper, Nittana Southiseng and Santisouk Vilaychur report on the white charcoal or *bintochan* element of a larger research project concerning the prospects for forming clusters in several sectors for the promotion of the export market overall. It is found that, for white charcoal, most activities are organized on a pull basis by private sector organizations and, in contrast with the more common approach of all East Asian societies, the state is not really meaningfully involved.

In the first peer reviewed paper, Ujwal Kumar Bhattarai and Petcharat Lovichakorntikul consider the impact of human resources information systems on human resources management in a large bank in Nepal. They find that the system has a significant impact on the efficient management of the bank but that the full range of benefits available from this adoption have yet to be realised.

In the second peer reviewed paper, Chanya Pokasoowan and Tuaranin Khamrin provide a fascinating analysis of the information technology requirements and abilities of the Royal Thai Police with respect to information technology in the contemporary world. The problems challenging the police force are acknowledged and considered.

As ever, please feel free to enjoy the contents of the journal and we welcome submissions in all fields.

*John Walsh, Editor*

# INVITED PAPER

# White Charcoal (Bintochan) Production in Lao PDR

## Abstract

*This invited paper describes research conducted in Lao PDR for the Economic Research Institute for Trade (ERIT), which is part of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. The research aimed to uncover the prospects for cluster formation in three economic sectors, including the topic of this paper, which is white charcoal. White charcoal is used in barbecuing food and is highly popular in Japan and South Korea because of its superior qualities in this regard. It is also known, therefore, by its Japanese name of bintochan. The research found that most production of white charcoal was being organized by private sector networks who worked with local farmers to establish an export trade which scarcely involves government services or knowledge at all. Conclusions are drawn from the analysis provided.*

**Keywords:** clusters, Japan, Lao PDR, South Korea, white charcoal

Nittana Southiseng and Santisouk Vilaychur

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Mr. Santisouk Vilaychur is Director General of ERIT, Vientiane, Lao PDR.

## 1. Introduction

A cluster is, simply defined, a supply chain in close geographical proximity. A supply chain is a series of activities that cause an upstream resource (i.e. raw materials) to move towards downstream consumers (i.e. retailers). Different parts of the supply chain add different levels of value to the process, usually in an inequitable manner so that some members benefit more than others. States wishing to promote rapid economic development (like Lao PDR) benefit from clusters because all sections of the value chain occur within their borders and so they can influence the distribution of benefits with a view to enacting long-term developmental goals. In Lao PDR, the agricultural sector remains of central importance and is likely to be so for the foreseeable future. When it comes to identifying potential clusters, therefore, then the agricultural sector should be the first one to be considered. Within agriculture, high value products should be sought because most production in the country is of commodity items which are marketed on cost basis alone. Such commodity trade is subject to sometimes rapid and intense price fluctuations in response to changes in demand and supply conditions. Added value can be found in processed goods, in goods for

## **PEER REVIEWED PAPERS**

# The Impact of Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS) on Human Resources Management (HRM)

## Abstract

*This paper reports the findings of a qualitative research project aimed at understanding the impact of a human resources information system (HRIS) on human resources management (HRM) through a case study of a large bank in Nepal. It is found that the HRIS is a multi-dimensional technology that has great potential for improving efficiency in the human resources function of any organization, although currently not all aspects of the benefits it can provide are being utilized. Some recommendations for future practice are drawn from the analysis.*

Ujwal Kumar Bhattarai and Petcharat Lovichakorntikul

## Authors

Ujwal Kumar Bhattarai is a graduate student of the School of Management, Shinawatra University (Kathmandu campus).

Petcharat Lovichakorntikul is a faculty member of the School of Management, Shinawatra University. [Petcharat.1@siu.ac.th](mailto:Petcharat.1@siu.ac.th).

## 1. Introduction

There is drastic change in technology. With this change, many information systems have drastically evolved from the original purposes of converting paper records into computerized databases. In the past, companies were accustomed to tracking data on paper and spreadsheets. However, with technological advancements, many companies have realized the need to implement more sophisticated computerized systems, like Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) for managing human resources in a company. By moving to HRIS, companies are able to keep more accurate and up-to-date records, allowing them to prepare better for future growth in their companies.

Many companies in Nepal have taken the step to transforming the ways by which human resource (HR) tasks are performed in attempts to keep up with rising employee counts and the evolution of technology. With the increase in duties and number of employees, it is not an easy task for an HR department to cope with this complexity. Basically, it is found in the organizations of Nepal, that little priority has been given to HR departments. Few people are hired for

# An Assessment of the IT Capabilities of the Thai Police Force

## Abstract

*Policing increasingly relies on adequate information technology (IT) capabilities for investigation, communication, workplace practices and all aspects of the organization of information. The increasing need for transparency and accountability in policing is being addressed in part by the routinization of the use of IT equipment in the pursuit of duties. Officers need to be aware of the ways in which people produce and consume standard media and social media so as to understand the ways in which people communicate with each other. This paper uses primary and secondary data to identify the nature of IT requirements in contemporary police forces with a view to estimating these needs within the Thai police force, before comparing this with the actual availability of these resources. It is shown that there is a systematic lack of resources and difficulties with the ability to use those that are provided.*

Chanya Pokasoowan and Tuaranin Khamrin

**Keywords:** *cyber threats, cyber-security, information technology, Royal Thai Police, social media,*

## Authors

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# **BOOK REVIEWS**

## Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy

Saskia Sassen

Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press

ISBN: 978-0-674-59922-2

298 pp.

Saskia Sassen focuses on two systemic shifts in the global economy to explain how brutality has produced the eponymous expulsions that inform the basic concept of this book. One of these is the ascendancy of finance capitalism and she remarks on "... the capacity of finance to develop enormously complex instruments that allow it to securitize the broadest-ever, historically speaking, range of entities and processes; further, continuous advances in electronic networks and tools make for seemingly unlimited multiplier effects (p.9)." The other relates to space: "... the material development of growing areas of the world into extreme zones for key economic operations. At one end this takes the shape of global outsourcing of manufacturing, services, clerical work, the harvesting of human organs and the raising of industrial crops to low-cost areas with weak regulation. At the other end, it is the active worldwide making of global cities as strategic spaces for advanced economic functions, this includes cities built from scratch and the often brutal renovation of old cities (p.9)." Both time and space, therefore, have been assaulted and wrestled to the ground by the forces of capitalism as they subject the world to a new stage of nature: first nature was the world before the impact of humanity; second nature was the world after humanity began to extract and take advantage of its resources; third and subsequent forms of nature are the world after capitalism has reshaped it so as to intensify capital accumulation. Inevitably, this form of creative destruction produces both winners and losers and it is Saskia Sassen's claim that the losers are not only increasing in number but are being expelled from the system and from communities with ever increasing rapidity and brutality, with obvious implications both for inequality and for the inherent instability of the system.

She explores these themes through a series of empirically-based chapters which include issues of land ownership and degradation, the role of finance in the formation of permanent crises and the role of global climate change. She builds a powerful if somewhat unoriginal picture of a world in which through accumulation by dispossession, in various guises, millions are forced into becoming refugees while a tiny minority increasingly hoovers up all the wealth, resources and future available. These chapters are competently enough written but seem slightly underwhelming because customarily she offers so much more than the accumulation of evidence. So, we look to the conclusion for the

conceptualization to take place. Here, she describes the systems considered in the book to be economic, social and biospheric and (given the two themes outlined above) they veer ever further away from geographical borders and, hence, are emblematic of the declining relevance of states vis-à-vis capital. This leads to the core hypothesis "... that the move from Keynesianism to the global era of privatizations, deregulations, and open borders for some, entailed a switch from dynamics that brought people in to dynamics that push people out (p.211)." This is evident both at the international scale and also at the national scale, where China, as a large nation, has demonstrated its own movement towards inequality that is locking people out of the overall economic wealth creation process. The unit of analysis in this case is the 'systemic edge,' because that is: "... the site where general conditions take extreme forms precisely because that is "... the site where general conditions take extreme forms precisely because it is the site for expulsion or incorporation (p.211)."

Having established this position, which has an attractive logic, Sassen can then broaden her analysis to cover the world from the early 1980s, which is approximately the moment when neoliberalism began to replace the previous rather successful (as Paul Krugman regularly argues) Keynesian economic settlement and concomitant social institutions. That settlement was fundamentally inclusive, as demonstrated by the rising wages and living standards for most sectors of society around the world. That this took place was not related to some kind of good old days phenomenon of moral decay so much as the awareness of the desperate need for peace and security after the horrors of the Second World War. People realised the need to build stable ties between countries and with communities to prevent those horrors recurring. That thinking has been replaced. Neoliberalism, of course, reduces all of the additional effects of work and of social arrangements to the lowest common denominator of money. People thereby become customers rather than clients, patients or passengers and the financial bottom line of the corporation is the master narrative of the age. In other words, "The relationship between today's advanced capitalism and more traditional forms of market capitalism can, at the limit, be characterized as one of increasingly primitive accumulation: complexity and technical progress serve causes of brute simplicity (p.216)." This is a powerful argument and one which I would have liked to see developed further.

Sassen concludes by wondering about the 'spaces of the expelled (p.222)' and this consideration leads to a number of emergent questions which might have shed light on whether any of these effects might be eliminated or reversed. As is so often the case, the book is more concerned with what has happened and its problems rather than what might now be done to try to improve the world. However, the closing words do offer some sense of tempered optimism: "... the spaces of the expelled cry out for conceptual recognition. They are many, they

are growing, and they are diversifying. They are conceptually subterranean conditions that need to be brought aboveground. They are, potentially, the new spaces for making local economies, new histories, and modes of membership (p.222).” Perhaps these will be addressed in another book.

*John Walsh, Shinawatra University*

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## The Use of Mao and the Chongqing Model

Joseph Y.S. Cheng, editor

Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 2015

ISBN: 978-962-937-240-8

XIX + 331 pp.

Chongqing is one of China’s largest cities and, since most of China’s dramatic industrialization and poverty reduction has taken place in cities, it is one of the sites of rapid modernization and economic development. That development has featured a variant of the Factory Asia paradigm, which is based on export-oriented, import substituting, intensive manufacturing with competitiveness based on low labour costs. Those low labour costs are achieved by drawing people from agriculture into industry through better wages and, after the Lewisian point of equalization of supply and demand for labour is passed, through repression of workers’ rights and exploitation through permitting a parallel workforce of illegal or unregistered migrant workers. This paradigm is often successful in achieving its goals but it is likely to be time-limited in effect as it triggers the Middle Income Trap. It is also inimical to the desire for equality of treatment promised by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) ideology which many millions of Chinese people still hold to be important. Consequently, there is scope for differences in approach from the application of the Factory Asia paradigm by enacting policies within a city that tackle the corruption that inevitably attends rapid capitalist development while reducing market failures by providing good quality low cost housing and promotion of microenterprise start-ups to help provide employment to rural migrants and university graduates who might otherwise have had to leave. One result of this was to attract 200,000 of the half a million Foxconn jobs that had been located in Shenzhen. The concept was: “Chongqing provided cheap public rental housing to Foxconn workers. This allowed it to break away from the ‘global labor arbitrage’ pattern and re-embed transnational capital in society (Zhao, 2012).”

This was always likely to be a problematic approach because of the forces lined up against just such an idea: “... a powerful hegemonic bloc transnational capital, domestic coastal export industries, and pro-capitalist state officials – as well as

neoliberal media, intellectual leaders, and their middle class followers – [which] continues to block any substantial efforts at re-orienting the Chinese development path (*ibid.*)." Bo Xilai, mayor of Chongqing, attempted to enlist the support of the people of the city by the *changhong* campaign of singing red songs. Songs, that is, that are associated either historically or ideologically with the person of Mao Zedong, who is described as both the Lenin and Stalin of China. It is quite clear that the relationship between the CCP and Mao and his legacy is both complicated and evolving. Mao has never been repudiated but he has been found culpable of some mistakes. As Sebastian Veg writes in this volume (237-75): "... the 1981 'Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party,' ... distinguished among five periods: the pre-1949 and 1949-56 periods, during which the line of the Party and Mao's leadership are deemed 'correct,' the 1956-66 decade, marked by some errors, the responsibility for which is shared by Mao and the collective leadership, and the 'Cultural revolution decade' of 1966-76, which is entirely condemned, including Mao's role. Finally, the post-Mao era was, unsurprisingly, endorsed (Veg, 2015)."

The figure of Mao remains quite capable of stirring controversy and the use of his personality through the *changhong* campaign to challenge policies endorsed by the CCP might well have provoked an official response. Bo Xilai's campaign brought him considerable levels of political success (he would scarcely have become mayor of Chongqing if he had not had some measure of personal ambition and determination) and undoubtedly caused him to attract a number of enemies, especially as the result of the Strike the Black anti-corruption campaign. In the central paper of this volume, editor Joseph Y.S. Cheng (pp.181-211) describes Bo's success in terms of living environment and housing, transport network, afforestation, safety as well as law and order and health services. However, it is evident that other authors take a different view, perhaps cynically assuming that the whole campaign was just a smoke and mirrors attempt to propel Bo to his political goals. In any case, Bo's world began to unravel after falling out with key Strike the Black ally Wen Qiang. Just before Chinese New Year in January, 2012, Bo had his Politburo membership suspended while his wife, the celebrity lawyer Gu Kailai, was indicted for the 'intentional homicide' of the British businessperson Neil Heywood. Heywood had lived an unusual life cultivating contacts in numerous agencies of the Chinese government in his successful attempt to move from being a teacher of English to a consultant to companies with non-specific contacts with Britain's MI6 spy service. Heywood was found dead and his corpse cremated without a proper examination having taken place (Watts & Branigan, 2012). A special investigator subsequently announced numerous charges against Bo Xilai and tried to obtain political asylum with the Americans in Chengdu while Chinese security forces surrounded the building. There had been rumours of torture employed during the Strike the Black campaign and son Gua Gua seemed to be enjoying an exceptionally affluent lifestyle while studying at the University of Oxford (*ibid.*). It was enough and Bo was finished.

What then, does the study of the confluence of the image of Mao and the

Chongqing model teach us about contemporary China? One thing that is clear is that the CCP maintains a pretty strong grip on the levers of state power. Émilie Tran (pp.213-35) writes that pro-Maoist websites were swiftly closed down and "... the authorities removed actual signs (posters and inscriptions on walls) and online testimonies, practically overnight. The next day, the residents of Chongqing woke up from their 'Red' fever in a freshly harmonized Chongqing. In that heavy atmosphere of suspicion, they behaved as if nothing had happened, being cautious not to mention anything related to Bo Xilai and his 'Red culture movement' to anyone (Tran, 2015)." An informant observes that it would not have been so easy to silence the Red Guards and this is symptomatic of contemporary China, according to a consensus of papers in this collection.

Mao has become inextricably linked with the Cultural Revolution and the continued silence about that period remains an obstacle to genuine rather than inflicted harmony – Bo Xilai himself was once a Red Guard and was subsequently imprisoned for five years for no properly explained reason.

Indeed, the CCP has provided some guidance as to how Mao should be considered in the future through sanctioned feature films which, as Veg (2015) observes, portray him in more humanistic terms dealing with a wide range of the great women and men of modern Chinese history in a vista from which the masses appear to have been deleted. This is both an expression of the neoliberalism of the political elite and, also, an attempt to sever the link between Mao and the people for the purpose of further legitimizing the present regime in its current manifestation. By doing so, it is presumably the case that it will become less possible for populist leaders to obtain broad support through the use of Mao imagery and ideology.

As is common with collections of academic papers of this sort, the extent to which authors actually address both parts of the title varies from case to case. As mentioned previously, the central paper is by Cheng himself and it is this one that most closely outlines the various themes explored. However, many of the other papers do make interesting contributions in their own right and it is noteworthy that most of them appear to have been published by academic journals since the time of the original conference of 2012. The production standards are good and the quality of editing more than acceptable. It is unlikely that the book will be of widespread interest but for scholars of contemporary Chinese society and economy it has a great deal to offer.

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## Against the Double Blackmail: Refugees, Terror and Other Troubles with the Neighbours

Slavoj Žižek

London: Allen Lane, 2016

ISBN: 978-0-241-27884-0

117 pp.

In the inside back cover of this new book by the irrepressible Slavoj Žižek, the author is described as ‘a Hegelian philosopher, Lacanian psychoanalyst, and political activist.’ He makes full use of all three of these aspects in this slender volume on the challenges surrounding the flow of refugees aiming to reach Europe from war-torn countries in Asia and Europe. The first of these is the political aspect (Marx is not noted on the back cover but his influence soon makes an entrance nonetheless). Žižek draws on Fredric Jameson’s concept of the lack of ‘cognitive mapping’ to suggest why it is difficult for people to understand their relationship with the rest of the world and that, of course, is because of the immanence of late capitalism which dictates the conditions of life but in a way that remains invisible to those who lack the ideological vocabulary to identify the contours of class struggle in the symptoms of apparent chaos all around. This inability to identify the problem has led to the rise of supposed maverick outsider politicians, the riots without demands in Paris and elsewhere and the outbreak of sexual violence in India. The same of course is true of the reception of the refugees. Citing (as he often does) Peter Sloterdijk, he observes

that "... capitalist globalization stands not only for openness and conquest, but also for the idea of a self-enclosed globe separating its privileged Inside from its Outside (pp.15-6)." The refugee, like the economic migrant, short-circuits capitalist globalization by seeking to move from the peripheral Outside to the core Inside. In this context, the refugees are worse than the migrants because (particularly when young and vulnerable) they come shaking their gory locks and force us to face the consequences of what we (of Europe and of the west) have done in history and what is now being done in our name.

Here Žižek adds the Lacanian aspect of his approach (while Hegelian dialectics form part of the very fibre of his discourse) by considering the importance of the ability of people to be able to tolerate others. This is a theme he has considered before – to be honest, he writes so much and publishes so often that there is not always very much in any of his books which could not have been found in some other part of his oeuvre. He refers to Freud: "Since a Neighbour is, as Freud suspected long ago, primarily a Thing, a traumatic intruder, someone whose different way of life (or, rather, way of *jouissance* materialized in its social practice and rituals) disturbs us and, when the Neighbour comes too close, throws the balance of our way of life off the rails, this can also give rise to an aggressive reaction aimed at getting rid of this disturbing intruder (p.74)." The Lacanian term *jouissance* refers to "... excessive pleasure coinciding with pain (p.75)." Pleasure and pain are defined on an individual basis: the ascetic or forest monk who lives outside society in poverty actually does so, it can be argued, because that is how pleasure appears to such a person and the pain involves not so much the physical deprivations as the self-knowledge that the purpose of asceticism is actually to gain that pleasure. We human beings all live together in communities of different sorts and our communal forms of *jouissance* have evolved to enable life to continue in a way we consider to be normal but when we are faced with an alternative form, unless we have the relevant cognitive mapping available, we may well reject this "ex-timate intruder (p.75)" with disgust. This is one reason why the maintainers of capitalist globalization are so opposed to any form of internationalism and regularly denounce the Others, whoever they might be, as threats to our way of life, our standard of living (they steal jobs and welfare payments) and our personal property (which for many people continues to include women).

However, Žižek does not just stop there with the implicit conclusion that if only, as so many t-shirts have it, we could live in "a world without strangers) then we could all just get to know each other and live together peaceably (i.e. 42). Instead, we should recognise that those we might consider to be Other can still behave very badly, as the sexual abuse of young white girls in Rotherham by ethnic Pakistani men and the large-scale incidences of sexual assaults in German cities by migrants and refugees demonstrates. Here Žižek likens these activities to those of paedophile Roman Catholic priests (which is one of the



reasons he has so many enemies) and argues that (pp.31-3) it is the very nature of the institution of which they are a part that makes the men behave in the way they do: “One can well imagine a non-paedophile priest who, after years of service, gets involved in paedophilia because the very logic of the institution seduces him into it. Such an ‘institutional unconscious’ designates the obscene disavowed underside that sustains the public institution (p.32).” This argument, which flows from his Hegelian-Lacanian approach combined with the pessimism of the intellect characteristic of Marxist thinkers, will outrage many. This is perhaps part of the point of it all but there is no doubt that Žižek constructs his arguments with integrity as well as his customary broad humour. However, just as soon as he reaches one conclusion he is skipping away at an apparent tangent to search for quite a different one. He is best challenged, I would say – for those who wish to challenge him – in terms of his method rather than his assertions. Having said which, there is some concern in my mind about his use of data and references. He does seem to rely too much on a thin number of sources for the data to support his wide-ranging subjects. Most references used in this book are online and, while that is not in itself problematic, quite often it is a single newspaper story that fuels an entire argument. Certainly he writes with great rapidity and in extraordinary profusion but a watchful editor might perhaps have required a little more justification. Still, the pleasure is in the breathless journey.

*John Walsh, Shinawatra University*

King John: Treachery, Tyranny and the Road to Magna Carta

Marc Morris

London: Windmill Books, 2015

ISBN: 9780099591825

XVIII + 382 pp

King John is perhaps best known among British people for being so bad a monarch that there can never be a John II and for losing the crown in the Wash (part of the sea to the east of the country off Lincolnshire). His representations on stage, screen and printed page are mostly limited to being the bad guy in contrast to Richard the Lionheart and using his proxy the Sheriff of Nottingham to persecute the sainted Robin Hood. Who, really, can quote from Shakespeare’s play? However, much of this is little more than hearsay and accurate information about the life and times of the historical king is comparatively limited, at least for non-specialists. Consequently, a work of popular history on the subject is most welcome.

The value of works of popular history is that they are obliged to tell the actual story

in as clear terms as possible. Academic history is required to present the myriad of quiddities and contradictions that appear in the sources and to take various theoretical frameworks of analysis as a means of examining the material in such a way that it is possible for the reader to remain unsure of what, if anything, actually did happen. One of the more notable benefits of the current book is that it is made clear why this confusion takes place: it was so difficult actually to get anything done, while there were powerful incentives to try to broadcast quite the opposite in a world in which significant enemies could respond aggressively to any show of weakness. Indeed, it is not difficult to find evidence of weakness in John's performance since, during the first part of his reign, he managed to lose possession of England's (this was the pre-union era) extensive holdings in what is now known as France. As Morris announces (p.5): "Travellers could pass from the border of Scotland to the border of Spain without ever leaving his territories. Millions of people, speaking at least half a dozen different languages, were his subjects. By any measure, his was the most important and powerful dominion in Europe."

The Norman Yoke had been imposed upon the British people only 150 years before and it had led to the creation of the empire which had become anglicized at the highest-level because of the agricultural value of England. This could have been used for the benefit of all people through such means as more integration of economic and social systems to help create a civilization that would rival Byzantium. Instead, it was used for predatory raids on the working people and frittered away in needless wars and diplomatic failures. John lost France and his influence in Ireland was greatly reduced after a disastrous adventure there. Yet all of this was effected not so much by active misrule as by the inability to get things done. So much effort had to be expended persuading minor nobility to do what was expected of them and acting as the gift-giver able to create and sustain patronage networks that it was almost impossible for a limited monarch like John (whose ascent to the throne was made possible by a relentless plague visited upon his many older relatives in the direct line) to find the time to do anything else. Furthermore, a great deal of what he wanted to achieve was subject to forces beyond his control, notably including the weather. British weather is notoriously changeable and British sea power, its traditional strength in European politics, was limited in the pre-steam era to the prevailing conditions. Any foreign military venture required naval support both for transportation and for bringing needed supplies, reinforcements and information. An inconvenient storm could, therefore, waste months and even years of planning as the gathered troops and their leaders wait in port eating the food and spending the money raised by taxation while waiting for the rain to stop.

However, irrespective of the vagaries of getting things done, what John actually did get done was often quite despicable. A notable example of this was his predatory taxation policy (back to the Sheriff of Nottingham theme), which extended to various ruses aimed at acquiring assets, including people, from those who felt they had a legal claim to them. This was not only wrong for ethical reasons but actively dissolved the bonds between monarch and nobility on which the political order of the country depended. The more that John alienated his erstwhile supporters, the closer

he came to the creation of Magna Carta, that restatement of the social bonds between the classes that has become so central to the unwritten constitution of the United Kingdom. Had John's reign not taken place or had taken place in a different manner, then the Magna Carta moment would have happened somewhat later. That it would have happened in some form appears to be an unavoidable fact.

Morris is to be praised for producing a clear and readable book that highlights the major themes of the life and times of an important but little understood period of British history. One would be forgiven for thinking, based on popular culture, that little happened between the Norman invasion and the six wives of Henry VIII. This book helps to fill that gap in knowledge. If, occasionally, the reader might hope for a little more information about some of the contextual or background issues, that is beyond the scope of this book and Morris provides enough information in the footnotes and references for that reader to create a personal reading list for further investigation.

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