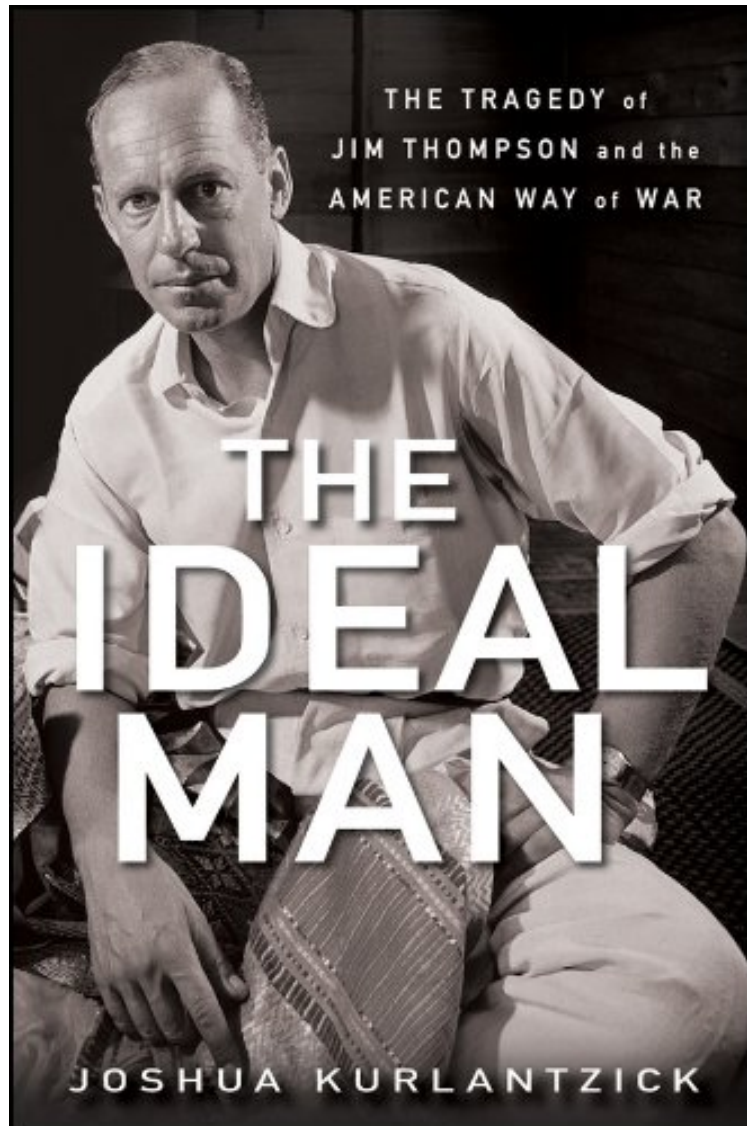


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The Ideal Man: The Tragedy of Jim Thompson and the American Way of War

Joshua Kurlantzick

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Joshua Kurlantzick : The Ideal Man: The Tragedy of Jim Thompson and the American Way of War before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Ideal Man: The Tragedy of Jim Thompson and the American Way of War:

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. The Life and Mind of an Extraordinary Expat By K. Johnson Two new things I learned reading this book were 1. that Thailand was manipulating American leaders for military and economic aid in the 1950s and 60s and 2. the common situations of Thompson's expat disenfranchisement from not

only his host country of Thailand but his home-country, the USA. This is a common experience among the vast majority of expats. Author Joshua Kurlantzick delved deeply into Jim Thompson and his situations in Thailand with fellow Americans, international expats, and US involvement in South East Asia. Thompson also witnessed the negative effects of the transformation of Thailand during the 'Americanization' period of the 1950s and 60s. There is lots of information about specific Thai political figures and occurrences in Thailand during the 1950s. A reader can learn a lot about the Thai political and economic situation starting with the post WWII leadership of Pridi who led the Thai democratic party and the country itself. Thompson knew Pridi and met with him on occasion. At this time the Viet Minh were working to drive the French colonialists out of VN. Thompson noted that the Viet Minh fighters were nationalists first and would possibly use communism to drive the French out if Washington shunned them. The Viet Minh would choose Washington over Moscow if the US gave support. This was not the case and the Viet Minh allied with Moscow. Thompson presciently predicted the future in advance, yet was doubted by the upper echelons of the US government military. Thompson accurately knew what was happening, much more so than the American civilian bureaucrats and military leaders back in D.C. Even bureaucrats and military leaders that were in South East Asia were incredibly ignorant of South East Asia in general and Vietnam in particular. The CIA eventually put a "burn" on Thompson, ordering US government civilians and military personnel to avoid contact with Thompson. He said things the civilian and military bureaucrats did not want to hear. What is intriguing is that although Jim Thompson was a unique person who was in many ways 'larger than life,' he experienced the common conditions and afflictions of being a long-term expat --> He had no home. For many long-term expats living abroad their native country is no longer "home" and their host country isn't either and will never be. Many long-term expats can relate to this. Many (but not all) expats are not a part of the host nation's society, culture and legal system, yet they are not a part of these elements in their native country either after several years abroad. To some this brings a feeling of being marginalized while to others it's feeling that you are more a 'citizen of the world' surrounded by your own bubble of friends, family, and colleagues, wherever you may be on the planet. The early life of Thompson by Kurlantzick shows him born and raised in an aristocratic Delaware family with connections. Thompson went to NYC and lived well in New York and worked as architect. In the Army during WWII at the age of 34 however, Thompson was a private first-class and had to salute the many "dregs of Delaware." Thompson referred to this period of the 1930s and 40s as what he described as a "total waste." But Thompson applied for training into the OSS (precursor to the CIA) and attained the rank of Major after successfully completing the training. This is when his expat life began, as he was transferred to work in North Africa and the Mediterranean theaters during WWII. After WWII, Thompson would end up in Thailand and gain powerful connections, trust, and friendship of many influential Thais. He regularly hosted guests for dinner which included tours of his house, his art collection, and scotch, during the sunset in the Bangkok heat. Some of his dinner guests included Eleanor Roosevelt, the du Pont, and Truman Capote. Jim Thompson has always held some mythic lore in the expat community of South East. I think there are three the main reasons: his past work in the OSS, becoming the "Silk King," and the mysterious circumstances of his disappearance. This is a very informative book because it delved into Thompson's views of US involvement in South East Asia, the transformation of Thailand, and doing business as a expat. Like almost all expats, Thompson went through stages of difficulty and what I would define as culture shock. Interest by most in Jim Thompson seems to focus on his mysterious and still unsolved disappearance. But far more intriguing, was his life. A great book by Joshua Kurlantzick. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. While beautiful, with neighboring homes in the area. By JP When I lived in SE Asia in the early 80's I would hear all kinds of theory's on Jim Thompson disappearance. One weekend we stayed at a private home in the area of Malaysia where he disappeared. While beautiful, with neighboring homes in the area, I would never consider strolling down the road alone or without protection since it is surrounded by jungle. I have also toured his home in Bangkok; a fascinating place kept the way it was when he lived there. Tours are well done and worth going. This book is a great read about an interesting man who did so much for the Thai people. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Very in-depth. By greg baker I live in Thailand and found this book to be fascinating. Anybody who has been to Thailand knows about Jim Thompson silk and I've been by his house many times without going in, but now I feel like I know the rest of the story, the cold war stuff, the alliances, the origins of some of today's relationships between high level players in Thailand and the USA. I found it to be a very interesting historically informative story.

How the West's greatest spy in Asia tried to stop the new American way of war; and the steep price he paid for failing. Jim Thompson landed in Thailand at the end of World War II, a former American society dilettante who became an Asian legend as a spy and silk magnate with access to Thai worlds outsiders never saw. As the Cold War reached Thailand, America had a choice: Should it, as Thompson believed, help other nations build democracies from their traditional cultures or, as his ex-OSS friend Willis Bird argued, remake the world through deception and self-serving alliances? In a story rich with insights and intrigue, this book explores a key Cold War episode that is still playing out today. Highlights a pivotal moment in Cold War history that set a course for American foreign policy that is still being followed today. Explores the dynamics that put Thailand at the center of the Cold War and the fighting in neighboring Laos that escalated from sideshow to the largest covert operation America had ever engaged in. Draws on

personal recollections and includes atmospheric details that bring the people, events—and the Thailand of the time—to life. Written by a journalist with extensive experience in Asian affairs who has spent years investigating every aspect of this story, including Thompson's tragic disappearance

From the Inside Flap

In the 1950s, U.S. foreign policy makers and intelligence agencies faced a momentous choice: Should America, as former OSS officer Jim Thompson believed, fight the Cold War by helping other nations build democratic, capitalistic futures while preserving and strengthening their traditional cultures? Or would it be more practical, as Thompson's old OSS buddy Bill Bird argued, to help local strongmen seize power and prop them up with financial and military aid in return for their staunch anticommunism and the establishment of American military bases on their soil? History makes two things perfectly clear—America chose the latter course, and anyone who disagreed with that choice, including Jim Thompson, was in serious danger.

In *The Ideal Man*, journalist and Southeast Asia expert Joshua Kurlantzick tells the compelling and tragic story of an OSS officer posted to Thailand in 1945 who fell in love with that then-remote nation and made it his home. Through this powerful lens, Kurlantzick offers insight into a pivotal moment in Cold War history that set a course for American foreign policy that is still being followed today. Kurlantzick reveals that, as a civilian, Thompson epitomized all that was best about postwar America. This former society dilettante quickly discovered the disappearing Thai cottage industry of silk farming and weaving and rebuilt it into a vast new source of wealth for the nation and thousands of its workers. But Jim Thompson was leading a double life. Thanks to his growing business, his passion for his new home, and his innate curiosity, Thompson had access to people and places that no other American could equal. He quickly became the go-to man for agents of the newly formed CIA. But he made no secret of his support for nationalist fighters in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, or his opposition to America's increasing military presence and support of Thai generals. Soon, he and Bill Bird found themselves on opposite sides in coups, congressional investigations, and what was, at the time, America's largest-ever covert operation. Thompson's very public opposition to what had become established American policy earned him plenty of enemies, especially among Thai generals. His disappearance in 1967 became an international mystery that has fostered decades of speculation.

Bristling with thorny insider tales of OSS and CIA exploits, political gamesmanship, and international intrigue, *The Ideal Man* is ideal reading for anyone who loves history, spy stories, and behind-the-scenes accounts of how diplomatic policy decisions are made—for better or worse.

From the Back Cover

Praise for *The Ideal Man*"Joshua Kurlantzick has written a sad, evocative tale of an American voyager who conquers a strange land only to be lost in it, caught between cultures and his own demons. *The Ideal Man* will appeal to readers of Graham Greene and *The Ugly American*, but it's also a timeless story of innocence and knowing too much."—Evan Thomas, author of *Sea of Thunder* and *The War Lovers*"Here is a more troubled and troubling Jim Thompson than we have previously encountered: the silk king enters the heart of darkness. After narrating the ultimate Asia hand's unrequited love affair with Thailand, this remarkable book makes Thompson's legendary and still unsolved disappearance at the height of the Cold War seem almost inevitable."—Duncan McCargo, author of *Tearing Apart the Land*"Woven throughout Kurlantzick's biography of *Our Man in Thailand* is an essential question for our times: When Washington goes on ideological rampages overseas, running wars that trample on the aspirations of the local people, no matter how hard those aspirations may be for outsiders to discern, don't these wars tend to boomerang? Doesn't cultural clumsiness undercut military power every time? Kurlantzick's glamorous protagonist, the 'silk king' Jim Thompson, saw American anticommunism wreak such havoc in Southeast Asia that it helped give rise to a later communist victory. This fascinating book will leave you wondering how often this pattern is going to be repeated, on large and small scales, in the Middle East, Afghanistan, and beyond."—Roger Warner, author of *Shooting at the Moon: The Story of America's Clandestine War in Laos*

About the Author

JOSHUA KURLANTZICK writes regularly about Asia for *Newsweek* and the *New Republic*. He also contributes to *Mother Jones*, the *London of Books*, the *New York Times*, *Foreign Policy*, the *Atlantic*, and *Time*. In 2007, Yale University Press published his book on China's soft power, *Charm Offensive*.