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Reinventing Siam: Ideas and Culture in Thailand, 1920-1944

by

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Of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

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Reinventing Siam: Ideas and Culture in Thailand, 1920-1944

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Chapter One, Introduction: Insiders and Outsiders in Thai Intellectual Life: Rethinking the 1932 "Revolution"

Early on the morning of June 24, 1932, tanks and armored cars rumbled through the streets of the Thai capital Bangkok and quickly surrounded the ministries and palaces that formed the heart of state power. Within a few hours, the 150-year old absolute monarchy had been abolished. The old ruling class was caught completely by surprise; many were arrested at their palaces still in their pajamas. A secretive group calling itself the "People's Party" (Khana Ratsadon) had seized power in the name of the people. Atop their tanks and cars, the group distributed flyers to Bangkok citizens who had come out on the streets that morning eager to find out what had happened. In part, the group's manifesto read:

"The government of the king has treated the people as slaves and as animals ... (T)he people have to sweat blood in order to find just a little money ... But those of royal blood are sleeping and eating happily. There is no country in the world that gives its royalty so much money as this, except the Tsar and the German Kaiser, whose nations have already overthrown their thrones."¹

Later that morning the news was brought to King Prajadhipok. The heir to the House of Chakri was playing golf at his seaside palace Klai Kangwon ("Far from Worry")

¹ "Announcement of the People's Party No. 1," in Pridi Banomyong, *Pridi by Pridi: Selected Writings on Life, Politics, Economy, Baker and Phasuk*, trans. and intro. (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2000), 70.

in Hua Hin, a coastal resort a few hours train journey from the capital. After conferring with his advisers, the king decided not to resist the takeover. He capitulated to the rebels' demands that the kingdom henceforth be ruled as a constitutional monarchy that vested sovereign power in the people, ruled through a parliament and guaranteed basic popular rights and freedoms. The People's Party had apparently triumphed and altered the course of Thai history.

The "revolution," as it came to be known,² however was not the popular revolt against tyranny that it claimed to be. The People's Party lacked a popular foundation, and instead comprised a very small group of civilian and military officers from the state bureaucracy. Contrary to their pledge to liberate the masses from autocracy, the Khana Ratsadon's top-down democracy sought to establish a system of social control. Their program strongly resembled the policies of the absolute kingship. The party's radicalism, moreover, was short-lived. Within 48 hours they asked the king's forgiveness for the initial manifesto's fiery language, and thereafter governed with the crucial assistance of the old royal-aristocratic class in the bureaucracy. While the constitutional system was maintained for the next fifteen years, it became a hollow shell. After an initial brief period of solidarity the People's Party broke apart into factions. Ultimately the military wing of the group triumphed, and by 1939 the country was a dictatorship.

² The word was coined by Prince Wan Waithayakon, a royal intellectual who supported constitutionalism; he invented *patiwat* for revolution about a month after the coup. It has remained the only word used to describe 1932. Wan, "The Future of Siam," *Bangkok Times*, February 27, 1933.

The failed establishment of democracy dominates the historiography of 1932. Studies about the event and its immediate aftermath focus on the bitter intra-elite three-way battle between the military, the civilian group in the People's Party and the old royal-aristocratic elite. Further, the legacy of 1932 is explained as a depressingly repetitive series of military coups and revolts that have marked Thai politics ever since. Histories of the period are thus dominated by studies of Bangkok politics and state "insiders," primarily the military, but also the monarchy and the new civilian leaders from the bureaucracy. The best of these studies are sophisticated and essential guides to modern Thai politics.³

This thesis, however, argues that the real "revolution" of twentieth century Thai history was not political but intellectual. Two more fundamental processes preceded and accompanied the irregular transition to a constitutional political system in interwar Siam, and both would be of much more profound social importance than 1932's tangled politics. First was the attempt to overturn a long-established state policy orientation that always favored the city at the expense of rural poverty and isolation. "Outsiders" to the royal-aristocratic and bureaucratic

³ Charnvit Kasetsiri and Thamrongsak Phetlert-anand, *Patiwat 2475* (1932 Revolution in Siam) (Bangkok: Textbooks Project (TB), 2004), Saneh Chamarik, *Kanmuang Thai kap Pathanakan Rathamanun* (Thai Politics and Constitutional Development, 3rd ed. (Bangkok: TB, 2006); Suthachai Yimprasert, *Phaen Ching Chat Thai* (Struggle to Save the Nation). Classic accounts of pre-coup Siam: Nakharin Mektrairat, *Kanpatiwat Syam 2475* (The Revolution in Siam 1932) (Bangkok: Fa Diaokan, 2010 (1992)) and *Khvam Khit Khvam Ru le Amnat thang Kanmuang nai Patiwat Siam 2475* (Thought, Knowledge and Political Power in the Siamese Revolution of 1932) (Bangkok: Fa Diaokan, 2003); Benjamin A. Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1984).

elite brought new conceptions of social integration and community into public discourse for the first time in Thai history, and sought to end the starkly uneven development between the country and the city.⁴ Second, outsiders also embarked on an intellectual renovation that sought the creation of a modern self - critical, autonomous and cosmopolitan - as an agent of social welfare and enlightenment. The modern self was also, crucially, egalitarian. Because of this advancement of an alternative model of personal responsibility and social order to the statist, kingly orthodoxy, the wide-ranging discourse of the outsiders tested the ethics of submission to the social hierarchy, the monarchy and, after 1932, the top-down democracy. Very little research has been done on the outsiders' pivotal contribution to Thai modernity despite their importance in twentieth century history.

This dissertation studies the intellectual and social history of Siam between 1920 and 1944, the key years of the mental transformation, and describes the rival discourses of state insiders and outsiders. In contrast to the aristocrats, military officers and lawyers who controlled

⁴ I've been inspired to think of the interwoven careers of state insiders and outsiders as centrally important by two studies that explain (perhaps coincidentally) contemporaneous but markedly different intellectual developments in Japan and Germany. Andrew Barshay, *State and Intellectual in Imperial Japan: The Public Man in Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988) and Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001 (1968)). Outsiders in Japanese and German societies contributed vitally to their countries' public life and both suffered terribly as their political systems collapsed in hyper-nationalism and war. State control of public life in Siam forced also an unhappy fate on many outsiders who resisted or merely stood apart from dictatorship, but history and political circumstances prevented such violent outcomes.

government, the outsiders formed a new intelligentsia of journalists, writers and literary theorists, modernist Buddhist monks and lay intellectuals. They were nearly all commoners. Further, while most insiders lived in Bangkok or the central plains that formed the heartland of royal power and civilization, the crucial class of outsiders hailed from poor upcountry provinces with weak ties to urban culture. It is thus a story of two Siams, one official, urban and under the sway of royal culture, and the other from the middle tier of rural society, and relatively autonomous of princely hegemony. The two were interwoven, however, and the complex and contradictory relations between them came together in the capital Bangkok, the largest city in the kingdom.

Insiders, State Careers and Mental Horizons

The slide into dictatorship after 1932 stemmed from a deeper problem than conflict among the new leaders or royalist reaction. Both before and after 1932 the elite governed on the basis of an innate sense of superiority to common people; the new democrats and military men, and the old royalists, cast the masses as naïve and docile subjects of Bangkok's authority. I attribute this political continuity to the importance of Bangkok in shaping the insider mentality. Here we can briefly explain the historical context for the close connection between public life and state careerism.

Siamese national independence during the age of European and American imperialism is a dominant theme in Thai historiography, and has shaped the self-image of Bangkok educated society for over a century. Because Siam

remained free from foreign empires in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the auto-modernizing Bangkok state commanded strong loyalty from educated people. Public service, above all, was highly esteemed and seen as a patriotic duty for young men of good families. In addition to the sway of nationalist thought, the educated young generation born after the 1892 reforms that created a modern administration also sought a bureaucratic career because of the financial security it offered and its career opportunities. The state was the most sought after employment, and formed the focus of public life.⁵

Monarchic stewardship of the state from the 1890s until 1932 relied on an elite class of administrators. Throughout these decades, the small network of royals and aristocrats who governed the upper tiers of the civil service served as powerful patrons and moral exemplars. They bred in aspiring commoners an adulation of high culture and the powerful men who created it. The princely great man as public servant model continued almost without interruption after 1932. The cliques that coalesced into the People's Party typified the mixed motivations for public service, patriotic and careerist, and showed the powerful psychological impact of elite society on young civil servants. People's Party leaders all held ranks bestowed by the old regime for public service, and none of them renounced these titles despite their attack of royal power. Political histories of the interwar period that chart the bitter disputes within the People's Party cliques

⁵ See Fred W. Riggs, *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1966) and Kullada Kesbunchoo Mead, *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism* (London: Routledge Press, 2004).

obscure the similarity among the factions. Largely ignored is the dominant influence of urban high culture and the statist mentality that produced a nearly identical authoritarianism among the new leadership.

Outsiders and the Diverse Challenge to Authority

The modernizing state and the social ethics of the elite class governed careers and mentalities. The official mind, however, was not all encompassing. A growing public sphere in the early twentieth century allowed for the circulation of diverse ideas some of which, especially popular nationalism and democracy, challenged elitism.⁶ While the market for reading and writing developed largely among the elite in the capital (and had its origins in the palace), provincial intellectuals of diverse social origins also participated. Outsiders who felt minimal affinity with Bangkok culture or who were not ambitious for political power usually formed the most radical challenge to the values of royal-aristocratic society.

The different networks described in later chapters that challenged the elite bureaucracy stemmed from both old and new solidarities. Provincial parliamentarians - excluded from the center of power in the cabinet and military - formed a brand new class and became key advocates for rural progress and a real democracy, as chapter one describes. Young intellectuals at the time often argued against behavior or attitudes they felt were unsuited to the modern age. It is striking that the most powerful of these

⁶ See Matthew Copeland "Contested Nationalism and the Overthrow of the Thai Absolute Monarchy," (Ph.D. diss: Australian National University, 1993), Nakharin, *Kanpatiwat Syam* and Scot Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002).

critiques developed among rural activists who had not absorbed Bangkok high culture but who nonetheless experienced the social effects of elitist attitudes. Young ministers from the northeast, the poorest region of the kingdom, constantly struggled after 1932 to increase state spending on rural education and infrastructure and spoke out in parliament and the press against army politics and the secretive expansion of military budgets.⁷

Modern education produced a new generation of teachers who grew up in the democratic period. (Many rural MPs in fact began their careers as educators.) Chapter two explains the tensions generated in the educational system under the authoritarian, centralized model pushed by the absolutist and constitutional states.⁸ Country teachers and others had democratic aspirations. They sought local management freed from the tutelage of Bangkok officials, whom they felt didn't understand upcountry conditions and who had obtained their positions through nepotism.

Modernist intellectual currents in the Buddhist monkhood, the subject of chapters three and six, contributed to progressive movements in the country's oldest cultural institution. Young monks from the eastern seaboard provinces organized a group that for the first time in Thai history sought equality between the two main religious sects, their Mahanikai association that

⁷ My research in the National Archives forms most of these sections. For the politics see Charnvit and Thamrongsak, eds. *Pridi Phanomyong lae 4 Rathamontri Isan + 1* (Pridi Banomyong and 4 Isan Ministers + 1) (Bangkok: TB and Thammasat Archives Project, 2001).

⁸ Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) was extremely useful as a comparison to my archival findings.

represented almost all rural religious, and the urban, palace-founded Thammayut. In another example, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a Thai-Chinese monk from the mid-south destined to become arguably the best-known religious intellectual of the century, as a young man traveled to Bangkok for study but hated its rituals and obsession with ranks, and returned to his province to develop a new philosophy and practice with vital contributions from young lay intellectuals who saw the social impact of modernist Buddhism in neighboring countries.⁹

Movements for religious and educational reform and rural development all present a relatively stark difference between the concerns of insiders and outsiders, between the growing power of Bangkok and its authoritarian culture and rural reaction. Some outsiders, however, were intimately familiar with city culture primarily because the growth of the state and its educational system allowed them to attend elite schools. The development of the novel, an exclusively city genre covered in chapters four and five, shows the key role played by commoners and the tensions generated by the powerful and continuing influence of old culture.¹⁰

Young writers were deeply inspired by an ideal of individuality and the valorization of experience in Western bourgeois culture's primary mode of expression, and the new genre of fiction would seem to present an unrivalled vehicle for development of a modern personality. Aspiring

⁹ Archival research and reading of period journals, magazines and memoirs form the content of these chapters. Foreign monks and religious thinkers who published are important sources as well.

¹⁰ Period stories and novels that I used were published serially in magazines and as books. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958) and *The Country and the City* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1973) stimulated my interest.

commoner journalist-writers, however, had the best chance to develop their trade in city school and career networks that were dominated both before and after 1932 by the aristocracy. The continued dominance of urban culture by the old elite emerges clearly in their fiction; elite families and their values are the primary themes. Commoners, especially the Suphaphurut group of writers as we will see, claimed to be "new men" creating a modern democratic ethics freed from tradition. But their closeness to royal cultural power produced a thorny contradiction in their self-fashioning. While their "modern" views supposedly superseded old values that were now seen as obsolete, the new assessments shared a strong resemblance to traditional ones and stymied the outsiders' escape from Bangkok's power.¹¹

The later chapters demonstrate a key aspect of interwar intellectual life: the unevenness of the mental transformation among outsiders and, despite the ever greater internationalization of modern society, the heavy burden imposed by the traditional state's central position in public life. The persistence or internalization of received standards of behavior and ways of thinking undermined not only the People's Party democracy but also the awakening of many in the young generation to a new idea of freedom. Without a radical decapitation of the old order, as happened in neighboring countries conquered by European imperialism, royal-aristocratic culture continued to exert

¹¹ Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) gave many points of comparison and helped shape my framework.

a powerful, nearly metaphysical hold over the best educated young people.

In maintaining their power the old royal-aristocratic class since the late 1800s had eagerly incorporated aspects of Western liberalism (especially an idea of progress), being "civilized," bourgeois ethics of self-improvement, a discourse of modern science and technology, and rational Buddhism as parts of palace ideology. Under the old elite these attributes of modernity were always expressed as best practiced by princely, male authorities for the public good. Because of the class dimension to this appropriation of Western intellectual culture, and despite their attempts to break away, young outsiders found that much of the language and philosophic apparatus they used to express their up-to-dateness had been invented by the aristocracy and inherited from them. The young shapers of Thai intellectual modernity, thus, always lived under the long shadow cast by the old authority even as they convinced themselves of their freedom.

Chapter Two: The Country and its Narratives

The uneven development of Bangkok's material and intellectual dominance over upcountry areas during the first half of the twentieth century is among the most striking aspects of modern Thai history. Urban culture and upcountry life remained worlds apart until well after the Second World War; it was only with the unprecedented power of the Cold War state that regional integration began to match the Bangkok planners' hopes for a unified kingdom. Thai culture is always spoken of in the singular. But cultural unity is a state imposition that belies the course of modern Thai history, and especially of our period. E.P. Thompson declared culture a "clumpish term," gathering together ways of life that must be separated to understand their different histories.¹ This chapter explains social life in the first part of the twentieth century and its most important aspects: the remoteness of Bangkok for most people and the heterogeneous resistance to metropolitan power.

Under the old regime, the belief that Siam was a unified kingdom long preceded the introduction of any state policies making it a reality. The absolutist state's selective development was governed by ad hoc plans, and it did not pursue social engineering. The result was a patchwork assortment of backward and isolated communities in a multiethnic kingdom. Historians have interpreted this neglect differently. In 1950 Aran Phromchomphu (Udom

¹ E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (New York: The New Press, 1993), 13.

Srisuwan) labeled Siam a "semi-colony" of the European powers, in which the local elite class maintained some control by capitulating to foreign trade pressure. Landlords exploited a defenseless peasantry for profits from the international rice trade. In Chatthip Nartsupha's post-1976 political economy studies, rural people from the mid-nineteenth century onwards lived at the mercy of middlemen and unrestrained market forces. State indifference was masked by the impressive growth of Thai rice exports, and tin and teak to a lesser degree. Chatthip identified four areas of neglect: agricultural development, local industrialization, improvement of native financial capacity and development of the social and physical infrastructure.²

Other historians acknowledge state neglect but argue that ordinary people played a much more active role in the great socio-economic changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than the early Marxists believed possible. Hong Lysa, David Johnston and the synthetic histories of Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker have redirected attention from the state to the peasantry. Hong showed that villagers both before and after the penetration of Western capital in the nineteenth century willingly took advantage of profit making opportunities that the *sakdina* state then exploited. Johnston's original work and Pasuk and Baker's synopses widen the temporal frame of peasant profit-seeking to the twentieth century. A dynamo of

² Aran Phromchomphu, *Thai Keung Muangkheun* (Thailand, A Semi-colony) (Bangkok: Chomrom Nangsu Udomtham, 1950); Chatthip Nartsupha et al. *The Political Economy of Siam, 1851-1910* and *The Political Economy of Siam, 1910-1932* (Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, 1978).

economic change in Siam, the peasantry propelled a moving agricultural frontier. Villagers readily left their natal hamlets and created new communities if it meant a better life. The very idea of the village, in fact, was a recent state attempt at control. The state, the bourgeoisie or a landlord class constantly played catch-up to peasant initiatives and tried to cash in on them.³

I have benefited greatly from these critical studies. I will describe the outcome of absolutism's laissez faire policies in three areas: agrarian life in a semi-capitalist economy; health; and communications. A largely unregulated peasantry and an entrepreneurial Chinese middle class drove commerce, sometimes in cooperation and sometimes in conflict across class or cultural lines. Most people lived in small communities, often insecure and diseased. The tin and teak regions discussed at the end of the chapter show global trade overruling state sovereignty. All of these factors contributed to the social fragmentation that the People's Party inherited and that stymied their halting attempts at national integration.

In addition, a cultural dimension of the state's neglect of development will be explored. The ruling class often seemed more interested in their image than in the messy details of administration. In the dialogue with the West, Siam's dominant partner, the ruling class portrayed itself as modern and civilized. It hoped the Western powers

³ Hong Lysa, *Thailand in the Nineteenth Century: Evolution of the Economy and Society* (Singapore: ISEAS Press, 1984); David B. Johnston, "Rural Society and the Rice Economy in Thailand, 1880-1930" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1975); Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand, Economy and Politics* 2nd ed. (Selangor, Malaysia: Oxford University Press, 2002).

looked upon it favorably.⁴ An image or representation always accompanied practical policies of state security or the economy, and the inspirations for state policy were thus diverse. A clear division between the cultural exercise of power and the material, or the symbolic and the practical, is difficult to make. This is perhaps a trait common throughout modern Southeast Asian politics, as Tony Day argues, with ruling castes blending different sources of legitimacy -- rational, magical, Western science, Buddhist spirituality - to generate their cosmologies of power.⁵

The state thus did not rely solely on Theravada Buddhist kingship, a political culture adopted in the thirteenth century Siamese kingdoms, as the main symbol of its legitimacy. European bourgeois culture also had a strong influence on Thai politics in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and British utilitarianism and economic liberalism in particular became central parts of Siamese elite conceptions of their world. Culture did not drop out when the Chakri state became more "rational." Instead, the royal and aristocratic elite transformed Western notions of progress and being modern into quasi-religious aspects of their rule.⁶

⁴ See Thongchai Winichakul, "The Quest for Siwilai: A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 3 (August 2000): 528-549, and Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

⁵ The process in Day's account is open ended and constantly evolving. Tony Day, *Fluid Iron: State Formation in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

⁶ All of the techniques of power can be viewed cynically as conscious deceptions. In Philip Abrams' words the state is a "triumph of concealment that hides the real history and relations

The practical outcome and limitations of the ruling elite's self-image will be seen in the sections on health and infrastructure below. Critics of the absolutist regime focused most of their attention on a literal interpretation of the official discourse of progress and development. They charged the royals and aristocrats with failing; new order enthusiasts and critics also raised poverty, disease, isolation and ignorance as urgent problems. Advocates in both times were less interested in the mystification of power and more its practical failures.

The Anarchy of Agrarian Capitalism

The censuses of 1929 and 1937 counted roughly six million people as farmers.⁷ The vast majority of these cultivated rice as the primary crop. Rice farmers accounted for about 90% of total labor in the kingdom in these years.⁸ From the late nineteenth century, the rice frontier expanded continuously: the area of paddy cultivation in the central region doubled in the period between 1905 and the Pacific War; all other areas saw a five-fold increase in

of subjection behind an ahistorical mask of legitimating illusion." In the process however any conversations about power, such as those held by people discussed in later chapters of this thesis, always risks demystifying elite claims, whether purposefully or not. Abrams quoted in Day, *Fluid Iron*, 35.

⁷ Categories of labor varied and were applied differently in different surveys. For 1929, I have added four major occupations: farming, rice farming, various farming and various garden cultivation. These totaled 6,221,421 people. "Rice farming" alone is insufficient, with the number only totaling a bit over 61,000. The largest category is "farming," which is given as over 5,600,000. See *Thesaphiban* 30, no. 6 (1929): 383. In the 1937 census, "agriculture and fishing" is the general category for 6,028,795 people. See *Statistical Year Book Thailand (SYB)*, No. 20 (1937-1938 and 1938-1939): 57.

⁸ James C. Ingram, *Economic Change in Thailand, 1850-1970* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), 57.

the area under cultivation.⁹ In the 1930s, about half of all rice grown was exported.¹⁰ Rice accounted for about 70% of all exports before the war.¹¹

Unlike the neighboring colonial states that the Bangkok elite emulated, the Thai regime did not undertake widespread changes to land use or economies of scale. Hence, modern Siam did not experience the misery, landlessness and boom and bust dimension of the rice economy to the same degree as those states.¹² To the contrary, the Bangkok monarchs' jealous preservation of power led them to actively oppose creation of a powerful landlord class. This was the positive flipside of Bangkok's disinterest in agricultural development: small farmers could leave the land they were using and move elsewhere without much state or landowner interference.

In general, the impressive agricultural growth was anarchic and unplanned. Peasants took advantage of the gradual abandonment of the old forced labor obligations to the lords and took up the cash opportunities presented by the commodity export economy. In the central plains rice frontier to the immediate north of Bangkok, a new freedom allowed settlers to set up nearly at will. Most farmers were de facto owners of their land. Land title remained a fuzzy concept until well after the war. By the 1950s, a cadastral survey covered only five percent of land outside the central region. Remarkably, in the mid-1960s land deeds

⁹ Ibid, 44-45.

¹⁰ Ibid, 53.

¹¹ Ibid, 37.

¹² See for example the vivid portrayal of Burma in Michael Adas, *The Burma Delta: Economic Development and Social Change on an Asian Rice Frontier, 1852-1941* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974).

covered only 35% of all land in the kingdom and most of these were central lands.¹³ Holdings were small everywhere. A government-sponsored survey in the early 1930s found that farms in the northeast and south, for example, ranged from one to 20 *rai*.¹⁴

The government increasingly relied on tax revenue from the export economy but didn't support its development. Landon in the late 1930s observed that no roads linked Bangkok with anywhere. No public money was spent on highway construction until after 1932.¹⁵ Further, the port at Bangkok could not handle the growth of the export economy. Situated for more modest traffic, sand bars blocked all large ships from entering the harbor. Work to dredge the harbor had barely begun by the war, and the Klong Toey port only became capable of handling international commerce in 1954. As a result, Chinese middlemen conveyed small shipments of rice to Hong Kong and Singapore, where large Thai rice shipments were sent around the world.¹⁶

The Chinese took the lead in the export economy. Without roads in the lower Chaophraya river delta, they traveled the country in small boats, buying rice from independent farmers and selling foreign goods. By the early 1900s, the Chinese trader reached anywhere commerce was possible, and dominated trade in market towns. As buyers of paddy, rural agents formed the link between the peasant and

¹³ Baker and Pasuk, *Thailand, Economy and Politics*, 63.

¹⁴ Carle C. Zimmerman, *Siam Rural Economic Survey, 1930-1931* (Bangkok: Bangkok Times Press, 1931), 174.

¹⁵ Constance Wilson, *Thailand: A Handbook of Historical Statistics* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1983), 161, 171. Road building only became a priority under the Sarit Thanarat dictatorship in the late 1950s.

¹⁶ Kenneth Landon, *Siam in Transition: A Brief Survey of Cultural Trends in the Five Years since the Revolution of 1932* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968 (1939)), 79, 149.

the world economy. In the depression, Thai nationalists targeted the Chinese as sucking the life out of the peasantry, who had no knowledge of market prices in Bangkok, let alone of world market forces. In fact, as Carle Zimmerman and James Andrews found in their rural surveys in the 1930s, paddy buying was very competitive and exhausting work, and the web of international markets caught both paddy dealers and peasants at a disadvantage. Neither, they concluded, had an effective form of self-defense.¹⁷

Even as determined, or desperate, farmers and industrious merchants sold on the modern world market, their mode of production remained ancient. Greater integration with the world economy didn't bring technological improvement. With some rare exceptions, farmers didn't irrigate in any systematic way, used manure rarely and harvested and threshed rice by hand.¹⁸ Plowing was poor, rarely breaking the ground to more than three inches deep (and hence exhausting the soil quickly) and, along with indifferent seed selection, limited production per *rai*. Plows seemed to be relics from the ancient tales: a wooden shaft and tip, with iron tips less commonly. Away from the central plains things were still more primitive. Some areas didn't have plows until the twentieth century; an old villager in Trang province explained to Chatthip how farmers chased buffaloes around a field to break up the

¹⁷ G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957), 106-108, 221-223. The latter pages have extensive quotes from both Zimmerman and Andrews on the insecurity of the rice trade.

¹⁸ In the central plains farmers used buffaloes to tread on grain instead of hand threshing with flails. David Feeny, *The Political Economy of Productivity: Thai Agricultural Development, 1880-1975* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982), 39.

earth. Ploughs arrived there in 1903.¹⁹ Carts in the northeast in the 1930s were "of an ancient style with a roof, and an ungreased wooden axle. Wherever there are carts, their singing noise is heard long distances away."²⁰

Critics called in vain throughout the early twentieth century for investment in agriculture. King Prajadhipok in 1930 labeled the lack of agricultural modernization as "criminal neglect of an obvious duty." In response to recent Ministry of Agriculture proposals for scientific methods, he wrote on a report that it "should have been done 20 years ago."²¹ Mom Chao Kridikara Sittiporn was the best-known and most vocal advocate for agricultural development. In 1927, some senior teachers at the Bang Saphan agricultural training school approached him at his nearby Bang Bert farm about their idea for an agricultural science newspaper and he became the paper's editor. His criticisms of government policy brought rural poverty to widespread attention for the first time. Prince Kridikara's proposals for rural credit and modern farming techniques became part of the public discourse even as the state generally ignored his proposals, and his career success was uneven.²²

In ownership, two Siamese agricultural worlds characterized the mode of production. Largely self-sufficient in rice production, smallholders produced both

¹⁹ Chatthip Nartsupha, *The Thai Village Economy in the Past*, trans. Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongphaichit (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999), 17.

²⁰ Zimmerman, *Rural Economic Survey*, 153.

²¹ Quoted in Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy*, 105.

²² Anuson Mo.cho. *Sitthiphon Kridakon, Botkhwam khong le kiaokap Mo.cho. Sitthiphon Kridakon* (Memorial Volume for Prince Sitthiporn Kridakara, Articles by and about Prince Sitthiphon) (Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, 1971).

for themselves and the world. A poor tenant class worked the fields of large landowners to survive.

Capital accumulation drove the aggregation of larger farms in the Chaophraya valley than anywhere else in the kingdom. Zimmerman found that farms in the central plains ranged in size from 30 to 200 rai, much larger than his upcountry findings.²³ On average, 36 out of 100 central families surveyed owned no land, compared with 27 in the north, 14 in the south and 18 in the northeast. Landlessness in greater Bangkok villages surveyed was 78%; 94% in the irrigation district of Rangsit.²⁴ Rangsit had the highest tenancy rates, with 84% of people renting land and having often poor relations with their landlords.²⁵ Absentee landlords invested nothing but raised rents on the tenants if the latter developed the land for better returns.²⁶ Unsurprisingly, tenants rarely made the effort. Ramshackle huts sprawled along the canal banks, housing the migrant

²³ Zimmerman, *Rural Economic Survey*, 174.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 18, 25. Chiang Mai, a quasi-agricultural export province, also had villages with high landlessness rates and some huge farms. Zimmerman found the highest landlessness figure in the north in Mae Hia village, at 64% of families. The largest farm in the entire survey was in the northern village of San Kambaeng, where one holding was an astounding 1,027 rai. This can be compared with the largest holding in the northeast, an area dominated by sufficiency agriculture, of 38 rai. *Ibid*, 26, 28.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 18. The Rangsit story - and central plains irrigation plans in the early twentieth century -- can be found in Johnston, "Rural Society and the Rice Economy" and Ian Brown, *The Elite and the Economy in Siam, 1890-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), Chapter One. The grand plans and disappointing career of J. Homan van der Heide, a Dutchman from Java hired to develop an irrigation network in the early 1900s, are detailed in Hans ten Brummelhuis, *King of the Waters: Homan van der Heide and the origin of modern irrigation in Siam* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2005).

²⁶ Chatthip et al., *The Political Economy of Siam, 1910-1932*, 4-5.

population that moved to the area. Many of these immigrants came from the northeastern Lao-speaking population.

The Rangsit development -- northeast of Bangkok below the confluence of the Pasak and Chaophraya rivers -- is the only case where a quasi-government initiative resulted in landlordism. Fearful of independent wealth's political consequences, the government sought to limit the aggregation of large farms in the delta to the royally connected. The government awarded a private, royal family-owned company a concession in 1889 to develop the Rangsit area for agricultural expansion. It is estimated that the scheme opened up to two million rai of land for cultivation by the turn of the century.²⁷ The company then sold land to farmers. In the initial years of the newly expanded east bank frontier, farmers and speculators rushed in to buy land and the offerings were greatly oversubscribed. Despite the expansion of the rice-growing area, landlords and petty owners made no technological investments and yields remained low. Canals were not dug to more evenly distribute water, but mainly to drain swampy lands. Areas were thus roughly cleared and then peasants and moneyed speculators moved in.

Banditry and lawlessness accompanied the growth of central plains agriculture. Large bands of forty to fifty armed brigands herding stolen cattle were a common sight in the center around the turn of the century.²⁸ From the

²⁷ More modest estimates put the figure at between 1.25 and 1.5 million rai. Johnston, "Rural Society and the Rice Economy," 60-61.

²⁸ *Bangkok Times* article of February 22, 1893 quoted in *ibid*, 169. The initial phase of state expansion into the provinces in the late nineteenth century revealed that local crime lords governed

beginnings of the Rangsit development, crime and unrest accompanied the anarchic settlement patterns of immigrants. A turn of the century government report noted:

"The traveller on Klong Rang Sit [Rangsit canal] cannot fail to be struck by the entire want of system in the location of the houses. It appears that on arrival, a man plants his house on the bank of the canal on the spot which pleases him best, with absolutely no reference to Pu Yai Ban or Kamnan [village headmen and commune chiefs]. Here he gathers round him his cattle and belongings and resides in splendid isolation with the result that, when some night his house is surrounded by a gang of robbers, he finds himself half a mile away from the nearest neighbour who could give him help."²⁹

Government concern that a lack of control over settlements led to unrest persisted in later decades. A report on the area in the late 1920s explained that individual families were wary of settling there because of thieves and general insecurity.³⁰

Zimmerman's high landlessness rates showed the situation in the hangover of the Rangsit boom years. Between 1890 and 1905 about 100,000 people moved into the

rural areas. There was no order at all without these bosses' protection, and the Bangkok state had to use them to consolidate its rule. Prince Damrong Rajanuphap, *Thesaphiban* (Control over Territory) (Bangkok: Matichon, 2002 (1925)), 53.

²⁹ Bangkok Revenue Department Report for 1900 by W.A. Graham, quoted in David B. Johnston, "Rice Cultivation in Thailand: The Development of an Export Economy by Indigenous Capital and Labor," *Modern Asian Studies* 15, no. 1 (1981): 112.

³⁰ Johnston, "Rural Society and the Rice Economy," 118.

area; by 1912 more than one-third had left.³¹ In the early 1930s, however, the Rangsit area still had abundant available land. The government in 1931 noted that about 20% of the land in Thanyaburi in the Rangsit scheme remained uncultivated. Elephant herds roaming the open spaces troubled farmers.³² The probable explanation is that rice prices declined steeply beginning in 1930 and many farmers had no means to continue. Later expansion was slower in the center than in upcountry regions. Still, the export economy continued to grow on the back of peasant initiative, Chinese commerce and elite speculation to a lesser degree. The central region was the most important area.

Commodification of the economy brought foreign consumerism. A later chapter will describe the acquisitive society in urban literature. It was not only the city, however, that became a market for new things. All areas of the country that had a nearby sizeable market town turned increasingly to rely on foreign manufactures in everyday life.

Zimmerman found in his survey villages that self-sufficiency was a thing of the past. Generally strong rice exports and income growth in the twentieth century (except for 1919-1920 and the depression) turned farmers and landowners away from the other crops - tobacco, sugar and cotton -- that they had previously cultivated for home use. In common with many other colonial economies, households in the center sold one major commodity to middlemen and bought foreign goods for all other aspects of life. Imported

³¹ Johnston, "Rice Cultivation in Thailand," 111; Baker and Pasuk, *Thailand, Economy and Politics*, 28.

³² Johnston, "Rural Society and the Rice Economy," 389.

cotton, cigarettes and sugar from the UK, India, Japan and Holland had replaced local products by the interwar period.³³ This process had begun much earlier. King Mongkut in the 1860s noted that central plains people preferred imported cotton clothing to homespun because the former was much cheaper.³⁴ In 1906, van der Heide stated that not only cotton and silk manufactures, but metalwork, paper, earthenware and other home industries had similarly been extinguished in the central plains.³⁵

A long-time foreign diplomat in Bangkok commented during the 1940s on the deepening commercialism in the central plains. With an unabashed nostalgia for the old Siam, Josiah Crosby wrote:

"(There) is a kind of mass culture which is common, as regards its outward attributes, at any rate, to the generality of mankind...Nowadays the stamp of uniformity is being impressed upon the population everywhere...Romance, in fact, has flown out at the window as modern progress has come in at the door."³⁶

We will see, however, that despite Crosby's laments, progress remained very limited and the charms of old Siam, that is, from the native perspective its poverty and isolation, were in full bloom.

³³ Zimmerman, *Rural Economic Survey*, 165, 174-175.

³⁴ Chatthip et al., *The Political Economy of Siam, 1851-1910*, 4.

³⁵ J. Homan van der Heide, "The Economical Development of Siam during the Last Half Century," *Journal of the Siam Society* 3 (1906): 85-87, 96-99.

³⁶ *Siam: The Crossroads* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1945), 43-44.

Summing up, agricultural expansion without development forced farmers to be savvy and self-reliant. The old elite had little business aptitude and viewed large-scale public or private development ideas with suspicion. While doing little for farmers, the state did *mainly* prevent the growth of a large landed class that would exploit the peasantry. This is a key aspect of the Thai absolutist state: it neglected popular welfare but also stymied the capitalist accumulation that much more dramatically enriched and enslaved neighboring Southeast Asians under colonialism.

At the time, however, critics attacked the government for its lack of planning, especially as the depression hit farm prices. The new government did abolish or reduce taxes on the peasantry, but it became a target of the same accusations that had dogged the absolutist regime. Economic nationalists were especially vocal for better policies. After 1932 the same practices prevailed; farmers continued to use a complex array of options to raise money, including Chinese moneylenders and relatives and village associates. The constitutional government didn't significantly change economic relations.

I will now turn to health, an important aspect of the pattern of neglect. While people's livelihoods were insecure, sickness took a heavy physical and mental toll.

Town and Country Life: Health and Sickness

The material conditions of life around the country in the 1930s had hardly changed since the last century. Bangkok was a different story, but instead of growing order, the city became increasingly chaotic. The majority of the populace lived in crowded, dirty spaces with no

corresponding infrastructural improvement. In the early 1900s, a sympathetic Belgian observer lamented the similarities he saw in daily life in Bangkok with those in the Belgian Congo:

"The bottoms of these miserable living quarters are saturated with detritus; everything that drops from the house, rots there. The canal is the universal cesspool, but this does not prevent the housewife from dropping a bucket to obtain the water in which she will boil the family's rice."³⁷

Forty years later, under the Phibun Songkram government, an energetic national drive for cleanliness and order began, but faced the same habits bred by unregulated growth. The government frequently exhorted people not to spit (or worse) wherever they pleased. In one example from a government magazine, a picture showed a man defecating in a public canal while a market gardener paddled by in a skiff and people worked overhead.³⁸

Market towns upcountry mirrored Bangkok's ad hoc growth. In the late 1930s, Landon described hotel cleanliness:

"The hotels that abound in every market centre are a definite menace to public health. They are run by Chinese and are usually unscrubbed, smelly from sewage, urine, and pigs, and over-run with prostitutes...There is a table, a chair, a spittoon, a wash basin, and - crowning glory of

³⁷ Charles Buls, *Siamese Sketches*, trans. Walter E.J. Tips (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1994 (1901)), 27.

³⁸ *Sang ton eng* (Self Fashioning) 1, no. 14 (May 1941).

all - a guest toothbrush firmly chained to the window frame...(The mosquito nets') chief office is to hinder the paying guest from getting in and out of bed too easily, and to conserve all tuberculosis germs from the guests of former years...(The wooden bathing shed) is all too often the urinal as well as the bathroom. The toilet is a bucket affair or a shed at the rear, in which case the pigs are frequently the sewage disposal plant. For this service, and the privilege of driving the resident prostitute out of one's room, one pays a baht per day."³⁹

Bangkok remained unhealthy despite the introduction of modern sanitation in the 'teens. Cholera claimed 13,000 lives in the city between 1919 and 1921; in 1925 and 1926 8,000 died.⁴⁰ Regular cholera outbreaks continued in the 1930s, and were especially severe from 1935 to 1937 when more than 9,000 people died out of about 15,550 reported cases.⁴¹ Endemic malaria caused the most deaths at the time. A survey around 1932 estimated annual malarial deaths at 40-50,000. The report found that nearly everyone in villages in the north, northeast and parts of the peninsula had it.⁴² Diarrhea, enteritis, "diseases of early infancy," tuberculosis, dysentery, puerperal state, pneumonia and influenza followed malaria as the leading causes of death.⁴³

³⁹ Landon, *Siam in Transition*, 131-132.

⁴⁰ Stefan Hell, *Siam and the League of Nations: Modernisation, Sovereignty and Multilateral Diplomacy, 1920-1940* (Bangkok: River Books, 2010), 144.

⁴¹ SYB, No. 21, 1939-40 to 1944, 100. In April 1936, Charlie Chaplin, darling of Bangkok's movie going public, cancelled his planned visit to the city from Vietnam because of the disease. "The Cholera Epidemic," *Bangkok Times*, April 21, 1936.

⁴² Virginia Thompson, *Thailand: The New Siam* (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1967 (1941)), 702-703.

⁴³ SYB, No. 21, 1939-40 to 1944, 98.

Plague recurred in the decade, and hookworm was common because most people didn't wear shoes. Leprosy's disfigurement made it a high profile disease. Of 20,000 leprosy cases in the country, by Landon's estimate medical treatment reached about 1,000 people. Those having the disease lived free of effective quarantine. One man in a market town, for example, stayed with his family and carried on his bicycle shop business as usual, which brought him into contact with many people each day. In another town, a group of about 30 leprosy food vendors asked the government that treatment be sent to them at their stalls, since they couldn't afford to give up their businesses.⁴⁴

Hardly anyone had access to modern medicine. At a parliamentary debate in 1934, Khun Vorasith Darunvedya, the Member of Parliament for Nong Khai, explained that one doctor served the province of 800,000 people. This doctor only seemed to attend to government officials. It was estimated that only 500 doctors worked in the entire kingdom of 12 million people, and most lived in the capital and attended to the elite. Prime Minister Phahon responded to the parliament by saying that one didn't have to travel hundreds of miles to see the problems. He pointed to the Bangkok neighborhood of Bangsue, which at the time was a remote quasi-country area, where he said people lived with little contact and lacked most modern amenities.⁴⁵

Globally, health and fitness became national concerns in the interwar years. Eugenics theory contributed to the

⁴⁴ Landon, *Siam in Transition*, 129.

⁴⁵ "The Assembly: Grievances of the Provinces," *Bangkok Times*, January 16, 1934.

aggressive interwar ideologies.⁴⁶ In Siam, Phibun Songkram's World War Two nationalism tapped into the popularity of health, fitness, nutrition and hygiene. Part of the appeal undoubtedly was the desire to appear modern and strong. Instructing behavior also was a strategy of governance. It is fascinating, then, to see the gap between policy and reality.

According to Zimmerman's survey, the chief diseases in the 1930s were two killers we saw above, malaria and dysentery, and yaws, a disease affecting small children.⁴⁷ Intestinal parasites lived in all the kingdom's water supplies and caused poor health over a number of years.

Children, with weaker immune systems and lower body mass, often died at the first encounter. All of the killer diseases listed above preyed on children. Among those with the least immunity, disease spread quickly.⁴⁸ Even without illness, many children died before the age of one. Infant mortality in the late 1930s was about 100 per 1,000 births.⁴⁹ Children aged one to four fared nearly as badly. In 1937-38 for example, nearly 50,000 children aged one to four died, compared with about 53,150 aged under one. Significantly fewer children in the next age bracket, five to fourteen, died. In 1937-1938 the number was roughly 21,500.⁵⁰ For those who survived infancy and childhood, endemic disease, not epidemics, became the common foe. Years of exposure to disease weakened immunity, so people

⁴⁶ Mark Mazower, *The Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000).

⁴⁷ Zimmerman, *Rural Economic Survey*, 247.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 233.

⁴⁹ *SYB*, No. 21, 1939-1940 to 1944, 96.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*. The numbers for the subsequent war years are roughly the same.

who had not recovered from a prior bout of illness succumbed to the next malady.⁵¹ The Siamese people inherited sickness as their common legacy: "The adult individual is generally one whose body shows the scars of many diseases. He has run the gauntlet and it has left its mark upon him."⁵²

As the Nong Khai representative quoted above explained, doctors remained a luxury of the well off in the city. Poor people in any case had no understanding of modern medicine and mainly feared it. Based on his limited survey, Zimmerman concluded that 50% of the people used no medicine at all beyond herbal remedies, 49% resorted to indigenous quackery, and one percent benefited from government clinics and missionary hospitals. The native medicines - Chinese, Indian and Thai - often consisted of:

"(C)oncoctions of pulverized tiger paws, snake skins, skeletons of strange looking sea animals...(the shops of sellers of native medicines) are filled with such things and they make their pills by combining a little bit of everything."⁵³

Psychologically, these remedies may have helped; physically, their efficacy was certainly nil.

The Thai elite's siwilai image didn't match reality. A recent book on Siam's enthusiastic participation in the League of Nations has described how Thai public health officials were able during a League visit to Siam for a

⁵¹ Zimmerman, *Rural Economic Survey*, 234.

⁵² Ibid, 234.

⁵³ Ibid, 233.

health conference in the early 1930s "to impress (their visitors) with their hospitality and their professionalism." Presumably this entailed a sincere commitment to the task. A later report by a League official on rural health in Siam noted, however, that healthcare was "practically non-existent."⁵⁴ Hoping to be modern didn't require much modernization.

Self-regard obscured the neglect of rural life that critics targeted. At a Bangkok Rotary Club talk in 1931, a foreign advisor to the government portrayed the peasantry as happy living their simple lives. Chinese exploitation posed the main obstacle to rural welfare.⁵⁵ Self-sufficiency reinforced elite opinions about rustic simplicity from the fifth reign at least.⁵⁶ Prince Sithiporn, introduced above, responded to this speaker that the reality was quite the opposite. His criticisms identified specific policy failures.⁵⁷

Similarly it can be argued that the government favored the city, building Siriraj in 1888, the country's first government hospital, and impressing foreign visitors with

⁵⁴ Hell, *Siam and the League of Nations*, 139, 141.

⁵⁵ Description of Morden Carthew's views is related in Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy*, 108. Blaming the Chinese for poverty or instability was a common tactic. The fact that many Chinese rice buyers were also creditors - as mentioned above -- made them an easy target in difficult economic times. Critics also saw them as politically suspect. Baron de Lapomarede for example, a French Indochinese official, wrote that pre-1932 Siam was a tropical arcadia, and that Chinese and half-Chinese troublemakers fomented the coup. *Bangkok Times*, April 24, 1934.

⁵⁶ As Minister of the Interior, Prince Damrong Rajanuphap visited a village in Udon in 1906 that he declared to be a perfect example of rural cooperation that some in the West sought via state socialism. Nothing, it appeared, need be done to achieve this state. *Nithan Borankhadi* (Ancient Tales) (Bangkok: Dokya, 2002 (1944)), 257-258.

⁵⁷ Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy*, 108.

their professionalism.⁵⁸ Modern medicine remained the luxury of the ruling class. As Davisakd has explained, the urban elite took up germ theory, modern sanitation and control of epidemic disease beginning in the early 1900s. But, as in the case of the royalist historiography that stresses kingly benevolence as the origins of modern medicine, a view of the expansion of these initiatives as primarily discursive instruments of state hegemony should be balanced by attention to their class focus. The practical value of these inventions remained mainly limited to the well off and did not reach rural society. In agriculture and health, the elite did not see the need to improve peasant life. The extension of state power in the first half of the twentieth century occurred primarily through limited infrastructure growth.

Country Life: Isolation and Tyrannies Far and Near

Like its neighboring colonial states, the Siamese government developed modern transportation to further its military power over the countryside. Prioritizing state security made infrastructure development selective. Generations of critics have seen this as inevitable; state policy sought the preservation of elite power, not

⁵⁸ For the details on Siriraj's establishment and the initial phase of modern state-sponsored medicine in the provincial capitals, see Prince Damrong Rajanuphap, "Ruang tang Rong Phrayaban" ("Story of the Hospital's Establishment") and "Ruang Anamai" ("The Story of Hygiene") in *Nithan Borankhadi*, 163-198. In contrast to my explanation, Damrong attributed the slow beginnings of state medicine to public indifference or wariness and limited state funds. American missionaries provided modern healthcare from the middle of the nineteenth century in some upcountry areas, and gained the respect of local people. See George B. McFarland, *Reminiscences of Twelve Decades of Service to Siam, 1860-1936* (Bangkok: Bangkok Times Press, 1936).

development. Sympathetic observers contend that the government did the best it could with limited capital.

The latter explanation has some merit. However, it can be seen that the logic of class superiority shaped the state's attitude to development - as it did in British Burma, Malaya or French Indochina.

The growth of railways gives a good example of the mixed motivations and outcomes of modern development. Prior to railway development in Siam, rivers and old trading roads formed the arteries of regional commerce and culture. The regions drew their spiritual and material sustenance along networks that spanned mainland Southeast Asia and beyond. Connections radiated in all directions: north to China, south to Java, west across the mountains into Burma and east across the Khorat plateau into the Khmer and Lao countries.

In the first attempt at national integration from the 1890s, these networks became subject to Bangkok's political power and capital. The tyranny of distance - in which isolated communities lived cut off from the modern world of Bangkok culture and commerce -- gradually gave way, but only along certain arteries that the state favored.

In the late nineteenth century, the centralizing state faced British and French plans to expand rail lines around and even through Siam, and thought they constituted part of a strategy to formally take over Siam.⁵⁹ Around the same

⁵⁹ The British asked permission to build a line from Moulmein through the border at Mae Sot and up through Lampang on into southern China (their request was denied). The French had a plan to link Hue in Vietnam with the Thai town of Nong Khai on the Mekong via the Lao town of Savannakhet. Ichiro Kakizaki, *Laying*

time, the Thai state found it could not easily assert its authority over Lao tributary states and chiefdoms. In 1884 and again in 1885 King Chulalongkorn sent soldiers to beat back the Ho, marauding bands from Yunnan, from Lao lands. When attempts to suppress the bandits floundered because it took so long for supplies to arrive at the hot zones, the government made plans for railway development.⁶⁰ Rails would long remain the only means of troop movements and the assertion of state power.⁶¹

What Penny Edwards smartly terms the "tyranny of proximity" applies well to the spatial reorientation of provincial Siam once the rails came in the last century. In the case of colonial Cambodia, Edwards describes how French road building brought a spatial reorientation of culture and community. The French believed they were liberating the Khmer from their age-old stasis and benighted entrapment in isolated hamlets. In fact complex networks of communications and mobility that pre-dated French colonialism were being superseded by a much more

the Tracks: The Thai Economy and its Railways, 1885-1935 (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2005), 80-84.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 84-89. It is crucial to remember that the state was forming at this time. The Ho episode was key in the assertion of Thai suzerainty over areas that traditionally had multiple masters and in the modern period were claimed by the French. See Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 101-107.

⁶¹ The fate of Khorat shows both the opportunity and destructive power of the new age in motion. With its rail line, the town became politically important; the state could reach the lower northeast much more quickly and state influence grew. Rails also enabled a new level of violence. Khorat served as the staging area for the anti-government revolt of 1933 that sought to bring back the absolute king. In a final act of suicidal futility, the rebel troops from the Khorat garrison ran a train into government forces in the northern suburbs of Bangkok, killing many soldiers at no profit to either side.

geographically limited orientation to the nodes of French state power.⁶²

This same dynamic can be seen in early twentieth-century Siam. Close to the rail lines the state's presence was felt (i.e., through the military), commerce grew, and news from the capital traveled quickly.

The government completed the first segment of rails, from Bangkok to the old capital of Ayutthaya, in 1897. From there, the line was extended over the mountains to the Isan garrison town of Khorat in 1900. Then the government switched its attention to extending a northern line, to Lopburi, which was completed in 1901. In 1905 this line reached the commercial center at Paknampho, Nakhon Sawan, where the Nan and Ping rivers, two important arteries of upcountry commerce, join. Meanwhile in 1903 the state extended a southern line to Petchburi. By 1916 this line traveled to the mid-southern town of Chumphon, and in 1921 went all the way to Sungai Kolok in Kelantan state. Meanwhile, the northern line reached Pitsanulok in 1908 and then Lampang in 1916. Thereafter, Lampang became an important rice export area, which contrasted most starkly with its dubious pre-rails reputation as a place of chronic shortage and high prices.⁶³ The line arrived at Chiang Mai in 1922. The government began work on the route from Khorat through the southern half of the northeastern plateau to

⁶² "The Tyranny of Proximity: Power and Mobility in Colonial Cambodia, 1863-1954," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37, no. 3 (October 2006): 421-443. In addition to their supposed spatial immobility, Edwards explains that the French viewed the Cambodians as living in a time warp. To the French, nothing had changed in the Cambodian mentality since twelfth-century Angkor. "The Cambodians ... were seen as time travellers, albeit ones stuck in a degenerate, medieval groove," 424.

⁶³ Kakizaki, *Laying the Tracks*, 183-184.

Ubon in the same year, and it reached the latter town in 1930. Prior to 1930, travel to Ubon involved an uncomfortable two-week journey by animal drawn cart. When the rail extension was completed, Ubon could be reached in a day from Khorat.⁶⁴ In 1929, a project started to build a line from Khorat to Nong Khai in the upper northeast at the Mekong river. It was finished in 1941.⁶⁵

The rails miraculously transformed space and time. Journeys that used to be measured in kilometers per day could now be measured in kilometers per hour. Travel time changed distance. Far away places became closer, time-wise, while close-by areas receded.⁶⁶

Until 1900, Khorat was only reachable by an arduous two-week trek from the capital; the summit of the journey via the Dongphrayayen Pass took three days of hard walking in the rainy season. After the line linked to Khorat, the three days over the pass took one hour; the two weeks from Bangkok now became one day.⁶⁷ Compare this to Nakhon Sawan, an important town in the upper Chaophraya region. Like Khorat, it is 250 kilometers from Bangkok. It remained largely outside the modern economic or political field in the dry season because the river could not support large ships. When Khorat made it onto the map of the modern state rail line, Nakhon Sawan became further away than Khorat. Commerce and state control advanced in Khorat, an area

⁶⁴ Liang Chayakan, "Pathakata Ruang Suphap Changwat Ubon Rajathani" (Lecture on the State of Ubon Rajathani Province), in *Pathakata khong Phu Then Ratsadon Rueang Saphap khong Changwat Tang Tang* (Parliamentary Representatives' Lectures on the State of Various Provinces, 1933-34) (Bangkok: Thai Club of Japan, 1996), 26. Liang gave his lecture on November 12, 1934.

⁶⁵ Kakizaki, *Laying the Tracks*, 106-107.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 36-46, 153-160.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 157.

populated by Lao, while Nakhon Sawan, a Thai area, remained largely on its own. Ten or so years later, the upper Chaophraya basin caught up to Khorat; the region exported rice in much larger volume and Bangkok expanded its political control there.

A similar pattern of varying integration spread along other arteries of the state. Travel time to Uttaradit in the lower north went from 39 days to two in the second decade of the century; from 37 days, the journey to Lampang, further north, now took seven, and then to one day in 1916 when the rails reached it. One traveled for 42 days to reach Chiang Mai before the rails; thereafter it took 12 days, and then 26 hours when the line that traveled through Uttaradit and Lampang reached the town in 1922. Rails reduced travel time to Luang Phrabang, which the Ho sacked in 1887 and the Thais had such trouble reaching, from 65 days in 1900 to 5.5 by 1932.⁶⁸

The expansion of rails gave a selective boost to commerce and furthered peasant-driven agricultural expansion. But the process was very uneven, and security concerns, not marketization of the economy, mainly drove development. The commerce in goods, people and news through which rails might turn an unimportant town into a commercial or political hub differentiated from the surrounding fields and forests by this new found place-ness also worked the other way.

Tak province, for example, for centuries was an important and thriving interconnection of market towns that grew with the overland commercial routes from Burma into

⁶⁸ Ibid, 156-157.

the Chiang Mai plain and the Chaophraya valley towns to the south. Both British and Thai colonialism encouraged north-south connections to port cities (Rangoon and Bangkok, respectively). The new orientations severed the older lateral commerce from Moulmein on the coast across the Thai lands into southern China and Indochina. Much of Tak receded into the past, even as the provincial capital became more integrated with Bangkok. Nearby towns and provinces remained in the 1930s on the travel schedule they had for millennia: upriver to Chiang Mai in the wet season took two and a half weeks, downriver one week; the 74 kilometers to Mae Sot, a regional market town, and the entrance to Burma, still took three days to reach on foot.⁶⁹

Another example is Pitsanulok, "Vishnu's World." A once proud garrison town from Ayuthayan times and an important site of memory for its role in the liberation of the Thai kingdoms from Burmese rule, government indifference reduced it to the status of "an unwanted child of a minor wife." Although the train line went through the provincial capital to Chiang Mai, no intra or inter-provincial roads connected Pitsanulok to the wider world and hence there were no marketing opportunities for local people.⁷⁰

Sometimes it seemed that rails served mainly to highlight social disparities. A map of the rails shows two vertical arteries, one to Chiang Mai and another to Nong

⁶⁹ Phra Pranatkorani, "Pathakatha Rueang Saphap Changwat Tak" (Lecture on the State of Tak Province), in *Pathakata khong Phu Then Ratsadon*, 51.

⁷⁰ Khun Prajet Darunaphan, "Pathakatha Reuang Suphap khong Changwat Pitsanulok" (Lecture on the State of Pitsanulok Province), in *Ibid*, 100-102.

Khai further to the east (completed twenty years later). Additionally, a line runs to the east from Khorat, and reached Ubon in 1930. This line, although furthest to the east, thus traveled mid-way temporally between the other two terminal points. In addition to differing time zones, life in the narrow strips along these lines differed sharply from vast areas around them that had no modern commerce. Above we saw the examples of Tak to the west of the northern line and Pitsanulok to its east. The northeast formed a much greater area of neglect.

More than one-quarter of the kingdom's population lived on the plateau in the 1930s, but they saw little benefit from rail development. Mahasarakam, a riverside province settled by Lao people, became reachable from the end of the rail line in Khon Kaen by a four to six hour car journey on bad, dry season only roads. This was progress of a sort, but not for many since the population in the late 1930s was nearly 571,000 people but the province had only 13 motor vehicles.⁷¹ The government completed the Khon Kaen section of the rails in the early 1920s, which made travel much easier. Previously, all Mahasarakham travelers to Khorat faced 10 dry season days travel with a maximum of 20 kilometers per day. Water sources - always a problem in most of the plateau -- were often far off the travel route and dirty with livestock waste. In the wet season, the journey took three weeks. Much of the time was spent slogging through mud and wading flooded channels. With the rails, though, Mahasarakham became connected to Bangkok via Khon Kaen. Its neighbor, Sakon Nakhon, fared poorly pre-

⁷¹ SYB, No. 20, 1937-1938 and 1938-1939, 242.

and post-rails. The province is much closer geographically to Mahasarakham than the latter is to Khon Kaen, but remained isolated because it lacked roads. Much of the year its people lived enclosed in their world of mountains and forests.⁷²

Outside of areas closest to railways, life went on in its seasonal and biological repetitiveness. The MP for the lower northeastern province of Buriram, about 400 kilometers from Bangkok, related that most people knew nothing about the province, and that it never figured in any *pongsawadan* (historical tales). The mountainous terrain captured little water and irrigation was difficult. A traveler would find hardly any permanent buildings. Villagers used elephant grass for roofs; corrugated iron was rare, as were tiled floors. Dwellings were dark, damp and dirty, animals lived under houses, and excrement and urine were everywhere. Public health officials, he said, had suggested that the people keep their animals away from their houses, but the villagers refused because of thieves. The few roads were impassable in the rainy season. While a telegraph linked the provincial capital to Bangkok, it was difficult to send or receive news to outlying areas. There were few phones.⁷³

Chaiyaphum lay to the north and west of Buriram. The provincial representative described the province of 200,000 people as the back of beyond. "Chaiyaphum is filled with

⁷² Phraya Sarakham Khanaphibal and Thongmuan Attakon, "Pathakatha Rueang Saphap Changwat Mahasarakham" (Lecture on the State of Mahasarakham Province), in *Pathakata khong Phu Then Ratsadon*, 117.

⁷³ Nai Phan Tri Luang Sakdi Ronakan, "Pathakatha Rueang Saphap Changwat Buriram" (Lecture on the State of Buriram Province), in *Pathakata khong Phu Then Ratsadon*, 74-77.

big mountains, waters and jungle. It is more different to Bangkok than the palaces of the gods are to the huts of the destitute."⁷⁴ Transportation was terrible. A train leaving Bangkok at 9am arrived at Khorat by 6pm. Chaiyaphum was still 120 kilometers away. After one night in Khorat, the following morning's train took travelers north and arrived at the halfway point in Khon Kaen around noon, at the end of the line in Bua Yai. From Bua Yai, cars traveled in the dry season only. (In the rainy season, travel was only possible by cart, horse or on foot.) Passengers, the representative humorously noted, hung on for dear life as vehicles bounced along unpaved routes. He explained that they could expect to "take a bad drubbing" (*sabak sabom*) if the car broke down. They would likely spend two or three nights sleeping rough in the forest waiting for repairs or for someone to pass by. In any case, like Mahasarakham, very few people experienced car travel; in 1937 the province had a total of nine vehicles.⁷⁵

Chainat in the 1930s remained another unknown province, even though it is only about 200 kilometers from Bangkok. Its MP in a radio address in November 1934 said that people he spoke with often didn't know the province's location, with some putting it as far away as the Lao border. Regarding roads, he stated: "(I)f one is speaking in today's terms, then I'd have to say there aren't any." Chainat was "the land of Phra Aphai Mani, from a town one enters the forest, from the forest one arrives at another town. There is nothing to see or visit (i.e., nothing of

⁷⁴ Luang Natha Nithithada, "Pathakatha Rueang Saphap Changwat Chaiyaphum" (Lecture on the State of Chaiyaphum Province), in *ibid*, 98.

⁷⁵ SYB, No. 20, 1937-38 and 1938-39, 240.

historical significance) here." The imagery of Phra Aphai Mani - the nineteenth century poet Sunthorn Phu's hero who traveled the spiritual landscape of Southeast Asian and Lankan Buddhism - still captured the feeling of 1930s Siam. In flood season, the MP related that villagers had to stock up on food ahead of time, or else "face a difficult time digging around in the mud for food" like animals.⁷⁶

Uttaradit lies at the gateway to the north. As we saw above travel times in the area dropped drastically with the rail line. Like other rail nodes, however, most of the province remained cut off because roads had not been built. The province came to public attention under unfortunate circumstances when a plane carrying a mini-constitution to Nan province further north crashed there in 1933, the first air crash site in Siamese history.⁷⁷

The further away from the central plains, the wilder the country. The MP for Loei described his province as "the Siberia of Siam." Prince Boriphat from the Bangkok royal family visited the three north central towns of Loei, Petchabun and Lomsak on a trip in the mid-1920s. In Loei, local people stood around in amazement - at both the urban prince and his mode of transport -- when he alighted from

⁷⁶ Ro. Tho. Son Wongtho, "Pathakatha Reuang Saphap Changwat Chainat" (Lecture on the State of Chainat Province), in *Pathakata khong Phu Then Ratsadon*, 27-29.

⁷⁷ Fak na Songkhla, "Pathakatha Reuang Saphap Changwat Uttaradit" (Lecture on the State of Uttaradit Province), in *ibid*, 122. Air travel in the 1920s preceded roads in remote areas. Nan province, for example, was visited first by air, before any cars had appeared in the province, at a time when the government was promoting an anti-wild tiger campaign. Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy*, 99-100.

his plane. He termed the area a no man's land, with Loei the most Siberian of the three towns.⁷⁸

Loei today is about 500 kilometers road distance from Bangkok. The emotional and physical isolation of a government posting to the provinces formed a prominent theme in literature of the time. Often in stories a protagonist lost his love, his health deteriorated and his mood soured to a gloomy depression while he lived upcountry on government work. Fiction followed real life. Civil servants, the Loei representative stated, considered a posting there as exile. There were no roads, and the provincial MP received no answer from the government about when one might be built to Khon Kaen - the nearest major town about 150 kilometers away. The province had five cars at the time. A procession of the mini-Constitution took 23 days to reach there from Bangkok. Carts could travel for commerce with Khon Kaen only in the dry season. One doctor served Loei's 108,000+ population.⁷⁹ People didn't trust modern medicine anyway and resorted to forest plants or magic to ward off illness. This applied to their animals as well. Most livestock died the last time that vaccination was attempted, their MP explained, and hence veterinary science gained no adherents.⁸⁰

Many other places can be included in the list of lands forgotten by time and the state. Roi Et in the northeast, "the 101," is so named for its history as the populous area

⁷⁸ Ibid, 99.

⁷⁹ National Archives (NA), ST.47/129 Pho.So. 2480, "Banchi Sadeng Jamnuan Phonlamuang Tambon, etc." "Account of Township Populations," April 1937, Ministry of Education files.

⁸⁰ Bunma Setsiri, "Pathakatha Reuang Saphap Changwat Loei" (Lecture on the State of Loei Province), in *Pathakata khong Phu Then Ratsadon*, 133-137.

of 101 *muang*. In the 1930s, however, modern life bypassed the area. Transport remained poor because the government focused its military and commercial attention on the border areas with French Indochina further to the east. People in Roi Et had no experience of the wider world, observers noted, and were not yet "awakened from their sleep, awakened from their ignorance."⁸¹

Ubon Rajathani was one of the largest provinces in the kingdom, with over 700,000 people. One of its MPs explained that prior to the constitutional era, royal policy consisted of only one strategy: "collect as much tax and other revenue from the people as possible." General backwardness ensued. Shoddy buildings constituted the norm, with even the provincial governor's house using mixed animal dung for the ceiling.⁸²

Liang Chaiyakan offered the commentary on Ubon just quoted. He and other northeastern representatives were the core critics of past state treatment of the provinces. They advocated a democracy in which regional voices carried as much weight as urban ones. Voranit Pricha, a judge and MP for Sakon Nakhon, the isolated northeastern province referred to above, frequently urged development in healthcare, roads, education and professional training.⁸³ Critics pushed for infrastructure development as a necessary foundation of democratic consciousness.

⁸¹ Phra Paisal Wechakam and Khun Sena Sasadi, "Pathakatha Reuang Kanpenyu nai Changwat Roi Et" (Lecture on Life in Roi Et Province), in *Pathakata khong Phu Then Ratsadon*, 176-177.

⁸² Liang, "Pathakatha Reuang Ubon," in *ibid*, 23.

⁸³ See his 130 pages of ideas in NA, SR.0201.8/13 for some examples.

Some of the pre-1932 elite believed in development as a self-evident good and as a symbol of modernity. State security, economic utility and being modern are not easily separated.

Prince Purachatra, a son of King Chulalongkorn and Siam's leading modernizer, embodied the different inspirations of development planning. He spent years first as head of the railways department and then became Minister of Commerce and Communications in 1928. Prince Purachatra had a great enthusiasm for modern technology and hoped to use it as quickly as possible in Siam. When he died in Singapore in September 1936, George McFarland, one of Siam's leading foreigners, eulogized him at the Bangkok Rotary Club. Prince Purachatra was the first president of the Rotary Club and frequently gave talks there on his modernization plans.⁸⁴ He also, however, faced criticism that he sacrificed road development for rails. He argued in response that rails gave a direct return on capital unlike roads. Other critics thought that the Siamese elite was rails-mad, and that the attention to railways reflected only an elite hobby.⁸⁵ Still, Purachatra's enthusiasm for communication technology convinced most people that the state was serious about national improvement.

Many foreigners and royalty were wedded to the paternal image that the state portrayed. The commoners that took power after 1932 had a different point of view. The perception among the parliamentarians quoted above highlighted the shortcomings of development. These men were

⁸⁴ "Prince Purachatra," *Bangkok Times*, September 15, 1936.

⁸⁵ Letter from a Singapore newspaper quoted in the *Bangkok Times*, quoted in Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy*, 124.

no less committed modernizers than the royal governors claimed to be. Technology and progress enthralled both groups. But the country spokesmen's' experiences reflected a much different world than the Bangkok princes who traveled as tourists to upcountry areas and made plans back in their ministries. The latter could afford to treat progress as much a symbol of being civilized and as a means to maintain power as for the country's benefit.

Other Worlds: Cultural Freedom in the North

From the fertile valley of Chiang Mai northwards, the terrain rises into a series of mountains and steep valleys stretching off into northern Burma, Lao and southwestern China. This great region of mountains and forests throughout the early twentieth century remained a part of the Shan world that straddled modern borders. Connections to a spiritual landscape that spanned centuries and linked far-flung communities maintained a living history.

Bangkok's authority over the northern provinces in the 1930s was still contested. Metropolitan power had put down the Shan revolt in Phrae around the turn of the century, when the People's Party leaders were infants.⁸⁶ As the future rulers grew to manhood, the kingly state was pensioning off the old lords of the north and sending their officials to govern in practice.

Commodity production for the international market from the latter part of the nineteenth century paradoxically helped to consolidate state power while at the same time handing over large parts of the economy to foreign control.

⁸⁶ See Tej Bunnag, *Khabot R.S. 121* (The Revolts of 1903) (Bangkok: TB, 2008 (1968)), 28-42.

British teak forest interests, for example, abetted the Bangkok monarchy's designs on the northern principalities and helped to consolidate its rule, but at a price. Foreign interests held extraterritorial rights and drained revenue, which hindered Bangkok's ability to govern even as it for the first time gained control over formerly independent princes. In the heyday of teak exploitation -- from the 1880s to the first decade of the twentieth century -- foreign capital dominated the business. British-Indian officials controlled the Department of Forestry that the government founded in 1896 to regulate the feverish exploitation of the northern forests. The department oversaw foreign-held leases, as well as regulations on the sizes of trees that could be felled. It was only in 1952 that the government announced that the last foreign leases would not be renewed on their expiry.⁸⁷

As a sign of the extra-national forces dominating northern Thai commerce, Indian rupees brought by the British were a common currency at the turn of the century, and remained so until into the 1950s.⁸⁸ In the 1930s, there was no standard money, with rupee notes, rupee coins, anna coins, Indian pennies (*at*), and Siamese red pennies all in circulation. Despite forestry's best days having past, the north still relied on the industry as a main source of cash

⁸⁷ Ingram, *Economic Change*, 110-111.

⁸⁸ Andrew Turton, "Northern Thai Peasant Society: Twentieth Century Transformations in Political and Rural Structures," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 3, no. 3 (April 1976): 274. Turton found that until the 1950s the local economy was based on payment in kind and there was no significant commodity production for the world market. The government presence in the Chiang Rai village he studied was light until after the war. The first government school was established in 1938 and a requirement made that the headman be literate in central Thai was made during the war.

in the People's Party era. The provincial MP for Mae Hong Son in the 1930s noted that teak traders, teak labor and sundry traders who connected Burma with Chiang Mai dominated employment. While teak traders could become very wealthy, he explained, the high investment costs of the business prevented many Thais from joining. Those who tried often wound up deeply in debt to Burmese moneylenders.⁸⁹

Capital had an ambiguous allegiance to Bangkok. Northern culture had no allegiance. I will explore this further in the chapter on religion, but here an intelligent observer from the times described the stubborn independence of northern culture.

Two summers after the change of government, an enthusiastic new regime supporter in Mae Hong Son wrote a long letter to the government outlining the problems that national integration faced. Kaeo Singhakachinthara responded to the release of a new educational plan (the next chapter discusses new regime education). He argued that the plan of October 1933 was too general for his province. Mae Hong Son had a population of 55,725, of whom 28,262 were minorities, mainly Ngiao (Shan, also referred to as Thai Yai). Kaeo contended that they were poorly integrated into the Siamese state and had much closer ties to the Shan communities in Burma. All district office documents to village heads, he explained, had to be written in Shan script to be understood. He singled out monks as serious obstacles to the implementation of any educational plan; the local Sangha jealously guarded their charges and

⁸⁹ Bunsiri Thepakam, "Pathakatha Rueang Kanpenyu nai Changwat Mae Hong Son" (Lecture on Life in Mae Hong Son Province), in *Pathakata khong Phu Then Ratsadon*, 166-170.

wouldn't surrender control to the government. The ecclesiastical governor had warned local monks to cooperate, but Kaeo said the result was doubtful. Also, he wrote, when the authorities tried to coerce people they disappeared into Burma. Support for religion anchored local life. As with communities in the north and northeast written about at the time (and indeed until well after the war), Kaeo believed that the people were mad for religion. He stated that excessive spending on religious endowments or festivals was a character flaw of the Thai Yai; people willingly went into debt to make merit.

Kaeo held a dual romantic and developmentalist view of local people. Sounding like other anti-modern community culture advocates both then and now, he argued that the Thai Yai communities cut off from lowland society were peaceful and happy. In his narrative, there was hardly any crime, people never locked their doors or windows, they rarely drank alcohol and most didn't eat meat. He lamented change. With the arrival of lowland Thais, the spread of a cash economy and the power of "suggestion" (English), he argued the Thai Yai would go astray.

Kaeo's belief that other, less civilized people should be forced to join the modern world forms a striking contrast to his romanticism about Shan life. The state, he explained, would have a difficult time bringing the Kariang and other hill people into its orbit. These groups numbered more than 27,000. Their nomadism was a problem, as was their immorality. Crime in their communities was much prevalent than among the Shan. It would be best, Kaeo suggested, to get them gradually to move off the highlands into settled valley communities.

Kaeo tempered his enthusiasm for social engineering by describing the obstacles to assimilation in Mae Hong Son. He explained that it took three to five weeks to travel between Bangkok and the province. Travelers commonly ran out of food, and were reduced to eating bamboo shoots. Mae Hong Son to Chiang Mai is only 120 kilometers directly, but the journey forced one to travel between 300 and 400 kilometers. Because of the lack of roads, carriages were useless; buffaloes or horses carried people and goods. Today's backpacker dream of an authentic nature trek was at the time the unromantic reality. One walked through clouds, Kaeo related, on steep paths bordered by mountains on one side and steep ravines on the other. No telegraph or postal stations connected the province. Any important government correspondence had to be hand carried.⁹⁰

I have highlighted Kaeo's narrative here because it describes Siam's social fragmentation. The Bangkok government began to centralize provincial administration in the fifth reign,⁹¹ and the state asserted itself as a new force in northern politics. But the state had hardly intruded into local traditions. After forty years of Bangkok's colonialism, the state's ideological hegemony remained weak. The government sent unwanted citizens to Mae Hong Son and other northern wildernesses.⁹² While British

⁹⁰ NA, SR.0201.14/10, Kaeo Singhakachinthara to the government, July 7, 1934.

⁹¹ Tej Bunnag, *The Provincial Administration of Siam 1892-1915: The Ministry of the Interior under Prince Damrong Rajanubhab* (Kuala Lumpur and London: Oxford University Press, 1977).

⁹² Political criminals were silenced in the 1930s. In October 1934 the state sent several public figures into upcountry exile in the wildernesses of Mae Hong Son and Tak. One was Choti Kumphan, an economist who received a doctorate from Leipzig University. While he was suspected of a plot to overthrow the government, the

capital shaped economic policy, central Thai customs remained foreign upcountry. As I will argue with the case of northern Buddhism in a later chapter, the People's Party state inherited a weak position from the absolutist government, and its attempts at cultural hegemony did not fare much better.

Cosmopolitanism and Money Worship in the South

In the pre-war years, the southwest, like the north, constituted another country from that of the center. Commodity capitalism deepened the estrangement from Bangkok,

evidence is unclear. In the summer of 1933, Choti had proposed organization of a quasi-state company to control the rice trade and cut out Chinese middlemen. He also frequently criticized the government for not doing enough for the people. He formed one of a group of economic nationalists (referred to briefly above) who took the new government to task for failing to live up to its promises in development and welfare. See NA, SR.0201.15/12 and SR.0201.8/14. Newspapers covered his trial and those of his associates in detail (see for example "The Case against Phya Devahastin," *Bangkok Times*, October 3, 1934).

The government allowed the families of the convicted rebels to travel with them upcountry, but life was tough. Most became ill. The state permitted Winai Sunton (Vinaya Sundara), one of the alleged conspirators in the Choti case who was under house arrest in Mae Hong Son, to move to Chiang Mai in April 1936 because of his malaria. Winai opened a restaurant and a law practice in the healthier environs of the town. The mistrust of Choti is ironic. A few months after Choti made his suggestions, Pridi proposed similar ideas of state ownership in his economic plan. Later in the 1930s the Phibun government established the Thai Rice Company to do exactly what Choti called for. It seems that strong opinions publicly voiced by those lacking access to the centers of power, not the ideas themselves, caused suspicion. The economic nationalists and businessmen with Cabinet connections had an arena for their views; those who didn't were left in the cold, or worse. Nakharin Mektrairat, "Kan Sawengha Rabop Sethakit Mai nai Chuang Neung Thosawat phai lang Kan Patiwat Siam Pho. So. 2475" (The Search for a New Economic System in the First Decade after the Siamese Revolution of 1932), in *Khwan Khit Khwan Ru le Amnat thang Kanmuang*, 318-361.

and amplified the cultural difference between the region and the capital.

In the nineteenth century, tin converted the island of Phuket - the main production zone -- into a gigantic mine. Chinese capital and labor dominated the industry. Tin made some people very wealthy and created a miserable, drug-addicted proletariat. Before the reforms of the fifth reign, Bangkok was content to leave the area alone provided that it sent some tax revenue to the capital. As recognition of their dominant position in local society, Bangkok ennobled leading Chinese entrepreneurs. Some became provincial governors.⁹³ Bangkok obtained the loyalty of the elite business interests, who then were tasked with managing labor. Western mining concerns were very important in the industry. Siam never developed processing capabilities, and so extracted ore was sent to Malaya for refinement. British owners dominated processing. In the early twentieth century they introduced more advanced bucket dredging techniques and hence gained an advantage over Chinese mine interests who for whatever reason did not invest in bucket dredging. By 1930, all tin exports were in the raw form, and 90% of this ore was sent to British Malaya.⁹⁴

⁹³ Prince Damrong described the way that Bangkok co-opted Chinese capitalists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Chakri state gave them widely discretionary political power, as provincial governors for example. See the translation of one of Damrong's letters in Chatthip, et al. *The Political Economy of Siam, 1910-1932*, 126-135. One family, the na Ranongs, came to govern all of the major southern provinces involved in the export economy.

⁹⁴ Ian Brown, *The Elite and the Economy*, 103. Brown doubts that the dredging equipment was too expensive for the Chinese, which is Skinner's explanation for the upper hand gained by Western mining in the early twentieth century. See Skinner, *Chinese Society*, 215.

In the absence of a strong state, the struggle for economic supremacy led to violence. In the 1880s, a series of clashes among competing Chinese industrialists for control of the mines shocked the Bangkok government into attempting tighter control over the region.⁹⁵ As with forestry in the north, Bangkok used foreign expertise to manage the industry. The first British ministers of mines were dismayed at the poor development of the tin areas. H. Warrington Smyth, Director of Mines in the mid-1890s, wrote that he was "at once struck by the abominable state of the roads, and the miserable condition of the town."⁹⁶ In 1908 a British consular official wrote that there were hardly any roads outside of one or two towns in the Phuket monthon. Poor infrastructure made the industry very inefficient. Labor conditions were equally terrible. In 1895, Walter de Müller, Smyth's predecessor, lamented that Phuket "is in the hands of a few rich Chinese men, who try to make as much money as they can by grinding down their workmen."⁹⁷ Haphazard management meant that tin tailings fouled the harbors and made docking of large ships impossible; lighters carried the ore from the harbor to ships anchored a mile away.⁹⁸ Smyth described the pollution:

"[T]he harbor has disappeared...The little docks...are old tin workings, the banks of the river are heaps of tailings,

⁹⁵ Brown, *The Elite and the Economy*, 103-104. King Chulalongkorn wrote to Prince Damrong of his lack of confidence in the government's ability to control southern violence, and the constant threat that such instability would invite foreign intrusion.

⁹⁶ H. Warrington Smyth, *Five Years in Siam from 1891 to 1896, Vol. 1* (London: John Murray, 1898), 318.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Brown, *The Elite and the Economy*, 97.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 95.

quartz and hornblende crunch beneath one's feet, and the decomposing granite scents the air...The stained water of the streams runs between mountains of tailings, grown over here and there with a few coarse grasses, and deep red pools lie in between."⁹⁹

By the early 1900s, it was believed that most of the veins were exhausted. This coincided with falling tin prices internationally, better opportunities for paid labor upcountry and appointment of a commissioner for Phuket monthon who hated the Chinese. Many thousands of Chinese left Phuket; the Chinese labor population fell from about 40 - 50,000 in 1884 to 12,000 15 years later.¹⁰⁰ The government reckoned the entire Chinese population for Phuket monthon at nearly 24,600 in 1919, and the figure fell to just under 16,000 in 1929. By way of comparison, in 1929 the state counted the entire monthon population as about 242,000, roughly the same as ten years previously.¹⁰¹ The 1937 census counted the mining population of the kingdom as about 15,000; the vast majority would have been in Phuket.¹⁰² These figures are open to different interpretations and the government's classifications were imprecise. Skinner explained, for example, that many thousands of those counted as "Thai" in the mining labor sector were ethnic Chinese born in the kingdom.¹⁰³ In any

⁹⁹ Smyth, *Five Years*, 317-318.

¹⁰⁰ Skinner, *Chinese Society*, 110-111. The 40,000 figure is his; Ingram gave the 1884 figure as 50,000. Ingram, *Economic Change*, 99.

¹⁰¹ *Thesaphiban* 30, no. 6 (1929), 338, 358.

¹⁰² *SYB*, no. 20, 57.

¹⁰³ Skinner, *Chinese Society*, 215. Government numbers on ethnic groups masked social reality with ambiguous classifications. The 1929 census, for example, numbered "outside Chinese" (*jin nok*) as

case, the fortunes of the tin industry rose and fell over the years. Chinese labor, whether born in the kingdom or overseas, would have traveled upcountry or across the seas to pursue better opportunities if possible. Tin production remained erratic through the decades.¹⁰⁴

By the People's Party era southwestern commodity capitalism had produced two generations of proletarian labor, wealthy Chinese commercial and bureaucratic families and a state constantly playing catch up to the changing economic realities.

According to a government report of 1934: "It is fitting that (Phuket) is an island because when you arrive here you don't feel that you are in Siam." Foreign goods filled markets in the morning, and travelers heard a cacophony of languages. Thai, British, Malay, French and Chinese all bought and sold in the market, and the shopkeepers used Malay and English in addition to Thai. People's Party visitors were struck by the province's orientation to money. The purported solidarity of Thai villages upcountry was entirely absent. The report gave the opinion that all profits and business were oriented outwards, and the state made no effort to form a sense of community. "The government allows the people to seek profits, and collects taxes, until soon there will be only an abandoned town (*muang rang*) and each will have gone their separate way." The province's migrants were like magnets that drew others to the place where "money is God."

about 445,270. Presumably this referred to Chinese born overseas. "Outside" covered the fact that many tens of thousands of ethnic Chinese lived in the kingdom, but were classified as Thai because of their birthplace. *Thesaphiban* 30, no. 6 (1929), 317.

¹⁰⁴ Ingram, *Economic Change*, 100.

Because of its wealth, the government estimated the cost of living there as 50% higher than other provinces. Police and other civil servants had a hard time meeting their expenses. Unemployment was very low.¹⁰⁵

The four industrial bigwigs of the town were all of Chinese descent and a government report noted the high visibility of the Chinese in general on the island, whether as market traders, capitalists or labor for the tin mines. A 1932 lecture tour to promote the ideas of the new regime had to use a Chinese translation, since so many listeners didn't understand Thai. The officials also reported that radios - which as we will see in a later chapter the government hoped could enlighten people -- were generally confined to market traders and aristocrats. Perhaps as a fitting symbol of the state's ambiguous position in local society, the police occupied a clock-less clock tower in the center of town; the Germans in the last war sank a ship carrying the new clock to Phuket.¹⁰⁶

Private initiative drove development. Countering a common criticism of the Chinese that they hoarded their wealth or sent it overseas, visitors noted their investment in local society. Phuket had changed from the late nineteenth century. By the 1930s, streets were lit at night, a rarity for Siam. A member of parliament noted in a radio speech that Phuket had 100 kilometers of asphalt roads and the network was growing. One car served 100 people, which was a high ratio for the times as we saw above.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ NA, ST.43, Ministry of Education report.

¹⁰⁶ NA, (2)SR.0201.10/3, folder 1.

¹⁰⁷ Phra Phisaiyasuntharakan, "Pathakatha Rueang Saphap Changwat Phuket" (Lecture on the State of Phuket), in *Pathakata khong Phu Then Ratsadon*, 86.

The wealthy Chinese highly valued education, and invested in this aspect of island life. Education in the province dated back to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and included English and Chinese language schools as well as Thai.

Private education was modern and oriented towards international commerce. As with other aspects of Chinese society, the government regarded Chinese education skeptically. An educational inspector in Phuket visited some Chinese schools and found them in complete breach of the 1921 primary education law.¹⁰⁸ Chinese schools taught no Thai at all. (The Chinese complained that Thai education was poor.) Aside from recommending a complete overhaul of the system, the inspector argued that the state should set up a mandatory boarding school for secondary school students. He related that the wealthy Chinese sent their children to Penang or Singapore for high school and college. Chinese children thus lost whatever tenuous Thai-ness they had when they studied overseas and saw the world.¹⁰⁹

Foreign investment combined with Chinese capital and labor to create the southern economy. Phang-na is known today for marine tourism, which draws people from all over the world. Long before international tourism, it was a different sort of global meeting place. In the 1930s,

¹⁰⁸ This law and its aims are discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁹ NA, ST.43, Ministry of Education report. It is interesting to contrast this attitude with the Thai elite's love of European education. In the dominant mode of elite socialization, young people went overseas for education to enhance their social status (and expected salaries), and returned to work in the bureaucracy. Bangkok royalty and aristocracy generally felt that their children would remain staunchly loyal and Thai regardless of whether they spent their formative years overseas. The state did not extend this same consideration to the Chinese.

foreigners - British, Australian, Danish, Indian, Malay - had a large presence in provincial business. Australians were prominent in tin mining. A provincial MP counted 2,625 foreigners living there out of a total population of over 48,000, of whom about 11,500 were able-bodied men. Almost all of the foreigners were men, and hence they formed a substantial percentage of the adult male population. As with Phuket, commerce created good transportation where it served economic interests. Phang-na had good intra- and inter-provincial roads (the latter to Phuket via a short ferry ride). Two steamship lines linked the province to Phuket, Krabi, Ranong and Penang.¹¹⁰

Indeed, regional commercial networks connected the entire southwest and its industries with global trade. In the south, British and Mexican dollars were the dominant currency around the turn of the century. British Malaya dominated the tin trade, but also rubber and other products relied on peninsular marketing. Bangkok was less important. Sea freight to Malaya from the south remained much cheaper than land transport to Bangkok throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. Things only began to change after 1932 when the People's Party encouraged road construction to better control the provinces.¹¹¹

The initial cultural and commercial focus was Singapore. A study of pre-war commercial integration has estimated that Singapore took 37% of all Thai commodities,

¹¹⁰ Luang Wattanakhadi, "Pathakatha Rueang Saphap khong Changwat Phang Nga" (Lecture on the State of Phang Nga Province), in *Pathakata khong Phu Then Ratsadon*, 60-61.

¹¹¹ Chaiyan Rajchagool, *The Rise and Fall of the Thai Absolute Monarchy: Foundations of the Modern Thai State from Feudalism to Peripheral Capitalism* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1994), 55.

and 46% of Thai imports came from the British colony. Most Thai exports originated in peninsular industries. Rice traveled on the steamships that linked Bangkok with the peninsula and Singapore.¹¹² The intermediaries who handled the trade had networks in Singapore and Hong Kong, which were crucial to the Thai economy. While Bangkok slowly gained control over upcountry areas on the mainland, Bangkok itself was a satellite of Singapore. The force field ran through Phuket.

In the parts of the south I have described, capitalism shaped life to a much greater degree than in the northwest. In Mae Hong Son, forestry introduced and dominated the cash economy, but thousands of upland peoples lived in a pre-capitalist world. The section on the Shan also described an old regional culture that remained hostile to Bangkok. In the case of Phuket and its environs, however, the Sinicization of commerce and culture does not seem to have predated the late nineteenth century conversion of the area into a vast tin mine. British capital, Chinese governors, labor gangs and Bangkok's quest for tax revenue all accompanied mineral exploitation.

With these contrasting cases, we see different aspects of the weak semi-colonial Siamese state's relations with its fragments. Bangkok used foreign help to control of the north, but lacked money for infrastructure that would bind the region closer to the center. In the south, the state used Chinese capital and authority to organize production

¹¹² Kakizaki, *Laying the Tracks*, 68.

that it could tax. Development of the area was haphazard, however, and rested largely on local initiative.

Conclusion

Bangkok's view of Thai society saw upcountry areas as a series of appendages to their world. In the discourse of *siwilai* the urban elite elaborated a hierarchy of civilization with Bangkok at the center. The further away one traveled, the more primitive life became. As Western ideas of progress and the threat of a foreign takeover dominated the ruling class mentality from the fifth reign, the Bangkok state tried to extend its authority uniformly. Calculations of capital, maintenance of elite control, the desire to be modern and impress the West all drove this complex process. The state wanted a united nation to strengthen the dynastic state. Marx described the thinking of capital's apologists, who saw all other histories as preparation for its arrival. In a similar historical justification, the royal state and its constitutional legatees posited themselves as the new geo-body that absorbed and unified the kingdom's social diversity.

But a crooked path led to their goal. Despite the appearance they projected, the state had tenuous control over the population. No one controlled the frontier capitalism that drove the export economy. In most areas outside of the Chaophraya delta triangle, pre-capitalist economies persisted. Health was poor. Spatial and psychic remoteness characterized most of the kingdom decades after the start of modernization in the 1890s. Mae Hong Son's minorities; the Lao communities of the northeast; forgotten provinces bypassed by the rails; the cosmopolitan southwest.

All of these areas had to be reoriented to Bangkok, the new axis mundi.

The next chapter focuses on education and propaganda, two areas through which the new government hoped to create social unity. But the new elite had a profound debt to old regime culture, and in particular lived in the rosy afterglow of the fifth reign's authority to expand the Bangkok-centric state. Upcountry customs stubbornly resisted Bangkok's growing power. Cultural dominance over a fragmented country that had resisted the absolute kings would be difficult to achieve.

Chapter Three: Education, Propaganda and Peasants

This chapter details the old and new regimes' efforts to create educated citizens in the 1920s and 1930s through education and publicity. Despite the government's inspired rhetoric about democracy in the latter period, its efforts produced mixed outcomes. The People's Party inherited a fractured country and an elitist mindset from the old regime. Its capacity to create modern democratic citizens was constrained by money and communications. Perhaps more importantly, the new regime shared the absolute monarchy's disregard for the importance of common people. The government erected a neo-traditional regime of images that projected the new order as holy.

Like the old regime under kingly despotism, the new attempted to maintain complete control of the (democratic) discourse. In the process, it excluded rather than empowered its new subjects.¹ The discourse of democracy and autonomous subjects advanced by the People's Party thinly covered an authoritarian culture.

As a result, contrary to the new order being founded on a social pact among equals, which the constitutionalists claimed as 1932's fundamental accomplishment, it is difficult to see the democracy as other than an elite

¹ I've been inspired in this chapter by Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). Gluck's study shows the same process working in Japan at the beginning of the 1890s. The Japanese arguably pioneered the top-down imposition of democracy in Asia. Interestingly, King Chula and the Meiji emperor came to the throne in 1868. Siamese national integration proceeded much more slowly than Japan's.

bestowal. The ideological state apparatus, however, wasn't all-powerful. We will see in this and later chapters that outsiders used the new discourse to try and create a less elitist democracy. Provincial outsiders to the state system, commoners with high school level education, used their social positions to engage the establishment in debate over rural enlightenment and modern citizenship.

Before looking at post-1932 education and propaganda efforts, I will explain the old cultural attitude towards education and commoners that had a strong influence on the new elite.

The Old Regime and Education

The last chapter described state development plans under the absolute monarchy as strategies to buttress elite power (in the development of rails, for example). A similar imperative shaped education policy. The state emphasized elite education as a way to preserve the political pre-eminence of the ruling class. To educate most people, the state relied on a pre-existing temple education that instilled loyalty to the social hierarchy. To train the elite, it developed a technical education favoring certain useful areas of knowledge that facilitated state power. The government also channeled money that could have been spent on upcountry education into the state security apparatus: the army and the interior ministry (which included schooling for careers in these institutions). All colonial societies acted similarly; Siam is not unusual in this regard.²

² During Vajiravudh's reign in the 'teens and first half of the 1920s, for example, the military budget ranged from 10 to 15

The state saw little need for modern education for those whose lives were tied to the seasons and to the land, in communities that for the most part had little contact with the outside world. The middle classes in the city staffed the civilian and military bureaucracy and filled the ranks of clerks in the commercial enterprises that traded with the world, while rural people produced the surplus that maintained urban life and generated foreign exchange revenue.

Elite attitudes, however, evolved much like economy and political arrangements. While still attempting to preserve class hierarchy, influential voices called for a better system that could meet modern challenges. We can look at the work of one important official in particular, Chao Phraya Thammasakmontri.

Thammasakmontri and Changing Times

In the fifth reign, King Chulalongkorn and his fellow modernizers created good schools to train elite sons for service in the government. Suan Kulap (1880), the Military Cadet Academy (1887), the Law School (1896), Ratchawitthayalai (King's College, 1897) and the Training School of the Civil Service (1899, renamed the Royal Pages School in 1902) were the key institutions. All of them were avowedly elitist, for example having explicit family

times that of education. *SYB*, 1938-1939, 282. The rise of the military in twentieth century Thai politics stems largely from the expansion of the internally colonizing state. As the kingdom's borders were guaranteed by the European powers, the army had no external wars to fight and could be used instead for domestic surveillance and control. Noel Battye, "The Military, Government and Society in Siam, 1868-1910: Politics and Military Reform during the Reign of King Chulalongkorn," (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1974).

requirements or charging fees to keep out poor people, but none successfully fended off a commoner takeover of its student body. In addition, famous temple schools (Thepsirin and Patumkhongkha, for example) and missionary or private schools with more democratic admittance policies (Sunanthalai, Bangkok Christian, Assumption and Ban Somdet Chaophraya were the most famous) provided skilled civil servants.³

Chula and his reformers needed more, however, to meet the times. The graduates of the above schools numbered a mere fraction of the bureaucracy, many of whom were not well educated. The fifth reign saw the first plans for mass education. After the king's death in 1910, discussion of a national educational law gained momentum. In 1912, the Minister of Public Instruction Chao Phraya Wisut Suriyasakdi (Pia Malakul) proposed compulsory education for all children aged seven to fourteen, but the government rejected his proposals for budgetary reasons.⁴

In 1916, Chao Phraya Thammasakmontri became the Minister of Public Instruction after Wisut, his patron, retired (he died the same year). Thammasakmontri played a huge role in shaping public attitudes to education in the

³ Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead, *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism*, 66-92; David K. Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969).

⁴ Warunee Osatharom, "Kansekksa nai Sangkhom Thai Pho. So. 2411-2475" (Education in Thai Society 1868-1932) (M.A. thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1981), 231. Prince Chantaburi, the Minister of Finance, contended that funds were needed for national integration and communications. At the same time, the Minister of Defense, Prince Pitsanulok, garnered annual increases for his ministry's budget in the range of one million baht from the Ministry of Finance. The minister justified the sums on the grounds of national security, Warunee, 229.

first half of the century. He was born Sanan Thephasdin na Ayutthaya in Bangkok in 1877, the 18th child of 32 in the family of Phraya Chai Surin, the Minister of Agriculture and also Finance until his death in 1885. Sanan's family was poor despite the father's high position. His mother provided for him and his brothers working as a seamstress. Intelligent and lucky, Sanan studied at an advanced level in Siam and attended a teacher training school near London beginning in 1896 under the patronage of Robert Morant. A senior figure in British education, Morant was a close advisor of Prince Damrong Rajanuphap, government education inspector and tutor to Crown Prince Vajirunhis (the likely sixth king before his untimely death made room for Vajiravudh to ascend the throne).⁵ Under the patronage of then Prince Vajiravudh, Thammasakmontri and his brother were among a small group that observed Japanese education in 1902 while accompanying Vajiravudh back to Siam from England. The Japanese plan became the basis for Siam's national education scheme. According to Wyatt, Thammasakmontri's ability around this time attracted Chula's attention and he replaced Wisut as the king's favored educational advisor.⁶ He reorganized the civil service school that would form the basis for Chulalongkorn University, which was created in 1916.⁷ Thammasakmontri had studied education policy in India as well as Japan, and was eager to advance a more modern educational system than his

⁵ Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform*, 136-140.

⁶ *Ibid*, 363-367.

⁷ "Chiwaprawat" (Biography), in *Bot Phrapan Bang Ruang khong Khru Thep, Phim nai Ngan Phra Ratchathan Pleung Sop Phana Than So. Thammasakmontri Thephasdin na Ayutthaya* (Some Writings of Khru Thep, Printed for the Royal Cremation of Thammasakmontri na Ayutthaya) (Bangkok, 1943), i - xviii.

country possessed. He continued the drive for compulsory primary schooling that Wisut had initiated.

Thammasakmontri saw existing education as quantitatively pitiful. In 1916, he pointed out that British Burma spent about seven times more, and the Philippines twelve times, the amount spent in Siam on education. In that year, Siam had 3,134 primary schools with 135,162 students, compared to more than twice as many schools and four times the pupils in Burma, and 4,000+ primary schools and four times the students in the Philippines.⁸ Siam spent just under two percent of its budget on education in that year, compared to 17% in the Philippines. In 1918, he found 10% of school-age children attended school, compared to 98.5% in Japan.⁹

The minister suggested that the neglect of education led to at least two crucial social problems, both of which were connected to recent fifth reign reforms. Development of the market economy led to the first since it left an uneducated and naïve peasantry at the mercy of unscrupulous foreign or Chinese middlemen. Not only were the peasantry easily duped, their unfamiliarity with modern commerce meant that no domestic middle class emerged that could challenge foreigners. Secondly, while the reforms of the fifth reign had released rural people from the feudal burdens of debt bondage and forced labor, they also generated new, more mysterious forces in the form of laws that poor people didn't understand. As with the business

⁸ He noted that the Siamese and Philippine populations were roughly equal, while Burma had slightly more people.

⁹ Thammasakmontri's opinions in a meeting of provincial viceroys and secretaries, May 1919, translated in Chatthip, et al. *The Political Economy of Siam, 1910-1932*, 116-118.

opportunists who took advantage of them, the new area of modern law introduced shady dealmakers and lawyers into their lives who manipulated their ignorance for their own gain.¹⁰

An obsession with bureaucratic careers posed another social problem that it was hoped a better educational system could cure. Young men seeking to rise in society under the reforming state sought government clerkships above all. This mindset hindered the development of a skilled business class and produced, many thought, a lazy, status obsessed younger generation too reliant on the state.

Despite his progressive views on education (at least compared to many other elites), Thammasakmontri was not a radical educator. Like other aristocrats, he worried about the consequences of the peasantry getting ideas above their station in life and doing things other than tilling the land posed social dangers that were best avoided. He sought to use education to save the old social system, not fundamentally change it. This would be achieved through more basic education as well as the development of higher education that produced other technical skills than the ministry schools and few elite schools offered. The remedy for the bureaucratic and anti-commercial mentality applied mainly to well off people, not to the vast majority who were farmers. In a 1919 national education plan that he submitted to the government (which rejected it), Thammasakmontri proposed a two-tiered vision of education: primary for the vast majority of the population, and secondary for those select few who had the intelligence,

¹⁰ Ibid, 113-116. The meeting is also covered in Warunee, "Kansekksa," 236-241.

financial means and social status. The latter obtained the technical skills for enrolment in the professional classes needed to manage an exchange economy.¹¹

The New Act

The government eventually passed a primary education act in 1921. As Warunee described it, the king occupied a tough spot vis-à-vis two competing sides: the finance and interior ministries on the one hand, who controlled government finance and state security, and Thammasakmontri on the other pushing for education. Vajiravudh respected Thammasakmontri and backed his plans, but at the same time was strongly beholden to the political clout of the key ministries. As such, the outcome was a half-measure. Although styled as a national educational plan, it only took immediate effect in some provinces (excluding Bangkok), and the Ministry of Finance did not formally approve its budget.¹²

The act recognized three types of schools: government, local (*prachaban*) and private (*ratsadon*). The state fully funded government schools, and these were usually the only upcountry schools that offered secondary education. Often only one government school existed in a province. Local schools - by far the largest number of the three types of schools -- relied on a mixture of state and local support. By and large, *prachaban* schools were established in temples

¹¹ Warunee, "Kanseuksa," 242.

¹² Ibid, 250-254. The act specified the provinces, districts and townships where it would initially come into force. "Phraratchabanyat Prathom Seuksa Phra Phutthasakarat 2464" (Primary Education Act 1921), *Rajanukitchabeksa* 38 (September 23, 1921): 270-289.

and were thinly updated temple schools. The government had begun to regulate private schools a few years previously.¹³ The largely Chinese bourgeois-established ratsadon schools offered good education, but often they were viewed as politically suspect. We saw in the last chapter that officials criticized the Phuket Chinese for their exclusive educations. The failure of (particularly Chinese) ratsadon schools to meet state educational requirements for Thai-language instruction and their purported republicanism were frequently discussed in government and the press in the interwar period. Attention was thus displaced from Thai education's poor quality.

The act required all children aged seven to 14 to attend primary school and to have met certain unspecified scholarly standards by the leaving age. Further, the act stipulated a series of exceptions to these requirements that made the act's implementation irregular. For example, children who lived more than 3.2 kilometers from a school or those "who for one unavoidable reason or another cannot attend" were exempt. Children who received home schooling were also exempt. In some places (unnamed), the entering age could be delayed to eight, nine or ten.¹⁴ While the act tasked local authorities with ensuring that all eligible children attended school, they had a hard time keeping track of students. The curriculum, as we shall see, was also haphazardly planned. An approved lesson plan had to be used in all schools, according to article six of the new law, but this was impossible.

¹³ "Phraratchabanyat Rong Rian Ratsadon Phra Phutthasakarath 2461" (Private Schools Act 1917), *Rajanukitchabeksa* 35 (March 9, 1917): 110-125.

¹⁴ "Phraratchabanyat Prathom Seuksa," articles 3, 5, 10 and 11.

Around the same time that the government passed the act, the ministry of education developed new rules for attendance. It stated that primary education entailed five years at a minimum for boys and three for girls. Up to eight further years of secondary school was possible in some places. These eight years were preparatory, in Thammasakmontri's plan, to training for a profession and/or university.¹⁵

Quantitative progress, if not qualitative improvement, was achieved after the act became law. In 1921, mandatory schooling was imposed in about 46% of townships kingdom-wide. By 1932, nearly 89% had some form of compulsory education.¹⁶ Roughly 1,300 schools were established between 1923 and 1932, bringing the total number in the kingdom to about 6,330.¹⁷ The Ministry of Public Instruction estimated that in 1921 90% of the population was illiterate. By 1931, the figure had dropped to 37%. In 1921, 922,728 boys and girls could read and write basic Thai; ten years later the figure had jumped to 6.895 million.¹⁸

Still, the vast majority of schools remained in temples, as they always had. It is not clear from the

¹⁵ Thammasakmontri to royal secretary Chao Phraya Mahithon, May 17, 1926, with the appended report "Sangkhep Khrongkansueksa khong Rao kap Suan thi jat pai laeo" (Summary of our Educational System and the Sections Already Established). NA, M.R7, RL.20. Also see Raleuk Thani, *Wiwattanakan nai Kanjat Kanseuksa phak Bangkhap khong Thai (Pho.So. 2475-2503)* (Development of the Establishment of Thai Compulsory Education, 1932-1960) (Bangkok: Thai Watana Panich, 1984), 22-25.

¹⁶ Warunee, "Kanseuksa," 378. This may not have actually meant very much, since one township encompassed many villages and most children probably lived too far from the few schools that came into being.

¹⁷ SYB, 1938-1939, 392.

¹⁸ NA, So.Th. 4/168, Krom Sueksatikan (Education Department) 1932 report.

evidence how much of a qualitative change the new act generated. Thammasakmontri and others' wish for a native middle class would have to rely on secondary and vocational schooling. But these levels remained out of the reach of most people. The number of secondary and vocational schools between 1923 and 1932, according to the government, actually declined even as more students entered these schools in those years. Two hundred and forty-nine schools in the kingdom had secondary curricula in 1923; by 1932, the figure had dropped to 182. Vocational education - the agricultural science and commercial sense that Thammasakmontri envisioned separating civilized countries from backward ones - was extremely rare. Sixty-five such schools operated in Siam in 1923; by 1932, there were only 29.¹⁹

Moral Education in a New World

Thammasakmontri and others hoped the education act would prepare rural society for the challenges of the modern economic world. It failed. I would like to highlight another aspect of primary education, moral instruction, which proved more durable. Even as the state failed to develop a native (meaning non-Chinese) middle class, elite social attitudes did gain a greater audience upcountry than ever before. The centrality of the state in career choices, perhaps, made it much easier to mimic polite society than to succeed as owner of a bike shop or local store.

These attitudes show the local reception of the tenets of international political economy. The early twentieth

¹⁹ SYB, 1938-1939, 393.

century Siamese social ideology, which persevered under the People's Party, developed from the filtering of European bourgeois values by a native aristocratic and royal elite attempting to maintain social stability in a changing world.

We can look at this social ideology through Thammasakmontri's *Thammacariya* (Ethics) series of school texts, which formed the fundamental discourse on proper behavior for at least half a century. Thammasakmontri wrote six volumes for this series, beginning in the fifth reign, intending them to be taught over six years of schooling. Two aspects stand out, authority and the importance of urban society and its values. These are interlinked.

In the Theravada world, the authority of the teacher rests claims to sound morality and wisdom; that is, on access to the Dhamma. The Dhamma is what makes us more than living things. Thammasakmontri states in one of the texts that: "It is difficult to put into words the feelings one has about religion, because they are so deep. Religion permeates the heart and (guides) all stages of life."²⁰ While students might admire knowledgeable, quick-witted people, he explains that they should be most inspired by those way of life is founded on the good. It is they, he says to all his young scholars and teachers, who create a community of order and togetherness.²¹

In the *Thammacariya* series the awakening of moral conscience and intelligence in children starts with listening to their elders and following their example. The social hierarchy is based on relative access to a moral law

²⁰ Phra Paisan Silapasat (Chao Phraya Thammasakmontri), *Thammachariya*, Vol. 4 (Bangkok: Aksorniti, 1912), 159.

²¹ Thammasakmontri, *Thammachariya*, Vol. 5 (Bangkok: Aksorniti, 1921), 5.

and absolute truth. The illiterate are in sorry shape: "The minds of those who cannot read are like those kept in a small box, shut off in complete darkness" (Vol. 4, 33).

Polite society set the standard for behavior. The sometimes lofty theory is shown in the texts via concrete examples of how ordinary people should behave.

Two examples can be given. In his first book, Thammasakmontri offered instructive vignettes of refined and uncouth behavior. In a section on "Good Behavior" Chom visits his relative Chap in the city. While older than Chap, the boy Chom is wild and rough. He lacks any sense of propriety. He breaks all of the taboos of refined society: he points at things with his feet, he walks past elders who are sitting down or sits down higher than them, he points at people and asks questions loudly. Both then and today, elite society severely frowns on all of these things. Chom eats very quickly, doesn't defer to others at the meal, plunges his dirty fingers into the various bowls and talks with his mouth full.²² The city boy Chap asks his mother why he is told not to do these things while Chom does them all the time. The answer is that Chap is a "bumpkin (*khon ban nok*), he doesn't yet know how to behave, he doesn't have manners like you do" (Vol. 1, 36).

In another vignette in the second book, Mae Peut goes to visit her uncle and aunt's family for a Songkran holiday at Bang Pa-in near Ayutthaya, a couple of hours boat ride from the capital where she lives. Her elder brother accompanies her. She is horrified at the way country people

²² Phra Paisan Silapasat (Chao Phraya Thammasakmontri) and Luang Anukit Withun, *Thammachariya*, Vol. 1 (Bangkok: Aksorniti, 1909), 33-36; Vol. 2 (n.d.), 23-24.

live. Plates and dishes are dirty and old, serving trays are rusty, and the general state of things is deplorable. "Was this stuff dug up from underground or what, it's so black and ugly!" she nearly blurts out at one point (Vol. 2, 6). Her brother Phong is having a great time during their weeklong stay and is in his element (that is, filth). He eats quickly, doesn't help clean things up and runs off to play. He doesn't want to go home. Mae Peut on the other hand is greatly distressed by the conditions, but doesn't express her feelings to her aunt or uncle because she is the model: a mannered girl taught to be deferential to her elders. She tells her mother about her experience, and her mother says that people who grow up in straitened circumstances often don't take care of their environment. She commends Mae Peut for not confronting her uncle, and says instead that she can work on her brother who is still a long way from having sound manners (8-9).

The discourses of learning and comportment in the texts are set in a busy world of commerce, competition and cash. The management of money determines everything that surrounds the audience.²³ Urban society held the values that contributed to practical success as well as goodness, in theory at least.

In the texts, good bourgeois ethics showed how developing society could become wealthier. In one example

²³ In a homily reminiscent of Dickens's Thomas Gradgrind, the author writes:

"*Phanung*, shirts and books are more than things. They are all real things, but without money how are they obtained? We have to believe that they are in fact money. At whatever point our money is wasted, those things also disappear."
(Vol. 2, 66)

offered by Thammasakmontri, two school chums, Chang and Chop, rise in society through hard work, thrift and honesty. Chop, from a modest family, is frugal and hard working from a young age. He converts opportunity into wealth. After a few years in government service, Chop becomes an entrepreneur (the hoped for middle class emerging from their fixation with bureaucratic careers). Chang's parents are well off. As a boy, he is an undisciplined spendthrift. Later, Chop employs Chang, gives him some capital, and Chang makes the most of it. After hard work Chang becomes an investor in an electric plant and landowner. Unlike the frivolous youth he once was, the young Chang now is a wealthy man with an honest work ethic (Vol. 1, 21-24; Vol. 2, 60-66).

Thus, Thammasakmontri tried to spread modern ideas that could make society wealthier. He situated these ideas in a Buddhist ethical frame that valued the moral and intellectual authority of teachers and other exemplary figures who showed how young people should conduct themselves. Chop and Chang have arrived, so to speak, and are good young bourgeois who make an honest living. In his texts and his career, Siam's most famous educator sought to buttress the social position of the elite class by putting the new values on a Buddhist foundation.

Chang and Chop would have been rare Thai people in the early century. Technical education was scarce and a class of native entrepreneurs didn't emerge to challenge the Chinese and foreigners. But elite morals and manners were influential among ambitious commoners, especially in Bangkok. Given the limited reach of state education upcountry all attempts to mold young people met with an

uncertain success. They did, however, reflect clearly how the elite thought people should behave. The maintenance of social hierarchy and the preservation of moral and political leadership in a small class were meant to guard against the dilution of royalist ideology in a changing economy.

Thammasakmontri's bourgeois ethics - as mild and general as they are - represented the cutting edge in the sixth reign. Serious study of economics was impossible at the time, at least officially: the absolute monarchy branded economics as a danger to callow minds. While a commerce school had been set up in 1913, it wasn't very popular in elite circles. As with modern agriculture, the goal of creating a native middle class remained unrealized as much because of official prejudice as for financial reasons. Phraya Suriyanuwat - a leading early twentieth-century official of wide learning and experience -- wrote a textbook of economics that he hoped would be taught in schools as the first step in this project. Vajiravudh, however, was skeptical of the utility of teaching economics and Suriyanuwat's book was banned. Thammasakmontri gave up attempting to introduce economics primers, and instead focused on general articles that could be included in a curriculum that spread the gospel of free trade and encouraged young people to pursue business careers. In the end, the state banned the teaching of economics entirely in 1931 during the depression because it was felt to be too inflammatory. An economics school still functioned, and attempted to produce junior clerks for the private workforce. The government found, however, that these young people could not match the technical or foreign language

skills of the graduates of the foreign schools, such as Assumption or Bangkok Christian.²⁴

The ethical code advanced under the old regime made no mention of politics. In the new order political discourse became an important part of official state ideology. The transition was abrupt but masks a deeper continuity in official attitudes. As with the moral hierarchy dialogue before 1932, a very few qualified people spoke about politics in the new regime. Furthermore, the new political discourse inherited old ethical language. The school curriculum remained largely unchanged after 1932, as we will see. Moral authority based on ascribed status and urban elitism stand out as the main intellectual legacies handed to the People's Party, ideas supposedly dethroned by 1932 but the new order lived in the shadow of absolutism. A new elite attempted to command the authority once held by the royals.

The New Regime and Education

The last of the People's Party principles announced in their founding manifesto stated that all Thai people had a right to education. The government also pledged to advance schooling far beyond what had been provided by the absolute regime. It made education, in fact, crucial to the development of the political system when the constitution stated that the parliament would be a fully elected body when at least half of the population had attained a basic education. How successful were they?

²⁴ Warunee, "Kansekksa," 315-316.

Quantity

Thammasakmontri left government service in the mid-1920s. While he exhibited little interest in democracy, he returned for a second stint as education minister after the coup because the government needed his expertise. As in other ministries, the People's Party relied heavily on old regime actors with long experience in administration. Also, with a new government committed to education, perhaps Thammasakmontri thought the time was right to push harder for national schooling. Despite the spread of primary schooling since 1921, both he and the People's Party thought more should be done. In August 1932, he submitted a draft plan that called for the immediate implementation of primary education in grades one to four and two years of vocational education for all children. By early 1933, the government appeared ready to implement the plan.²⁵ A new education act (1935) and additions to it (1938) followed Thammasakmontri's 1932 proposal.²⁶ Thammasakmontri had retired by the time the new act came into force. The government was never short of plans; the historian indeed

²⁵A letter from the Prime Minister to Thammasakmontri confirmed cabinet approval for the plan and suggested that he and Pridi make a few improvements. "Rang Prakat Panek Kanseuksa Chat" (Draft National Education Plan) and January 11, 1933 letter to Thammasakmontri in NA, (2)SR.0201.24 Kanseuksa (Education).

²⁶ "Phraratchabanyat Prathomseuksa Phutthasakaratt 2478," *Rajanukitchabeksa* (25), November 24, 1935, 1591-1616. The act called for all children aged eight to 15 to be enrolled. As we saw, the 1921 act stipulated the age range as seven to 14. Four years of primary and three of either lower secondary or vocational were expected in the new plans. The new act only referred to the ages eight to 15, but didn't make any stipulation of the grades. The government stipulated separately the four years of primary school and three of either lower secondary or vocational scheme. "Paenpang Kansueksa Chat" (Diagram of Scheme of National Education), SYB 1938-39, 387.

can get lost in the maze of schemes and laws that circulated in the new regime. Attention to plans and pronouncements can obscure the fundamental question: what really changed in education under the democracy?

In a newspaper interview in late 1934, Phra Sarasas said it was disheartening to see how little progress had been made, especially upcountry. He lamented, among other things, the perennial shortage of funds. In addition Phra Sarasas explained that provincial education officers were beholden to the government to advance their careers and couldn't spend enough time improving education. The state, he said, gave these officers additional duties, like crime suppression, which they had to do to stay in the government's good books.²⁷ The next summer, Phra Sarasas wrote to Prime Minister Phahon that an education bill was urgently needed to guarantee a school budget. He argued that education was of first importance to the government's plans for the future:

²⁷ "Education in Siam, A Minister's Aims and Deals," *Bangkok Times*, December 3, 1934. The article refers to two interviews with Thai newspapers. Despite passage of the new act, it isn't clear how the budgetary allocation changed.

Phra Sarasas' complaints came even as the state made more money available than ever before. Budgets for education during the 1930s rose consistently. Grants for primary education rose to nearly eight million baht by 1938-1939, compared to about three million in the 1930-1931 fiscal year. Still, as with the absolutist regime, critics could find grounds for dispute. The preference given to the military was a main target. As with all colonial societies, military spending needed no explanation, while social programs had to be justified. The People's Party gave the best justification for education: the viability of democracy. Nonetheless, allotments spoke louder than rhetoric. It was mentioned above that during the sixth reign - the heyday of military pomp and ceremony - military spending was ten to 15 times education. In the 1930s, the same tendency prevailed, and the ratio grew as the war approached. *SYB*, 1938-1939, 290.

"The idea that we can build the nation with education ... or that we can cure the diseases of extravagance (*rokh samruay*) or clerkship (*rokh samian*) will likely remain dreams given that there isn't enough money." Phra Sarasas explained that he looked at the budgets over the past ten years, and saw that the amount allocated and the work needing to be done were not in accord. The yearly allocation, he wrote, was more a matter of luck than anything else."²⁸

Despite the obstacles, the government persevered with its expansion of basic schooling. Judging by the quantity of education offered, things improved throughout the 1930s. As with the first decade of compulsory schooling in the 1920s, the most dramatic changes took place at the primary level. According to government figures, the total number of schools nearly doubled between 1930 and 1939; there were about 11,500 at the end of the decade. Over the same period, student enrollment rose from nearly 678,000 to nearly 1.446 million. The teaching ranks also expanded, from about 14,000 to more than 32,000.²⁹

By 1937, according to the education ministry, some type of schooling was available everywhere. Temples housed the majority, as they always had. What it meant for schooling to be available everywhere isn't clear, nor did it mean that all children attended. Truancy or simply an inability to reach a school kept many children away. In 1934-35, for example, the government calculated that about 1.75 million primary school age children should have been

²⁸ Phra Sarasas to Phahon, June 20, 1935, in NA, (2)SR.0201.24/3.

²⁹ SYB, 1938-1939, 392.

in school; about one million actually attended. The government's ambitious plan to have at least half the population educated at the primary level remained out of reach. One district officer in 1937 estimated that 10% of children had done so, while a high-ranking government official estimated the figure at one-third.³⁰

Young people of an age that democracy could inspire remained tied to the land and did not attend school. About 76% studied only at the first two primary school grades. Numbers fell off drastically at the higher levels. Of the one million-plus children in school in 1934-35, just under 45,000 attended secondary school.³¹ Secondary enrollment expanded (from 16,500 in 1929-1930) but many children left school after completing the primary grade, or before. By 1939, there were still 45,000 secondary students.³² Few graduated from *mathayom* six - generally considered a largely complete education. For 1939, Prince Rajadapisek Sonakul head of the ministry's research department, calculated that about 5,400 people graduated at this level. Of these, about 84% were less than 18 years old; the majority were aged 15 to 17.³³ Mathayom courses remained around 200 in the kingdom by 1939, a steady number throughout the decade.

Moreover under the absolute regime, secondary education was largely confined to the capital. In the mid-1930s, for example, six provinces in all offered a

³⁰ Landon, *Siam in Transition*, 98.

³¹ Government figures quoted in Landon, *Siam in Transition*, 96, 99-101.

³² *SYB*, 1938-1939, 393.

³³ "Bantheuk Khwamhen khong Jaonathi khong Krasuang Thammakan Krom Wichakan" (Report of the Education Ministry's Research Department Official), March 1941 in NA, SR.0201.24/4 folder 1.

complete³⁴ secondary school education (Chiang Mai, Songkhla, Pitsanulok, Udon, Nakhon Rajasima and Phuket), with each province having one school that offered it. Bangkok, meanwhile, had 16 schools offering a mathayom eight education. These included the city's six leading schools, all of which were connected to royalty and the old aristocracy (Suan Kulap, Thepsirin, Patumkongkha, Wat Sutiwararam, Ban Somdet Chaophraya and Wat Benjamabophit). Two Bangkok schools offered a mathayom eight education for girls, while outside of Bangkok only one girls' school (in Chiang Mai) had one.³⁵

The centralization of knowledge in Bangkok was extraordinary. In 1939, the city had nearly 27,700 secondary school students, or about 62% of all secondary students in the kingdom; they were taught by 1,650 teachers. Upcountry, things were much different. In Ubon Rajathani with 700,000 people in the 1930s, fewer than 1,950 students enrolled in secondary education. Sixty-six teachers instructed them.³⁶ The government spent about three times as

³⁴ Full secondary education (*mathayom boribun*) entailed study to level eight. In theory, if an eight year old entered primary school, she or he would leave secondary school at 19. By the early 1940s, the government didn't support mathayom seven and eight because most students had already left by that stage and there were not enough jobs for graduates.

³⁵ The vast majority of primary level boys and girls studied together in temple schools. The government attempted to separate *mathayom* education, however, for fear of unmonitored socializing. By these numbers then, girls had even less of a chance to obtain a secondary education than boys. Letter from Deputy Minister of Public Instruction's office to secretary of the Education Department, April 28, 1936. In NA, So.Th. 39/13, "Kan Prachum Kha Luang Prajam Changwat" (Provincial Governor's Meeting).

³⁶ SYB, 1938-1939, 399 and 401.

much on Bangkok schools than those in Ubon in 1939, while Bangkok had about 11% more students than the latter.³⁷

Assessments of the Challenge

The figures on schools and their budgets show the uphill climb that the government faced in trying to implement the sixth principle of its program. Inspection tours and reports from the provinces reveal more detail about the difficulties the state faced during the first ten years of its educational initiative.

Many observers felt that expansion of education sacrificed quality for quantity. In Ratburi province in 1934, for example, the primary school act was in force in nearly all districts (146 out of 149), but the teacher student ratio was extremely high at 1:100.³⁸ Often different grades had to be combined. Crowding was not only bad for education, but for hygiene as well. Two government officials visiting Ubon in the northeast on a constitutional lecture tour found extremely dirty children and shoddy buildings: "In some schools, I couldn't bear to stand there (i.e., the classroom) for five minutes because of the students' stench."³⁹ Observers frequently commented on toilets, or the lack thereof. Six pit toilets, some too

³⁷ Ibid, 409 and 411 and 398-401. Bangkok had a total of 95,320 students enrolled in school in 1939 compared to 84,718 in Ubon in the same year.

³⁸ Ratburi MP radio address, 1934. This figure was not unusual. A Pattalung official in 1935 reported that many primary schools in his province had three teachers for about 300 students. NA, S.Th.4/195.

³⁹ "Kho Sangket Bangyang thi dai chak Kan Pai Ratchakan thi Changwat Ubon" (Some Observations from an Official Visit to Ubon), NA, SR.0201.18/7, folder 1.

dirty and fly infested to use, served about 560 students in a southern district school.⁴⁰

Facilities were generally insufficient and most schools relied on temple beneficence. In Chainat, which the reader might remember as the land of Phra Aphaimani, an area of forests and isolated villages with no roads, there were 140 government and prachaban (local) schools and 11 private schools. This was a high number for the times, but most of the prachaban schools, as around the kingdom, used wat facilities. The Chainat MP explained the outcome. The sala was the only school room and there were no chairs or tables for the students. Temple business frequently interrupted instruction, for example when monks needed the sala for preaching or if the temple hosted a funeral ceremony.⁴¹ In Nonthaburi, close to Bangkok, the same situation prevailed. If instruction didn't end entirely when temple functions needed the space, the students decamped to a hillock or a field to listen to their teacher.⁴² A multi-province central region inspection in 1934 found shoddy facilities (or their complete absence) to be one of two main obstacles to better education.⁴³ In straitened circumstances, the authorities advised local educators to do the best they could. In Nakhon Sri

⁴⁰ "Kan Truat Kansukhapiban Rong Rian" (Inspection of School Hygiene), July 21, 1934, in NA, S.Th. 43/107.

⁴¹ Chainat MP radio address, 1934.

⁴² Nonthaburi MP radio address, 1934.

⁴³ "Kha Luang Truat Kanseuksa Ayutthaya song raingan Truatkan le Kansanasombat nai Jo.Wo. Tang Tang" (Ayutthaya Educational Inspector's Report on his Inspection and Religious Monies in Various Provinces), January-May 1934, NA, S.Th. 43/104. Aside from poor facilities, the inspector reported widespread budgetary chaos in local education.

Thammarat, for example, a district was advised to use milk cartons or wooden boxes for bookshelves if needed.⁴⁴

Textbook shortages and curricular confusion were additional problems throughout the 1930s. The curricula plans outlined below give the appearance of clear teaching guidelines. But provincial teachers and officials found that what children learned and where depended mainly on personal initiative and old books. In Nakhon Sawan, for example, an official said that each level of primary and secondary school used the reader from the grade beneath them (obviously the first year of school had no texts). Where it existed, *mathayom* instruction varied from school to school; some schools used elements of the old Ayutthaya *monthon* curriculum, while others relied on plans used in some Bangkok schools. The official wrote: "The problem is especially critical at the *mathayom* level. It needs to be clearly established what will be taught at what grade. We need a uniform standard to be applied all over the country." A Nonthaburi inspector found a similar problem with different secondary school approaches used around the province. In Ubon, an official wrote to the government explaining that while the national plan called for a fixed curriculum to *prathom* six, he had never seen any texts beyond the fifth level.⁴⁵ An administrator in Sakon Nakhon

⁴⁴ Samuthesapibal Samretrajakan to Nakhon Sri Thammarat governor, January 9, 1933, commenting on Nai Deng Chusuwan's inspections. In NA, S.Th. 43/97, Rainan Truat Kanseuksa, 2475-2480 (Report of Educational Inspections, 1932-1937).

⁴⁵ "Panha Kho Songsai Ratchakan kiao ke Krom Seuksatikan" (Official Doubts for the Department of Education, Nakhon Sawan) in NA, S.Th. 4/194, and Nontaburi and Ubon in NA, S.Th. 4/195.

explained that students used a variety of texts depending on what was available, resulting in confusion.⁴⁶

What the authorities taught is difficult to tell. Chances are a child with two years of schooling would only have one year of reading from texts. The first year would have been basic language, arithmetic and Buddhist morality taught rote by a monk or young teacher. As we will see in the next section, the new regime labored under an additional burden.

A Democratic Education? The Time Lag

The textbook difficulty reflected the dominance of old regime thought. The philosophy of education changed slowly and fitfully. It was only in 1935 that the Cabinet ordered the formation of a committee to look into the specifics of a new curriculum.⁴⁷ A committee met five times in 1935 to discuss the different curricula, but slow progress in 1935 and 1936 caused anxiety in the government.⁴⁸ The Minister of Public Instruction asked several times that government expedite the curricula plans because old pre-People's Party

⁴⁶ Sakon Nakhon education inspector, NA, S.Th.4/195.

⁴⁷ The first committee included Thammasat University's Duen Bunnag and Chulalongkorn University's Prince Rajadapisek Sonakul. The latter, mentioned above briefly, was a royal with a distinguished career in government under the old regime and head of the university department in the new. Phra Darunaphayuraks, an aristocratic career bureaucrat and a member of the committee, wrote to the Minister of Public Instruction in March of that year that it would take 20 years from the introduction of a new curriculum to see concrete results. February 15, 1935 letter of Phra Darun to Minister of Public Instruction in NA, (2)SR.0201.24/1, folder 2.

⁴⁸ Committees formed after the initial curriculum plan was sent to the Cabinet also featured high-ranking (often royal) civil servants, including Prince Wan and his brother Sakol. Pridi also was on the subsequent committees.

school plans were not consistent with the new principles of government.⁴⁹ Finally in the spring of 1937 a new curriculum was officially implemented.

While the government pledged to re-organize compulsory education to inculcate democratic values, it did not make extensive changes. At the primary and lower secondary levels, the old curricula, including Thammasakmontri's *Thammacariya*, remained dominant. It took five years for officials to approve a new course curriculum, and when it did come into force it mainly added a thin glaze of democratic ethics to the foundational values of authority, hierarchy and guidance.

In 1932 and 1933, a series of classroom manuals and guides for teachers circulated in the government. These texts give us an idea of how the government wanted to present itself.⁵⁰ They also formed the outline of the new instruction in democracy. The lessons mix Buddhist teachings on self-reliance (always popular because of their adaptability to democratic discourse) and Lincoln-esque statements about popular sovereignty.

We can look first at some ethical guidelines. Primary and secondary level instruction continued to rely on

⁴⁹ Minister of Public Instruction to Prime Minister, January 13, 1936 in NA, (2)SR.0201.24/3, folder 3. Additional problems caused by the delay included no guidance on vocational education, which had been expanding in the past few years without an established curriculum. Additionally, a parliamentarian explained that upper secondary education was in limbo, with not enough teachers and official guidance. He asked that no new mathayom seven and eight year courses be offered. Phraya Pramuan Wichaphun to Cabinet Secretary, January 15, 1936 in *ibid*.

⁵⁰ NA, ST9.2/253. "Huakho thamanun kanpokkhrong pendin syam samrap pen khumer khong khru chai son nakrian chan prathom" (Points on the Constitutional Administration of Siam, a Guide for Teachers of Primary School Students) (p. 75 of file).

traditional education. *Cariya* (ethics) training for primary schoolchildren focused on manners; honesty; kindness; thrift; bravery; gratitude; diligence; unity; and non-acquisitiveness. Manners included having proper deportment in public places that demanded respect (in the classroom for example), having respect for others, knowing how to ask for forgiveness and not laughing at other people. Kindheartedness included being reliable, not getting easily angered and having loving-kindness (*metta karuna*) for other people and animals (animals were not to be teased or tortured). Bravery meant not only fortitude in action, but also a willingness to speak out and not being ashamed of honest work.⁵¹

Secondary level ethical instruction expanded on these Buddhist principles to include more on the citizen in a modern state. The budding democratic subject is layered over the Buddhist subject. Both discourses highlighted duty to others and self-control (like the refinements we saw above in Thammasakmontri's vignettes).

Upper secondary education, for those who made it that far, offered further training in the social graces: the virtues of a gentleman, diligence in giving up vices and maintaining virtue, for example. These things are linked to a more developed "understanding of worldly dhamma" (*ruchak lokatham*).⁵² In the final curricular plan adopted in 1937, the "duties and ethics of citizenship" (*nathi ponlamuang le silatham*) included explanations of the constitutional system, how the parliament worked, how elections functioned

⁵¹ "Laksut Prathom pi thi 1 theung Prathom pi thi 4" (Primary Education Curriculum Years One to Four) in *ibid.*

⁵² "Laksut Chan Mathayom 5 theung 8" (Secondary Curriculum Years Five to Eight) in *ibid.*

and the importance of national holidays (Constitution Day and Visakha Puja, for example).⁵³

The People's Party government avoided attacking the old regime. A primary-grade manual for example outlined how the old and new regimes should be described and the aims of politics. The manual praises the old government for aiming to bring the people happiness, provide internal and external safety and engender progress (3). Generally this paternal model is not attacked, but seen as incapable of meeting its goals.

The constitutional system is described as a "monarchy under the law," with the people as the sovereign power (*pen yai*) (5). Despite its failure to deliver the goods (one of the avowed reasons for the coup), the handbook explains monarchy as more important religiously than politically. The king was still needed in the new regime because of the holy power that the institution gave to the nation (*mi kasat pen pramukh peua pen sri khong chat yu*, 6).

The manuals explained something new in Thai society: how people should evaluate their political representatives. But while the notion of political representation was novel, the standards by which candidates should be judged relied on old interpretations of power. Ethics and comportment were to guide the people in their selection of representatives as much as qualifications (8). People were advised to choose candidates with graceful manners (*manrayathat an di ngam*), good will (*namjai*), and the

⁵³ Minister of Public Instruction's report, March 17, 1937 in NA, (2)SR.0201.24.1, folder 3.

qualities of "manliness."⁵⁴ The latter included warm-heartedness, the just treatment of others and self-control (*rujak banghkap jai ton eng*). Additionally, the right kind of representative works for the interests of society, is not greedy or out for himself, and sacrifices for the common good. While these values had long been associated with, in Oliver Wolters's phrase "men of prowess" as a Southeast Asian type of leader, in this modern interpretation the texts advise people to free themselves from the bonds of patrons. They should not feel compelled to choose kamnans, village heads, district heads or provincial governors as their representatives (9).

How should we evaluate these plans? I would say the People's Party's pledge on education changed the form, but not the content, of old regime schooling. The drafters of educational plans and courses were old regime officials, mostly from the aristocracy or royalty. Despite the government's statement that the old course of study was unsuitable for a democracy, in reading the course manuals that circulated in the government (the best evidence for what was being taught in the 1930s), the ethics instruction appears firmly grounded in traditional temple education. Grace and manners instruction could have been taken straight from the *Thammacariya* series.

The People's Party pledged to make democracy a social value. But the "worldly dhamma" that described democracy

⁵⁴ The modern political subject was a man. The drafters of this manual as well as other political expositions apparently forgot that the People's Party constitution and election laws guaranteed the equal rights of men and women to vote and to run for office provided they possessed the same age and educational qualifications.

bore a very strong resemblance to pre-existing social ethics. Graceful, mannered people should become representatives, for example, and democracy was portrayed as socially harmonious, much like the old regime hierarchy.

Young people, then, were on the receiving end of a depoliticized political discourse. They were given the frame of democracy, but weren't encouraged to question it. (Subjection to democracy, rather than empowerment by it, will be explored further in the propaganda section later in this chapter.) The state advised people not to choose democratic representatives based on what their patrons instructed, but how else was it to be done when the system guaranteed that only through these patrons would they gain an inkling of the new regime's philosophy?

The ethics of democracy had an uncertain impact on most young people. Most outsiders, for example young people tied to a life of farming, didn't challenge what they were taught. Some insiders, however, civil servants and the new intelligentsia, did challenge the system using democracy as a weapon. The following section will examine one group's aspirations.

Teachers: Democrats or Dupes?

The ethics manuals just described were written for teachers. The state relied on the traditional figures of social authority in Siam and all other Theravada countries to spread its message.

Many officials at the time commented on the poor qualifications of the teachers they encountered. Inspectors upcountry lamented their low learning and failure to set positive examples for their charges. This isn't surprising

given the very low secondary school enrollment and graduation numbers. Most teachers were very young, as indicated in amendments to the 1935 education act. It was stipulated that ordinary teachers (*khru noi*) must be at least 15 years old, have a teaching certificate and have completed a mathayom three education. In areas where no secondary education was possible, the law required an exam showing the equivalent of prathom four knowledge. Headmasters (*khru yai*) had to be at least 20 years old, possess a teaching certificate and have a mathayom six education. They also were required to have at least one prior year of teaching experience. If they possessed less than what was required, three years of teaching experience would suffice.⁵⁵

Very few people had teaching certificates. It is likely that the majority of teachers were only a few years older, and slightly better educated (meaning an upper primary education), than their students. This presents an odd paradox of pre-war society: the moral guardians of youth were often themselves and many of those tasked with spreading democratic values had no experience of them.

This reality reinforced a feeling often expressed at the time that most people were too immature for democracy. This is a justifiable argument. More importantly, however, the new commoner elite in the People's Party inherited the old regime's intellectual outlook and emphasis on elite authority. The new insiders were not as interested in

⁵⁵ "Kot Krasuang Thammakan, ok tam khwam nai Phraratchabanyat Prathomseuksa Phutthasakarat 2478 (chabap thi 2)" (Ministry of Public Instruction, Addendum to the 1935 Primary Education Act (Second Issue), *Rajanukitchabeksa* (54), May 17, 1937, 441-442.

supporting democratic aspirations in practice as much as in theory.

In the following cases, we will see that the authorities responded to challenges to institutional power by using this argument. A series of cases in the early 1930s shows the prevalent idea that young teachers, as much as anyone else, were easily duped by bad influences and that they didn't understand their profession sufficiently to challenge the system. Democratic discourse unleashed forces that it sought to stifle.

About a year after the revolution activists in the nationwide Teachers Association challenged the system. The group argued that the education ministry was failing the People's Party pledge because too many old bureaucrats staffed its hierarchy. People commonly used organic or rhythmic metaphors at the time in describing society or politics. In this case, the teachers used a pendulum to make their point: the drag, the dead weight of these fossils from a bygone age retarded the natural movement of education.⁵⁶

Provincial education, as described above, left much to be desired. Some in the Teachers Association contended that a large part of the problem was an old regime mindset. In August 1933, teachers at a school in Lopburi wrote to the government that the provincial education head was unsuited for the position.⁵⁷ Li Sukriket and a group of nine

⁵⁶ Pendulums were common images at the time. One wonders whether the Siamese intellectual class adopted the image from Britain. When in doubt, as Raymond Williams wrote, the English used the pendulum as metaphor. *Culture and Society*, 53.

⁵⁷ Li Sukriket and group to Prime Minister Phahon, August 9, 1933 in NA, SR.0201.27/8.

signatories explained at length the case of Khun Wichakam Piset. They argued Wichakam was a man of low learning who "doesn't want to express his opinions for fear of making mistakes." He only attained his position, they contended, because of his friendship with Dhani Nivas, the last education minister under the old regime. Wichakam's general laziness and disinterest limited the educational prospects of the province. Two years into his post, they claimed, he had yet to make it to the outlying reaches of the province, and showed no interest in the quality of provincial schools. Education in Lopburi, they asserted, was no better than it was under the old regime. In other words it remained bad, because Wichakam's "gaze doesn't reach that far" outside of his home district. Even in the head district of the province, they asserted, most students didn't know who he was because he left everything up to his subordinates. The latter flattered him; the district official in the main district only offered "window dressing" in his reports to Wichakam and hence was liked. Wichakam never examined the accounts and rarely monitored subordinates. The teachers at the *prachaban* schools lacked proper training and knowledge, but Wichakam didn't know anything either. Prachaban teachers, according to the group, had to buy their own training manuals and consult with each other about methods having never received any formal training. His style based on flattery and kowtowing, the petitioners said, was completely unsuited for the democratic age. There was no good exchange of ideas among teachers, because he never turned up to their meetings to offer guidance or encouragement.

Pichit teachers reported similar problems with their local masters. In July 1933, a group there followed up on a letter that they had written to Bangkok the previous August.⁵⁸ At that time, they had requested the removal of Phra Sawat from the head of the Pitsanuloke monthon education department. A year later, they wrote that they were aware that the administrative head of the monthon was leading an investigation, but that "if the investigation isn't called hush-hush, then we are not sure how it should be described." None of them, they asserted, had been asked to give any evidence, probably because an influential figure behind the scenes was blocking any real inquiry. When Phra Sawat got wind of the case, he conducted a personal vendetta against the group.

Like Wichakam in Lopburi, the accused in Pichit was said to be of dubious morals. Phra Sawat only liked flatterers and he harassed his subordinates, especially if they crossed him.⁵⁹ The group also contended that Sawat wasted precious funds. While he gave money for building additions to the girls' school in the monthon, Pichit children had to make do without desks and other supplies. (The group reasoned that since Pichit was an out of the way

⁵⁸ Pichit teachers group to Prime Minister Phahon, July 30, 1933 in NA, SR.0201.27/8.

⁵⁹ The petitioners cited the case of Khun Witaya, a headmaster at a Phitsanulok province school and senior monthon official. When Khun Witaya clashed with Sawat, the latter took his attitude as a personal attack, and had him sent to the wilderness of Pichit as an ordinary teacher. When Witaya raised the issue with higher authorities, Sawat realized his error and tried to rescind the transfer, but it was too late. He then attempted to pass off the transfer as a training exercise, which didn't make sense since Pichit was a very remote province without a teacher training school. Witaya successfully petitioned the government, and became a teacher at Suan Kulap in Bangkok.

province, Sawat probably thought that no one would notice.) He also wasted money allocated for the Junior Red Cross in the month on entertaining foreign guests.

In short, the group portrayed Sawat as an autocrat governing his fief with impunity. In a later letter to the government, the group claimed that a senior civil servant before 1932 knew what was going on with Sawat but important men spun a tight web of influence.⁶⁰ As mentioned above, the group expressed disappointment that the current investigation of Sawat seemed to be protecting him.

The Teachers Association's campaign against malpractice in provincial schooling gained public attention. At the beginning of September, the *Chalerm Prades* newspaper published a list of the accused and its correspondent wrote that the teacher's group truly represented the democratic age.⁶¹

The attack on reactionaries in education expanded to target the high levels of the ministry. A 187-member group explained in a letter to the prime minister around the same time as the provincial revolt that five senior figures in the ministry were old and useless.⁶² The head of the department of education for example, Phraya Pirunpittayapan, had been a bureaucrat for 30 years. His learning was out of

⁶⁰ Pichit group to Prime Minister Phahon, August 18, 1933 in *ibid.*

⁶¹ This edition has unfortunately been lost to history. Thammasakmontri cited its report in a correspondence with Prime Minister Phahon (see below). An English paper summarized a government statement objecting to the issue becoming public while it was still discussing the matter. This created a bad precedent, "it is not good policy to allow clamour by several hundred people to have any weight." "Petitions by Ministry Officials," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, September 13, 1933.

⁶² Khun Witayawuti et al. to Prime Minister Phahon, August 9, 1933 in NA, SR.0201.27/8, "Bet Set Krasuang Thammakan" (Ministry of Public Instruction Miscellany).

date, he spoke no foreign languages, and he generally idled away his time. The group also criticized Phraya Wisetsuphawatt, who in 1933 was head of the ordinary education department. Like Phraya Pirun, Phraya Wiset was solidly old regime. He had overseen two bastions of traditional schooling as the headmaster at Baan Somdet Chaophraya school and director of the Royal Pages School in Chiang Mai. At the latter school, the teachers claim Phraya Wiset did a poor job and set a bad moral example. He didn't control teachers, and his behavior (opening people's mail, for example) made him no friends. Most grievously, after June 1932 as head of ordinary education, he convened a meeting of students to protest against the People's Party takeover. Another target hit close to home. The teachers attacked Naga Thephasadin, Thammasakmontri's nephew. They claim the government promoted Naga to be assistant head of the ordinary education department over many other more qualified candidates. He studied in England because of family connections, they contended, but was a failure and had to return to Siam.

Where did all this get the activist teachers? Not very far unfortunately. Thammasakmontri, education minister at the time as we have seen, read these news reports with contempt. In August, after the storm broke, he wrote to Phahon that the Teachers Association couldn't be taken seriously.⁶³ Thammasakmontri asserted that the group had only a few real leaders, all of whom were former *ang yi* troublemakers. Prejudice drove the majority of the signatories, the minister averred; or they just did it for

⁶³ Letter of August 24, 1933 in *ibid.*

a lark. Thammasakmontri regarded their suggestions for replacements as completely unsuitable. Regarding one, he wrote that the "world will only laugh, and look down on us; in Thailand is education only worth this much?"

Thammasakmontri broke down the cases of the senior accused figures. He portrayed all of them as skilled professionals with years of experience that the young radicals could not hope to match. A native professional class, not idealists, Thammasakmontri claimed would help the country progress.⁶⁴

The government deferred completely to his judgment. Like many of the accused, Thammasakmontri had decades in public service. The new regime officials in the People's Party that led the revolution had only a few years. None of the officials lost their positions because of the accusations. While the curricula remained absolutist, so did the structure in perhaps the main ministry tasked with creating democratic subjects. The state advised people not to bow to authority when choosing representatives. Then, when in a particular case where young teachers used democratic discourse offensively, it branded the activists as troublemakers. Obviously, a bureaucratic hierarchy and elected officialdom are different. But both were supposed to be meritocracies. The People's Party discourse frequently reiterated that merit, not birth or connections, determined who one was. But people were advised in one case to trust their judgment and in another that their reason was delusional. If the wise men, it seems, weren't controlling the use of "democracy" then no one would.

⁶⁴ August 30, 1933 letter to Phahon in *ibid.*

As Fred Riggs described the People's Party model, bureaucratic tutors would instruct the people in democracy. The newly enfranchised and enlightened peasantry would then vote these bureaucrats out of office.⁶⁵

The bureaucrats wouldn't have gone quietly. In any case, the Pacific War and military dictatorship sidelined the plans for popular sovereignty. Even without a global calamity, however, it is doubtful that popular rule would have been realized. Imposing icons of authority blocked the people's view of the democratic country they had been promised.

Democratic language entered a discursive field dominated by hierarchy and deference to authority. The assimilation of democracy to the older systems, when it was understood, would likely have blunted the force of new ideas. But the effort wasn't airtight. The young teachers, outsiders to the elite hierarchy who challenged the educational bureaucracy, acted on a new way of thinking that had been furthered by 1932. Their efforts failed and they were maligned, but the new discourse produced unexpected (and from the state's perspective, unwelcome) new ways of expression. As we will see in a later chapter on Buddhism, outsiders in another field took seriously the new ideas and tried to reform an institution.

Propaganda

This chapter concludes with an explanation of a different kind of governmental effort to enlighten people, via publicity. Given the limitations of the educational

⁶⁵ *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity*, 182.

system, the government sought shortcuts to promote a democratic ideology. As with education, the new ideology sought a way to control what could be conceived. But, also like education, the ideological strictures escaped the control of the government and new ideas inspired people to test the limits of democracy.

Mass Communications? The New World of Government Publicity

The People's Party took power at a time when modern communications generated a great deal of excitement in Siam. Radio appeared in the late 1920s and deepened the penetration of foreign news, ideas and culture into the kingdom.⁶⁶ Modern gadgetry and the new ideas it brought remained largely the preserve of the urban middle and upper classes. Printing, an old technology first used in the mid-nineteenth century, remained Bangkok-focused.

The new regime pledged to change this. Like others, Ronasit Pichai, an army officer and follower of Song Suradet, and one of the new men assigned the task of publicity, asserted that a main problem with the old regime was its unresponsiveness to popular aspirations and its secretiveness about state affairs. In the new regime, he insisted that more and better state news should be written and broadcast to the people. Ronasit especially lamented the near total exclusion of the provinces from the news business. Poor communications, as we saw, made it difficult to find out about the provinces. Because of this, as he maintained, metropolitan news (often petty) filled the

⁶⁶ Cinema also became very popular in the capital in the late 1920s. Film had a strong influence on popular culture, as we will see in the chapter on literature.

papers and fed the feeling that only Bangkok mattered. In the new era: "It is necessary that common people's knowledge expand to include the entire country and for provincial people to feel as if they are one, and not left out of the commonality as before."⁶⁷

The government established a publicity bureau in the prime minister's office in May 1933 with Prince Sakon Voravan, Prince Wan's brother, in charge.⁶⁸ In subsequent years it would become a department. In 1934, it had only 20 staff in total, with 10 of these in the lectures division. As in education, budgets and experienced people proved to be long running problems for the dissemination of knowledge.⁶⁹

The fascist countries greatly inspired the People's Party in their dedication to propaganda. Writers and officials at the time often noted the similar timing of the People's Party coup (June 1932) and the Nazi electoral route to power (January 1933). Supporters saw both as attempting to refashion weak countries (or more accurately in the German case, a powerful nation brought low) into strong ones. Phraya Issaraphakdi, another of the men charged with overseeing publicity, argued that the German

⁶⁷ "Kham Banyai Rabiap Ratchakan khong Samnakngan Khosanakan" (Lecture on the Government System by the Publicity Department), August 21, 1935 in NA (2)SR.0201.18/3.

⁶⁸ Suwimon Phonlajan, "Krom Kosanakan kap Kan Kosana Udomkan Thang Kanmuang khong Rat, 2476-2487" (The Propaganda Department and Dissemination of State Political Principles, 1933-1944) (M.A. thesis, Thammasat University, 1988), 16-17.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 19-21, 32-33. The total budget for public information was 50,000 baht in 1933, and most of this went to the salaries of the staff. By comparison, Nazi Germany spent 256 million francs; Italy 119 million; France 71 million and Britain 69 million. "Europe Spends Millions Yearly for Propaganda," *Bangkok Daily Mail*, May 10, 1933.

model was thus fitting because of the "time and place" (*kala thesa*) in which the People's Party project happened. English translations of press releases from Germany on the occasion of Goebbels' opening of the Ministry for the Enlightenment of the People and Propaganda circulated in the government, with advocates highlighting the centrality of propaganda as a vital link between the state and the people.⁷⁰

The initial plans for the propaganda department closely followed the German example. In 1933 Issaraphakdi outlined a department named in English as the Department for National Enlightenment and Propaganda.⁷¹ Issaraphakdi admired the Nazis' aggressive attempts at mind control. Others in the publicity drive advocated a more gentle approach. Sakon in July 1933 had submitted a plan that called for the government to use moral suasion (*phra khun*) rather than outright coercion (*phra dej*), for example, to influence the press.⁷² Ronasit argued that enlightening the populace didn't mean dragooning them.

⁷⁰ Goebbels' speech and the ministry's opening occurred on March 13, 1933. "Bantheuk Ruang Kan Kosanakan khong Rataban" (Report on Government Propaganda), July 21, 1933 in NA (2)SR.0201.18/3.

⁷¹ Sakon Voravan to Prime Minister Phahon, August 22, 1933 in NA (2)SR.0201.18/6. Sakon reported Issaraphakdi's plan to Phahon in this letter. Enlightenment here also was the name for one of the proposed divisions within the department. It obviously has a social-political meaning - "Kong Songserm Khwamru Ratsadon" - literally, the division for the increase of citizen knowledge - not a spiritual one. Propaganda at the time did not have the negative meaning it has carried since the totalitarian twentieth century. In Thai, the English word was sometimes glossed as "Kanpey Pre," literally dissemination, and sometimes "publicity" was used for *khosana*.

⁷² Sakon's plan of July 21, 1933 in NA, (2)SR.0201.18/3. The government also realized the limits of information control in a small country dependent on great powers. Sakon noted Siam didn't

Like all other new regime officials who directed the dissemination of the new ideology, however, Ronasit came from the bureaucracy. In his case, a specific section: the military strategy division under the control of Song Suradet. While his approach to propaganda at the time is certainly more progressive than the Goebbels' approach favored by Issaraphakdi, like most of the vanguard he held firmly to a tutelage model. Democracy would be taught to the people; they would not experiment with it or debate meanings.

Radio, the Magic Device

Ronasit posited four aims for the propaganda drive: to create a stable administration; gain the confidence of other countries; promote understanding among the people; and get all civil servants to understand their responsibilities and duties. This section concerns primarily the third goal; how was this done? Newspapers had transformed society in the first few decades of the century and brought democratic, anti-elitist values to the urban population. But, as Ronasit explained, the city was as far as any new dialogue traveled. Upcountry areas remained cutoff from this information source and in any case most people couldn't read.

Then there was radio. This "magic device" (*khruang wiset*) presented an exciting new option that quickly became an infatuation. Listening to Western music and world news was a novel social experience. Like other consumer products, however, it remained a luxury of the urban elite. Radios

have a government news service, as the Japanese did, that could control the news sent overseas.

gave rise the same problem as good schools and books; they became concentrated in those with disposable income. Sakon Voravan estimated in 1933 that there were 16,000 radios in the country; the following year Ronasit put the figure at 25,000. Most were in Bangkok. The 50%+ increase in a year is impressive, but Ronasit estimated that this represented only 2.5% of what was needed to reach people.⁷³ The government acknowledged that radio was too expensive for most people.⁷⁴

Soon after the coup, the radio division offered to sell radios to schools at a special rate, which depending on the type, ranged from about 50 to 70 baht. The government supported the idea as it was planning a thrice-weekly half-hour educational program specifically for teachers, and stated that it wanted every district in the kingdom to have at least one radio. If the money couldn't be found, the education ministry suggested that the local bourgeoisie (*khahabodi* and *pho kha*) and civil servants might be persuaded to pitch in for the common good and buy a set for their district.⁷⁵ The government commenced with

⁷³ Sakon's report of July 21, 1933 and "Kitchakan khong Samnakngan Khosanakan banyai thang Withayu doi Nai Phan Tri Ronasit Pichai" (Ronasit Pichai's Radio Address on the Publicity Department's Work), September 2, 1934. The number doubled in two years. By one count, in 1931 there were 11,007 radios in the kingdom. Suwimon, "Krom Kosanakan," 12.

⁷⁴ "Listening in too costly for Siamese," *Bangkok Times*, February 25, 1937.

⁷⁵ Some provincial officials thought that radios were still too expensive, despite the discount, and that in any case time spent by teachers traveling to the radio meant time away from teaching. The reception of the message, they contended, would also always be a problem. The governor of Chumphon argued "some won't understand (the program) and will forget it soon anyway." Instead he suggested that only one teacher be sent to a provincial capital and take notes for his fellows on what he heard.

its on air teacher programs at the beginning of 1933, but it isn't clear how successful the initiative was. Private radios in provincial capitals seemed to be the main way that teachers could hear the programs, which relied on knowing the local middle class well enough to visit them and listen in their homes.⁷⁶

Capacity posed another problem. In the early 1930s, Phraya Thai station in Bangkok was the only transmitting station and had power for only two or three hours of programming a day. Furthermore, the ten-kilowatt signal often disappeared outside of the Bangkok area. By one estimate, the signal traveled well for about 300 kilometers. Receiver quality upcountry was another issue; many of the cheapest sets had only intermittent reception.⁷⁷

A third problem, after cost and capacity, was the limited staff of the department noted above. Ronasit explained that the government quickly discovered it didn't have enough qualified people to speak on the topics it broadcast. It thus opened the door to suitable people of any class or background to come and deliver lectures in their areas of expertise. In the mid-1930s, these included: health, provincial history, religion, morals, sports and hobbies such as photography or music. Ever vigilant, the

⁷⁶ Radio official to secretary of Minister of Public Instruction, October 14, 1932; "Kham nenam khong monthon ruang tang khruang withayu tam rong rian" (Monthon suggestions on setting up radios in schools), no date; Chumphon governor to Monthon Nakhon Sri Thammarat head, December 8, 1932; latter's reply, December 14, 1932, all in NA S.Th.4/160.

⁷⁷ Suwimon, "Krom Kosanakan," 36. War and nationalism spurred government investment in capacity. The government set up stations in Phra Ta Bong (Battambang), Srisophon and Siam Rat (Siem Reap) when these provinces were taken from the French in 1940, and also stations in the northeast to better reach the provinces. Ibid, 33-34.

government censored all content prior to airing. The state sought to depoliticize public discourse as much as possible. Only certain government representatives could speak of politics, and this meant administrative topics, not debates or philosophy.

Even so, the regime couldn't manage complete control of discourse. We saw in the previous chapter that parliamentarians spoke on radio about their provinces. Some, for example a Chiang Mai representative, spoke glowingly about their people's loyalty to the new regime and how happy everyone was in their villages.⁷⁸ Undoubtedly, this would have pleased the publicity bureau. Others, however, as we saw spoke forthrightly about the problems they faced at home. Referring to their province for example as the "bastard child of a minor wife" can't have been very popular with the authorities, unless perhaps the clear implication was that the old regime was responsible. Whether the government really approved of parliamentarians as legitimate voices or not remains unclear. Parliamentary politics in the decade often got feisty and confrontational. To the executive branch, which never really decided firmly how far to allow democracy to develop, it was a fine line between debate and disloyalty.

Radio broadcasts frequently addressed moral education. Unless spoken by approved voices, no link could be made between morals and politics. The state invited Buddhist monks to the radio programs. It stipulated that only those

⁷⁸ "Pathakata Rueang Saphap khong Changwat Chiang Mai" (Lecture on the Topic of the State of Chiang Mai Province), in *Pathakata khong Phu Then Ratsadon*, 31-37. The lecture was delivered on December 4, 1934.

of parian five or higher could lecture.⁷⁹ Government stated explicitly, however, that politics could not be broached, criticizing people or groups was not allowed, and sermons could not be too long winded or cover worldly topics. Instead, the government suggested that monks focus on the old standbys of moral education: the Sangha administration, the history of Buddha images or particular temples, and the *jataka* tales.⁸⁰

In the mid-1930s, the government's Fine Arts Department - the premier state cultural authority - instituted a new type of discourse: public debates. The department sponsored a range of exchanges, which were carried on the radio and proved to be popular. Many hundreds of people attended the debates and applied to participate. Oratory became valued in the government's discourse of democracy.⁸¹ It also formed part of the interest in self-improvement that was both state sponsored and popular among the middle classes.⁸²

⁷⁹ Initially the speakers were only from Bangkok and Thonburi because of the difficulty upcountry monks would have traveling to Phya Thai.

⁸⁰ "Khambanyai Rabiap Ratchakan" (Report on the Government System), August 21, 1935 in NA (2)SR.0201.18. Monks under pressure, however, extolled the government. During his incarceration at Bang Kwang prison after 1932 for allegedly fomenting revolt, Luen Saraphai avoided Sunday sermons at all costs. He described them as naked government propaganda that attacked the old regime and all government enemies. Luen, *Fanrai khong Khappachao* (My Nightmare) (Bangkok: Odeon, 1949), xx.

⁸¹ For an example of improvement literature see Mom Luang Cha-on Issarasakdi, *Sinlapa khong Kan Phut: Khumer Jampen samrap Phu thi Tongkan Kaona nai Chiwit* (The Art of Speaking: A Necessary Handbook for People who Must Advance in Life) (n.p, n.d.).

⁸² Wichit Wathakan is the best-known figure of the self-help movement. In addition to Scot Barmé, *Luang Wichit Watakan and the Creation of Thai National Identity* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1993) where he discusses some of his work in this area, see Craig Reynolds, "Thai Manual Knowledge: Theory and Practice," in his *Seditious*

Not only abstract issues of political philosophy were banned, but any discussion of government policy. Such interesting topics as the need for irrigation or social issues like prostitution were off limits.⁸³ Instead people were invited to show their skill in debating things like: heat is better than cold for health, cigarette smoking is better than betel chewing, strength is more effective than virtue, women of old were better than those today, or beauty contests do more good than harm. Despite the vagueness of these topics, speakers were reigned in if the topic veered too near sensitive issues.⁸⁴

Then as now in Siam, the newspapers were more assertive and critical of public affairs than radio, which was under government control. Newspaper writers in the 1930s were not terribly impressed with government radio and offered a range of criticisms: the government was too lax in supervising morals and too strict in not allowing free expression. "Mr. Ratburi" in 1936 wrote in the *Krungthep Warasap*, a leading newspaper, that the 180 minutes of nightly service then offered was essentially a waste of

Histories: Contesting Thai and Southeast Asian Pasts (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 214-242, and especially 238-239.

⁸³ "Nayok sang kae Kho Wa thi" (The Minister Orders Improvements to Debates), *Krungthep Warasap*, August 10, 1935.

⁸⁴ "To wathi thi Krom Silpakorn meua Wan Athit sanuksanan thang 3 reuang phu fang lon rong" (Debates at the Fine Arts Department last Sunday, Great Fun with all three topics having overflowing crowds), *Krungthep Warasap*, August 20, 1935; "Phuying nai adit di kwa patchuban" (Women in the Past, Better than Today?), *Mitthraphap*, November 1935. A debate on beauty contests, for example, flouted on-air politeness codes when some participants started attacking women as a whole. One competitor arguing against the contests opined that beauty contests were immoral since all entrants, it was well known, were prostitutes. "Kanto Wathi," *Krungthep Warasap*, November 21, 1935.

time: "The directors should try and please listeners rather than the Fine Arts Department" (i.e., for fear of having their budget cut). He explained that the three hours of programming was comprised of 30 minutes of lectures; 30 minutes miscellaneous news (most of which was in the newspapers that listeners had already read); and an hour and a half of music (not very good music at that, he claims). The remaining 30 minutes he explained was advertising, which was a waste of time. Another writer around the same time also complained that playing gramophone recordings to fill the time was a waste of resources. As far as the news went, he contended, much more public information should be disseminated about new laws, local news and more informative international news, "not just Italy's war with Abyssinia." An English-language writer concurred, asserting that most radio programs were government propaganda without enough real news.⁸⁵

In addition to its personnel, infrastructure and economic limitations, then, radio content itself was shaped as much by what was left out. Monks, the chief moral guardians traditionally, could not discuss the new regime. The popular debates had to focus on general topics and aimed to practice speaking well. In a regime of sanctioned voices, however, parliamentarians constituted an ambiguous class. We will see this further below.

⁸⁵ Mr. Ratburi in "Kho Khot Khuan Khit" (Things to Think On), *Krungthep Warasap*, March 1936; second article "Withayu Krajai Siang khong Rao khuan prapprung hai Krachap kwa thi Thamkan yu Thuk Wannii" (Our Radio System Should be Improved), *Thert Rathamanun*, February 13, 1936; English article "The Radio," *Bangkok Times*, March 13, 1937.

The Lecture Tour

In an explanation in 1934, Ronasit Pichai asserted that 25% of the population believed in democracy, 15% were against the new order and the remaining 60% didn't understand the new regime or its ideology and felt that it had no relevance for their lives. The government's critical task lay ahead.⁸⁶

With limited education and even more limited radio, duty fell to the approved publicists of the new order on lecture tours. What did they discuss? Initially, officials scrambled to answer clearly this relatively straightforward question. Rural experience provided an important impetus to the government's publicity drive. An MP for Petchabun province informed the government that he tried to explain the new order to local people but quickly found himself in over his head.⁸⁷ Other government authorities also found themselves confronted by uncomprehending or hostile crowds. An MP for Lamphun for example misspoke in trying to explain the tax system and found tobacco farmers refusing to pay the tax at all. This irritated the interior ministry, which sought to get civil servants to stick to an approved script when giving constitutional lectures in villages.⁸⁸ Soon

⁸⁶ "Kitchakan khong Samnakngan Khosanakan" (Activities of the Publicity Bureau), September 2, 1934 in NA (2)SR.0201.18/3.

⁸⁷ This letter prompted an effort to publicize the work of the various ministries. Khun Inthongphakdi to Cabinet Secretary, December 30, 1933, NA SR.0201.16/46. The publicity bureau argued internally that cooperation and openness were keys to the success of a democracy, but the plea fell on deaf ears. Publicity officials lamented the unwillingness of the ministries (especially defense) to share information. The exchange between the Publicity Bureau and the Cabinet was three years after the 1932 coup. See the letters in NA SR.0201.16/47.

⁸⁸ Ministry of Interior to Cabinet Secretary, June 11 and July 11, 1934 in NA, SR.0201.16/46. A similar problem was reported in

after, the publicity bureau sought message consistency in the lecture circuit. Lecturers most often promoted the new order by discussing two topics: popular sovereignty and rights and duties of the citizenry.

Speakers should explain that the people before 1932 had no role in the administration of the country. In one explanation, rights and power were almost entirely one-sided; an elite class had them, the masses did not.⁸⁹ In another, what rights the people had were never explained to them.⁹⁰ Post-1932, the government advised, the people should be told that there were no masters and servants any longer (*mai mi nai mai mi bao*).⁹¹

Speakers described rights and duties as interdependent. Rights were divided into equality and liberty. Articles 12 to 15 of the permanent constitution of December 1932 formed the foundation. People should be advised that equality means legal equality, as Article 12 stated, not equality of wealth. Most importantly, legal equality for the first time in Thai history superseded the privileges of ranks, titles and class. Judicial equality meant that the courts judged

Chiang Mai. Chiang Mai provincial committee letter to deputy Minister of Interior, July 6, 1934 in *ibid.* In Nakhon Pathom in 1934, lecturers found local people, believing that they were now "free" to do as they liked, had seized land from wealthy landowners and were capitalizing on its rental. The lecturers instructed local officials that any further Soviet-style land expropriation could not be allowed. Publicity Bureau to Cabinet Secretary, May 1934 in NA, SR.0201.18/7.

⁸⁹ Pairoj Chaiyanam, *Pathakata Khosana Phak thi Ha: Rueang Sithi le Nathi khong Phonlamuang* (Propaganda Lectures Part Five: Rights and Duties of the Citizenry) (Songkhla Provincial Committee, 1935), 2.

⁹⁰ Fung Charoenwit, *Sithi le Nathi Phonlamuang tam Rabawp Prachathipatai* (Rights and Duties of Citizens according to the Democratic System) (Chachoengsao Provincial Committee, 1934), 18.

⁹¹ "Lak haeng Kan Sadaeng Pathakata" (Principles of Lectures), NA, (2)SR.0201.18/9. Undated, this document is probably from 1934.

the disputes of all citizens equally (the military formed an exception, as the forces had their own courts). Class or family was irrelevant. State responsibilities affected the citizen in two ways: taxes and military service (described in Article 15 of the constitution). Citizens also had the duty to take care of their families, the basic social unit, to work and to respect the law.

Lecturers followed Articles 13 and 14 of the constitution when describing liberty. Speakers explained that progressive countries are those that do not allow slavery, the loss of autonomy, which is "very similar to the state of a savage beast." Regarding religion, "people are free to believe in any faith they like, or none at all." Association was free, but government permission must be obtained in order to set up an association. People could freely choose whatever education they wanted, but could not opt out of education altogether.⁹² Finally, lecturers described constitutionalism as civilized: "we don't live in a savage country."

Right through the 1930s lecturers toured the countryside. They commonly traveled several months in the dry season, giving talks throughout a particular region. In a 63-day tour on the eastern seaboard provinces at the end of the decade, for example, a committee visited nearly 55,500 people in 44 places. Officials distributed 1,500 pictures of the Constitution and an equal number of copies of the document. They handed out 2,000 printed lectures, and 1,500 collections of the Prime minister's speeches.⁹³

⁹² Fung, *Sithi le Nathi khong Phonlamuang*, 19-34.

⁹³ "Kanpaitham Kansadaeng Pathakata nai Khet Changwat Chachoengsao, Prachinburi le Nakhon Nayok" (Lecture Tours in

Young supporters of the People's Party formed the core of the lecturers. Their opinions on rural understanding of the new regime's philosophy are mixed. That the people generally didn't understand constitutional democracy isn't surprising. To maximize the impact, the government advised that the quality of listeners trumped the quantity. It counseled that only people with a minimum of four years' primary education be allowed to attend. Children and old women were ostensibly banned.⁹⁴ The educated middle strata of society - civil servants, monks, the rural bourgeoisie and teachers - formed the core audience.

Making the Constitution Sacred

It isn't clear how well the trickle down theory of instruction in the new principles of governance - on radio or lecture via an educated and receptive elite to illiterate peasants - actually worked. I will conclude this chapter by detailing another approach taken by the party: presenting the constitution itself as a sacred object embodying universal law. The government celebrated the anniversary of the coup each year with public commemorations of the progress the country had made under the constitutional order. The government frequently likened the constitution to the Dhamma. These celebrations encouraged people to have faith.

Spectacle formed an important part of the inspiration to have faith in the power of the new order. In addition to speeches and written texts, the new regime relied on seeing

Chachoengsao, Prachinburi and Nakhon Nayok Provinces), June 28, 1939, NA, (2)SR.0201.18/7.

⁹⁴ "Khambanyai Rabiap Ratchakan," NA, (2)SR.0201.18.

as a way of believing. The spectacle also offered profane fun in addition to sacred ritual. As with the age-old temple festivities that created community spirit amidst moral indoctrination, the People's Party festivals relied on distraction and amusement to hammer home the serious messages of a new democratic loyalty. These spectacles also raised vital cash for the army, education and social programs.

The People's Party found fertile ground in advancing their ideology as a performance.⁹⁵ The spectacle of People's Party power is usually associated with the fascist phase of the movement under Phibun's wartime leadership. Phibun directed construction of the great monuments of the era that expressed an ideology of commoner heroism and martial valor.⁹⁶ From the beginning in 1932, however, the government was interested in its image. Probably the most famous photograph of the period is King Prajadhipok's bestowal of the permanent constitution in a ceremony on December 10, 1932. Ever after the government used the picture as a way to legitimize and sacralize the constitution. December 10th became Constitution Day, the center of a series of festivities that celebrated the new order.

The December rituals continued right through the 1930s and early 1940s. The events of 1934 can be given as an example. On December 8th, a ceremony was held in which

⁹⁵ The spectacle of modern royal power began with the fifth reign. Fascinated with photography and wanting to rule as an approachable monarch, King Chulalongkorn and his men created powerful images that brought the monarchy into high profile. See Peleggi, *Lords of Things*.

⁹⁶ See Chatri Phrakittanakan, *Silapa Sathapatchyakam Khana Ratsadon* (Architecture and the People's Party) (Bangkok: Matichon, 2009).

monks chanted over and blessed the constitution. The government presented 30 monks from Bangkok and Thonburi with new robes. On the following day, Brahmin priests blessed the constitution and anointed it with holy water. The constitution was then placed in the throne hall, where kings had been crowned and now the People's Party had its headquarters.

Twin blessings - Buddhist first, Hindu second -- took place also on the 10th of December after a constitutional procession of honor around Bangkok. Delegations of the new people empowered by the regime - the military, businesspeople, labor, farmers and people's associations - accompanied the constitution on its tour. The four-hour public journey through the old city culminated at Sanam Luang, where schoolboys and girls and the Tiger Cubs association flanked the final approach to a ceremonial hall erected for the purpose. Brahmin priests strew popped rice and flowers around the hall, a *pipat* orchestra played and then the constitution was finally entrusted to municipal officers. The blessings took place at five in the afternoon. At precisely 5.18 pm, a procession of planes flew overhead and dropped garlands of flowers onto the site.⁹⁷

Song Suradet, a senior member of the original coup group, opined that the June 24, 1932 takeover would have attracted more attention from an apathetic public if plotters had staged theater plays and drafted in a Chinese noodle soup vendor. While sarcastic, Song's recollection reflects the awareness of the new elite that some excitement would need to be injected into the new civic

⁹⁷ "Kamnotkan Kanngan Chalong Ratthamanun" (Schedule of Constitutional Celebrations), December 7, 1934, NA SR.0201.16/38.

religion if it were to have a chance at success. The solemn Buddhist and Brahmin ceremonies were a start, but more was required. For additional psychological and material benefit, the government held the first ever Siamese beauty contest in the 1934 festivities.⁹⁸ In addition, contests of *takraw*, chess and other pastimes, a lottery, food, drink and toys all made the multi-day event a family affair. The lottery, like the beauty contests, required a fee. First prize in the lottery was the tremendous sum of 10,000 baht; the total pool was 25,000 baht.⁹⁹

The sacralization of the constitution effectively added it to the holy trinity of Thai-ness: to nation, religion and king was now added the constitution, pictured on its pedestal. After 1932, many newspapers carried this symbol on their literature and it was featured in much public imagery.

The question remains whether the experience of the living constitution worked stronger magic on the people than did the lectures, radio or faulty educational system. Ronasit's hypothetical 60% of the population who didn't care either way for the new order may be nearer the representative mark of public allegiance than the vocal middle and upper classes who fought it out in the pages of

⁹⁸ Thai political modernity and objectification of the female body are intertwined. Wu Jongfen, a writer with the Chinese paper *Hua Chiao Yer Ba* wrote that modern, educated people shouldn't be ashamed of their bodies. Girls from modest backgrounds upcountry could potentially earn great fame, he argued, not for themselves but for their hometowns. The government used the entry fees for the beauty contests to buy weaponry for the military, fund constitutional publicity and for poverty relief. The judges were all men. NA, SR.0201.16/38.

⁹⁹ The 2½" by 4" lottery card showed a picture of the constitution and the armed forces on the front and listed the names of the day's organizing committee on the back.

newspapers, or the princes and army officers with their rebellions and assassination attempts.

Further, critics who wanted a more democratic system doubted that constitutional festivals were an improvement over the old sacred rituals of monarchy. Thawin Udon - one of the young group of northeastern MPs who challenged the status quo - argued in the late 1930s that people lighting candles and incense for the constitution and regarding it as holy was no different than grannies going to listen to sermons at the temple in order to make merit. Neither group took in the message, he contended. Constitutional fairs were the equivalent of these old women, who slept through most of the delivery, then woke up at the end of a sermon shouted *sadhu* (amen) a couple of times and fell asleep again until the next intermission. Real democracy, he asserted, was different. It was active, contentious and lived in the villages and rural towns, not in state-sponsored festivals and passive acceptance of what was presented.¹⁰⁰

Like education, radio programs, lectures and parades had a limited audience. Few people had radios, lectures excluded the uneducated and constitutional celebrations, while more inclusive, made the biggest splash in Bangkok (and secondarily in provincial capitals) and only happened once a year.

Further, all three media were governed by the same effort to control the discourse of democracy that featured in the education system. Radio lectures, except for the

¹⁰⁰ "Thesaban pen Prakan Prachathipatai" (Municipalities are the Guarantors of Democracy), *Siam Ukhos*, August 21, 1938.

ministers' annual review of the regime's accomplishments, contained no political opinions. While the government debated internally whether coercion or moral suasion would work better to make productive citizens, it envisioned both tactics as uni-directional. The state advised upcountry lecturers to stick to its script on the constitution and the rights and duties it entailed. The government instructed people in the lectures that they were autonomous, as paradoxical as that sounds. Constitutional celebrations perhaps posed the least troubling ideological problem, since they seem the most "traditional" of the three approaches outlined here. The constitution became part of the national mythology. Like the king and the Dhamma, the constitution protected the people. It was above and beyond them, but also constituted their being.

The people existed at a double remove from true democracy: they may have not understood the state's message, and in any case, the state was master of democracy and not a fellow traveler.

Conclusion

It is tempting to view the mass of people, Ronasit's 60%, as living in a black box. The light of the new order didn't enter. Many educated outsiders -- bearing in mind that "educated" refers most broadly to anyone with a primary school education and work that went beyond tilling the land -- expressed frustration that the post-1932 government didn't broaden the political spectrum and remained under the sway of old regime thought. As we will see more in later chapters, popular opinion challenged the official mentality. The Pacific War put an end to the first

phase of Siam's democracy, but the attempt to realize basic rights would continue. Post-war society's memory was very selective, however. The People's Party era would be seen negatively on both the left and the right. Democracy after the war meant different things, but the Khana Ratsadon version was labeled a failure.

Chapter Four: Outsiders and the Sangha: The Regional Challenge

This chapter discusses challenges to the religious authority of Bangkok during the 1930s. I will focus on two cases: the northern monk Khruba Srivichai's refusal to comply with Bangkok directives, and the movement of regional Mahanikai monks against elite Thammayut domination of the Sangha.

Khruba Srivichai's biography shows a regional saintly tradition resisting both the absolutist and constitutional states. The Mahanikai sect challenged the Thammayut before the coup, but asserted their case with renewed energy in the People's Party era.

Even as its political power expanded the state's dominance of the country's most important cultural form was continually challenged. The state appears paradoxically strong and weak simultaneously. Research into these cases shows the primary role of popular voices in shaping twentieth-century Thai Buddhism and is an important counter to the state-centric studies that are commonly taught. The People's Party was largely powerless in religious affairs. Their bold plan for democracy and social renovation didn't discuss Buddhism. Instead, two outsider groups fought within the discourse of religious authority: rural monks (and their networks, which included young urban support in the Mahanikai case) tangled with the upper class urban sect, and the latter responded by asserting the privileges and ideological authority that the absolute monarchy had created for elite Buddhism. In both cases, the People's Party deferred to the Sangha elite, a group of old men that

had been appointed under the old regime and who continued to direct Buddhist affairs through most of the People's Party era. Only around the time of the Pacific War did the new government try - in an unsteady way -- to create a more democratic religious hierarchy.

Dominance without Hegemony: Reconsidering State Buddhism

For the royal elite, Buddhism was a foundation of state ideology. The long-standing mutual reliance of kings and the Sangha created a powerful metaphysical grounding for secular authority and social hierarchy. Royally sponsored temples enjoyed considerable prestige and wealth.¹

Siamese Buddhism however has always featured many diverse practices and influences. Thanissaro Bhikkhu usefully divides modern Buddhism into three main strands: customary, reformist and state.² The customary faith (or faiths, since there are many local traditions) has typically consisted of a motley core of teachings and practices handed down from master to student over generations. Monks led sedentary lives in villages and

¹ There are several good studies of modern Thai Sangha-state relations. See Saweng Udomsri, *Kanpokkhrong Khanasong Thai* (Governance of the Thai Sangha) (Mahachulalongkorn Withayalai, 1990); Yoneo Ishii, *Sangha, State and Society: Thai Buddhism in History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1986); Stanley J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Somboon Suksamran, *Buddhism and Political Legitimacy* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1993); Peter Jackson, *Buddhism, Legitimation and Conflict* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1983); and Kamala Tiyavanich, *Forest Recollections: Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).

² Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "The Customs of the Noble Ones," Access to Insight, June 7, 2010, available at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/customs.htm> 1.

served local people, for example as teachers of basic literacy, traditional healers or fortunetellers. There often would be little, if any, familiarity with the Pali language, the Pali Canon or scholasticism among the little traditions scattered around the country. Sermons had to engage local people's interest and thus were usually dramatic. Stories from the Buddha's prior lives were especially popular for the bodhisattva ideal of conduct, but also local folktales and extra-canonical teachings such as the Questions of King Milinda were used. Skilled preachers recited very long passages from the jataka tales in rotation during festivals and holy days.³ Customary wat education avoided the Pali Canon. Its pedagogic style often lifts words or phrases (*yok sap*) completely out of the context of the original scripture or source to make a moral or intellectual point that is understood in a local context.⁴

Customary Buddhism, in all its diversity, has represented Thai Buddhism for the majority of the population. A new force emerged among the Bangkok elite beginning in the 1820s. A small group of reform-minded, back to the Canon religious intellectuals coalesced around a son of Rama II who enjoyed a monastic career for decades before becoming King Mongkut (r. 1851-1868). Mongkut established the Thammayut ("In Accordance with the Dhamma") order that became the elite standard for correct practice of the religious life. The Thammayut group stressed three things: the centrality of a purified Canon that is "true

³ Kamala, *Forest Recollections*, 30-34.

⁴ See Justin McDaniel, *Gathering Leaves and Lifting Words: Histories of Buddhist Monastic Education in Laos and Thailand* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

Buddhism," the importance of the vinaya code of discipline and the primacy of scholarly work. The movement didn't conceive of a rational, scripture-based faith *ex nihilo* but, as Nithi argues, intervened in an ongoing nineteenth-century dialogue about Buddhism's true nature.⁵ Further, this royal movement - which came to dominate the politics of Thai Buddhism - wasn't "Thai" at all in its immediate inspiration. Despairing at the lax discipline and ignorance of Thai monks he encountered, the bhikkhu-prince Mongkut re-ordained in the Mon tradition. Mon monks living in wats on the Thonburi side of the Chaophraya river across from the royal palace greatly impressed Mongkut with their discipline and knowledge. Study of the vinaya and ascetic practices with a Mon teacher energized Mongkut's wish to reform Thai Buddhism. His brother Rama III (r. 1824-1851) was embarrassed that a Thai prince had to study with an ethnic minority to learn about the faith and so built him his own monastery where he could assemble his people.⁶

State Buddhism, which developed as part of the administrative reforms of Mongkut's son King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910), elevated the Thammayut to national religious dominance. The state under Chulalongkorn reorganized the Sangha hierarchy. In theory, the 1902 Sangha Act for the first time created a single administrative structure for the Buddhist order, which was organized to parallel the civil administration. All monks had to be registered with the authorities and had to conduct themselves according to state directives.

⁵ See "Biographies of the Buddha," in *Pen and Sail*.

⁶ Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "The Customs of the Noble Ones."

The Thammayut interpretation of Buddhism became the standard advanced by the state as it expanded its control upcountry. With the administrative reforms, the small group defined itself as a caste apart. While the royal sect administered itself independently, it also governed the Mahanikai in three geographic sections, central, south and north. Thammayut monks oversaw the expansion of the administrative hierarchy. The vast majority of monks in the kingdom then effectively became members of a residual category. While the Thammayut grew among a cosmopolitan Bangkok royalty and had clear ideas about religious belief and practice, the Mahanikai possessed no simple provenance or ideology. Instead, it represented loose networks of thousands of upcountry teachers of diverse ethnic and regional origins and all the wonderful heterodox confusion of centuries of oral teachings.

When the act passed, religious power theoretically became centralized in the Council of Elders, a select group of senior monks dominated by the Thammayut. In fact, the Supreme Patriarch - the SP, head of the Sangha - became the most important official in the hierarchy, partly because of the age and travel difficulties of the council and a lack of interest in meeting agendas. Also, however, the personality of the Supreme Patriarch during a crucial phase in state history dominated Bangkok Buddhism. Prince Wachirayan - Chulalongkorn's half-brother -- was SP from 1910 to 1921. Prince Wachirayan almost alone established orthodox modern state Buddhism in Siam. He began a systematic examination system for monks, established an elite ecclesiastical university and wrote the key texts, such as the *Navakovada*, that to this day have defined

orthodox practice for Thai Buddhism.⁷ Wachirayan was the abbot of Wat Bowoniwet, the Bangkok Thammayut temple most closely associated with the royal family. His successor as high priest, Prince Chinaworasiriwat (1921-1937), was abbot of Wat Ratchabophit, another elite Thammayut temple. From the fourth reign until the late 1930s, all SP's were Thammayut.⁸

Thammayut monks from the leading Bangkok wats traveled upcountry conducting inspections and also became overseers of provincial religious practice. After the 1902 act, Thammayut monks held nine of 14 monthon ecclesiastical heads. The Thammayut remained a small group, however. How did they extend their influence? The expanding Bangkok state pressured venerable local monks to become Thammayut priests so that its control could be more effective. The northeast gives an example.

⁷ The Mahamakut College was established in 1893 in Wachirayan's Wat Bowonniwet. The exam system, after some initial hiccups, became the educational standard around 1911-1913 and was subsequently elaborated and regularized. In addition to testing basic knowledge, it formed the basis of the nine-tiered *parian* exam system, in which students concentrated on Pali language studies. Ishii, *Sangha, State and Society*, 85-92. Wachirayan wrote the *Navakovada* in the 1890s and it became the core text in the exam system in the following century. It has been a bilingual (Thai and English) text since 1971. The *Navakovada* is comprised of three sections, the *Vinaya Paññatti* (the Vinaya Rules), the *Dhamma Vibhaga* (the Dhamma Classified) and the *Gihi Patipatti* (the Layperson's Practice). See Somdet Phra Maha Samanachao Krom Phraya Vajirananavarorasa, comp., *Navakovada, Laksut Naktham Chan Tri, Phra Niphon Somdet Phra Maha Samanajao Krom Phraya Wachirayan Waroros* (*Navakovada, Instructions for Newly-ordained Bhikkus and Samaneras* (Standard Text for the Dhamma Student, 3rd Grade) (Mahamakut Rajavidyalaya, 1999).

⁸ Royals accounted for all but one SP during this time. From 1899 until 1910 there was no SP. Khanuengnit Chantrabut, *Kankluenwai khong Yuwasong Thai Run Rek Pho. So. 2477-2484* (The Movement of the First Generation of Young Thai Monks, 1934-1941) (Bangkok: Textbook Project, 1985), 24-54.

Isan Buddhism has always had a strong reputation for advanced meditation practitioners and devout lay support. The Thammayut stressed scholastic achievement over meditation,⁹ and the group definitely was not interested in rural folktales and (what it regarded as) superstitious nonsense. The state sect wanted monks to use clear, preferably central Thai, language and to avoid fanciful stories or myths. An example of the encounter of city and country Buddhism can be given. A junior Thammayut monk from Bangkok traveled to Khorat to supervise a Pali exam in 1934 and also happened to visit a local temple where a monk was preaching on the Vessantara Jataka, a very popular tale in Theravada countries. A head monk at the temple noticed the presence of the Bangkok bhikkhu and commanded the preaching monk to switch to central Thai. The result is funny:

"(The head monk's) order (to speak in central Thai) was loud enough to be heard throughout the hall. As many as three hundred pairs of eyes turned to stare at me, and I heard people whisper, 'He came from the south' (i.e., Bangkok) ... Hearing him reciting the story, I completely lost faith. Not only was his accent horrible - like a Chinese speaking Thai - his rhythm was no better than that of the one-armed beggar who sings for money on the Rama I Bridge in Bangkok. I sat through the recitation and felt relieved when it was over. Perhaps the preacher was relieved, too. I excused myself on the pretext that I had

⁹ King Mongkut believed that the path to nirvana was closed and hence rural *kammathana* (meditation) bhikkhus were wasting their time. The Thammayut contended that the religion would only flourish with disciplined, settled practice and scholarship. The state could test scholarly knowledge; claims to advanced psychic states were different.

to supervise some students. That was only half of the truth. In fact I regretted having to sit through such a disastrous sermon."¹⁰

The attempt to create orthopraxy and right thinking began much earlier; we see how little impact central Thai Buddhism made by the 1930s. From the fourth reign, the Thammayut had established temples in the region, especially in Ubon, arguably the intellectual center of Isan Buddhism.¹¹ The royal sect co-opted some leading Isan monks in its efforts to spread its practice. In 1902, Phra Sao Kantasilo and Phra Nu, two famous Isan abbots at leading temples (and recent converts to Thammayut), traveled from Ubon north to Nakhon Phanom. They can be seen as the first Thammayut evangelists, and attracted converts to the sect. Another example is Ajan Man, a highly respected Isan meditation master and disciple of Ajan Sao. Man converted to Thammayut in 1899. These examples inspired others, most notably Phra Lui (Chantassaro Lui) and Phra Li (Thammatharo Li), who re-ordained as Thammayut monks in 1925 and 1927, respectively. Man's encounter with Phra Fan - another leading Isan monk from Sakhon Nakhon province -- inspired the latter in the mid-1920s to convert to the Thammayut. Man's ascetic pilgrimages (*dhutanga*) around the northern provinces in the early twentieth century spread the

¹⁰ Phra Thepsumethi (Sawaeng Wimalo) quoted in Kamala, *Forest Recollections*, 36. Interestingly, Phra Thepsumethi would later in life become the abbot of Wat Si Mahathat, the democratic temple that the government would promote in the 1940s. See below for more information on this temple.

¹¹ Wat Supatnaram, the first Thammayut temple in Isan, had been established in 1851 in Ubon.

northeast meditation tradition as well as Thammayut practices.

Conversion of famous practitioners led to more temples becoming Thammayut. By 1930, seven out of 16 Isan provinces had Thammayut temples. Ubon had been the focus of Thammayut interest in the late nineteenth century. Gradually, the royal sect spread its influence in the region. In religion (as in education, state security and political administration), the crucial phase of Bangkok's expansion of control occurred during the coup makers' formative years. By around 1930, the Thammayut had established itself in the key northeastern provincial capitals. Thammayut monks also dominated the Sangha hierarchy that governed Isan.¹²

Many monks resented Thammayut clerics from Bangkok intruding and controlling local affairs. Others disliked their fellows going over to the elite sect. At any rate, as with royally backed schools in education, royal temples served only a fraction of the kingdom's total religious community. But like elite schools, Bangkok-established or managed temples commanded the majority of official attention because of their royal association.

Thammayut dominance came amidst very few numbers. In the mid-1930s, for example, there were 17,305 Mahanikai temples in the kingdom, compared to only 260 Thammayut

¹² Premwit Towkaew, "Kan Kotang le Khayai Tua khong Thammayut Nikai nai Phak Tawanok Chiang Nuea (Pho.So. 2394-2473)" (The Establishment and Expansion of the Dhammayuttikanikaya in the Northeast, 1851-1930) (master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1991), 117-153. Also see Kamala, *Forest Recollections*, Chapter Seven for a retelling of Thammayut influence and local monks' careers.

wats.¹³ Exact figures of monks in each group are difficult to pinpoint, but one historian has estimated that the ratio of Mahanikai to Thammayut monks was about 60:1 in mid-decade.¹⁴ Further, Thammayut monks held five of eight positions in the Council of Elders at the time.

Two points should be made about Thammayut control of the Sangha. For one, it probably didn't mean very much to most laypeople. We saw in the quote above how unfamiliar Bangkok religion was to upcountry people. Most of the faithful had no interest in the Thammayut's origins or pure Canon-orientation. Monks led by example, and reputations made by spiritual adeptness or moral rigor traveled far and wide. Ajan Man for example, although a Thammayut convert, was not revered because of his association with the Bangkok group but because of his decades long travels around the northeast where villagers experienced first hand his spiritual power. Further, it is doubtful that conversion of long established and venerated temples in a provincial town to Thammayut changed the religiosity of lay supporters; they continued to offer food, money and labor because of the long-standing local bonds of monks and villagers. The sect's power, we might say, always had to be ratified by popular opinion.

Second, despite its small size and reliance on the cooperation of local religious leaders, the Thammayut - and especially the elite at the apex of the Sangha hierarchy -- had considerable control over the political and intellectual affairs of the professional religious

¹³ *Thalaengkan Khanasong pakh Piset*, no. 23 (1935), n.p.

¹⁴ *Khanuengnit, Kankluenwai*, 81-82.

community. And crucially, like royalist ideology as a whole, this influence outlived the demise of the absolutist system.

We have seen that the royal sect held formal control over Sangha affairs from 1902. While Siam in the fifth reign saw a very close connection between the Thammayut and the core of state power - with elite Thammayut monks initially leading the way in education, for example, and Prince Wachirayan single-handedly creating the religious curriculum - the developing complexity of the state in the twentieth century reduced the social role of the elite sect and it became focused on religious administration. By the People's Party era, while ostensibly completely subordinate to the secular administration, the Sangha elite in fact constituted a largely autonomous force. Its close association with royalty, seemingly a liability in a new era of commoner politics, didn't fatally undermine its authority. With Khruba Srivichai, to whom this chapter now turns, we can see that the People's Party deferred entirely to the Sangha elites from the old regime.

The Struggle for Religious Autonomy in the North

Srivichai's tangle with the authorities represents the culmination of a decades-long clash between the expanding religious and political authority of the Bangkok elite and local communities that saw their autonomy curtailed.

In many ways, Lanna remained a separate country in the 1930s. Its religious traditions linked it to the world of Shan State Burma, southern China and Lao more than Bangkok. We saw in the second chapter that the northwest especially enjoyed a largely independent existence. Shan monks jealously guarded their autonomy. Northern language

dominated and only bureaucrats used central Thai. The regional economy - as a result of the absolute state's reliance on foreign capital - was largely oriented away from Bangkok and towards British Burma.

But the great arc of northern culture - from the Shan states in the west to the valleys of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai and on eastwards into the rugged provinces of the upper northeast - had to come to terms with the growing power of the southern regime. By the People's Party era, the Bangkok state's expansion had taken away much of the political power of the old regional nobility. The new power demoted the old lines of Lanna nobility and its Chiang Mai royal house to ceremonial status. Central power triumphed symbolically with the assumption of Thammayut control of Wat Chedi Luang, one of Chiang Mai's most holy temples, in 1925.¹⁵

Like the case below of the Mahanikai monks in the provinces, however, Bangkok's growing political dominance didn't win loyalty. Upcountry culture stubbornly resisted the imposition of Bangkok's language and religion as these tools of control were spreading in the countryside.

The Khana Ratsadon had an ambiguous relation to Buddhism. It inherited the centralizing logic of the kings' cultural apparatus, and only belatedly formed its own policy when faced with popular pressure. The new elite wanted allegiance without having to invest too much in getting it. As such, they relied on the Thammayut

¹⁵ Ajan Man became the temple's abbot in 1927. Presumably the authorities hoped that his spiritual clout and status as a Thammayut monk would win the loyalty of locals.

establishment to attempt to bring the regions into line. We can see all of this in the career of Khruba Srivichai.

Srivichai was born in Li district of Lamphun province, to the immediate south of Chiang Mai, in 1880. Always interested in the spiritual life, as a young man he studied *sayasat* (black arts, magic) with a local master. He abandoned superstition for vipassana meditation when he became a disciple of Khruba Upala, an advanced and well-regarded meditation instructor. It seems that thereafter Khruba Srivichai enjoyed a rejuvenated ascetic and spiritual rigor. He adopted vegetarianism, ate only once a day and was said to be a Buddha and a *tonbun* (source of merit) by the local people. In common with many spiritual adepts (and despite his abandonment of necromancy), local people of many ethnic groups viewed him as having magical powers. Once the Karen people accepted Srivichai as their spiritual leader, it was said that the rain fell regularly and crops became plentiful.¹⁶

His widespread popularity attracted pupils in droves. Srivichai acted as an autonomous force in northern Buddhism for many years before attracting the attention of the southern authorities. Bangkok sought to control religious practices through ordination rules and approved preceptors - bhikkhus who supervised and sanctioned those seeking entry to the religious life.¹⁷ But for years Srivichai ignored Bangkok's rules and ordained young men solely on his own authority and without informing the Sangha higher

¹⁶ Chirawat Santayos, "'Khruba Srivichai' kap Khatiniyom baep 'Khruba' (Mai) chuang Thosawat 2530-50," *Silapa Wathanatham* 31, no. 4 (February 2010): 85-86.

¹⁷ Prince Wachirayan enumerated the procedures for ordinations via the Sangha Act of 1902.

ups. Near the end of Chula's reign, Srivichai was the head of the tambon Sangha in his area and the abbot of Wat Ban Pang.

In 1910, eight years after introduction of the Sangha Act, the religious authorities held Srivichai in custody for four days for illegal ordinations. No conclusive evidence was found against him, however, and his popularity grew further after his release and return to Wat Ban Pang.¹⁸

A few months after the above incident, the authorities relieved Srivichai from his position as tambon head for twice failing to attend administrative lectures given by the Li district Sangha chief (and for not bringing his followers also). He was confined to Wat Haripunchai in neighboring Lampang for one year, and then demoted from abbotship of his wat. Srivichai remained indifferent to administrative orders and by now also was perhaps growing more truculent. A few months after returning to his home temple, he was ordered to decorate his wat for the coronation of Rama the Sixth and also to conduct a survey of monks and novices in his jurisdiction. In reply to the latter order, he said he couldn't because he had no jurisdiction since being relieved of his abbotship. His wat alone had no lanterns or pendants hoisted on coronation day; Srivichai said that his best homage would be to lead his monks in chanting in honor of the king. They were inheritors of the triple gems he said; material displays were unimportant by comparison with religious power.¹⁹

¹⁸ It was rumored that Srivichai could see into the distant past as well as the future; when queried on these powers, he only smiled and told his devotees to concentrate on their practice.

¹⁹ Siva Ronachit, *Phra Khruba Srivichai* (Bangkok: Phirap, 2001), 31-33.

Srivichai continued self-authorized ordinations in the 'teens. In January 1920, the head of the Sangha in Lamphun tried to ban him from the province because of his repeated violations of the order's rules.²⁰ When he finally relented and surrendered himself to the state at Wat Haripunchai, 1,500 supporters accompanied him. Worried that they wouldn't be able to control the crowd, the authorities requested that he be kept in Chiang Mai. The government hired a car from a Chinese businessman to transport him to Chiang Mai, and he was sent under guard to Wat Sri Don Chai where officials held him for three months under close control.²¹ Large crowds turned up at Wat Sri Don Chai every day to pay respects and offer material assistance. Northern peasants and ethnic minorities were Srivichai's core support, but it would be mistaken to read Srivichai as merely a leftover from a traditional world that was disappearing. Local businessmen with Bangkok ties and ennobled elites (and later parliamentarians) financially supported him and his followers.²²

During his confinement, the authorities leveled a mixed assortment of charges against him, eight in all. In addition to the allegations about ignoring the religious hierarchy and its rules, the authorities alleged that Srivichai was able to walk on water, to levitate, to walk

²⁰ The government worried that Srivichai was undermining the Sangha's routinized charisma. It accused him of letting unwanted or underage elements into the Sangha. He responded to his accusers that he had always asked applicants whether they had their parents' permission to ordain and that they were neither debtors nor slaves. In his mind, this was all that was required.

²¹ So. Suphapha (pseud.), *Chiwit lae Ngan khong Khruba Srivichai* (Bangkok: Khlang Withaya, 1956), 120-138.

²² Luang Anusansunthon, a Chiang Mai businessman, took the lead and enrolled Phraya Kham who also supported Khruba Srivichai.

through the rain when in confinement without getting wet (even as his escorts were soaked to the bone), and of possessing a magical sword bestowed by the gods.²³ After his three-month confinement in Chiang Mai, the authorities sent him to Bangkok for investigation by the Supreme Patriarch. As with his arrival in Chiang Mai, a tumultuous scene marked his departure from the north with excited crowds seeing him off.

In June 1920, Supreme Patriarch Prince Wachirayan read about the 40-year old northern monk in the *Bangkok Times*. He promptly wrote to Prince Chinaworasiriwat, at the time head of the central region Sangha (*jao khana yai hon luang*) and lead investigator in Srivichai's case. Apart from the ordination issue and failing to appear when summoned by his Sangha superiors, Wachirayan felt that Srivichai hadn't done anything wrong, and that people viewed incarceration of this popular monk as very unfair. Wachirayan argued that Srivichai had already paid for the ordination issue with his one-year confinement some years before and the stripping of his abbotship.²⁴ In a letter the next month, Wachirayan explained that Srivichai was not a rebel but merely misguided. Growing up in a regional tradition of the transmission of authority from teacher to student, Wachirayan thought that Srivichai was merely ignorant.²⁵ Following these opinions from on high, the authorities released Srivichai and Chinaworasiriwat's deputy sent a letter to the *Bangkok Times* explaining their decision. That

²³ So. Suphapha, *Chiwit lae Ngan*, 139-140.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 149-154.

²⁵ Wachirayan's letter in *ibid*, 164-166. When Khruba Upala died, he entrusted Srivichai with the responsibility to look after the wat and the monks.

same month, he traveled back to the north and took up residence again at Wat Ban Pang.²⁶

It is hard to say how all of this made Srivichai feel. Perhaps, during the long days of imprisonment in a foreign city, he was chastened by government criticism and reconsidered his career. Or maybe he emerged from confinement more thoroughly convinced of his own spiritual authority and the unfairness of the secular power and Sangha hierarchy meddling in northern affairs. Maybe like Phra Wimonmettajan, a monk from Trat who will be introduced below, he reckoned central authority to be more smoke than fire and that Bangkok's interest in his tradition would wane eventually. At any rate, after his return to the north, Srivichai concentrated on temple restoration projects. This was a deft move, since the authorities and elite classes eagerly promoted temple rebuilding as a way to accumulate spiritual capital and to cement the allegiance of the lower classes to their patrons. By taking the lead in these meritorious projects, Srivichai could perhaps prove to the state that he wasn't a divisive figure but a unifier of the Bangkok and local culture. It is estimated that Srivichai received 400,000 rupees in donations for his various projects between 1920 and 1929.²⁷

²⁶ The civil authorities, probably influenced by Wachirayan's take on things, held a similar view. Prince Bowondet - who would lead a rebellion against the People's Party in 1933 -- here enters the story as the viceroy for Phayap (the north) monthon. Bowondet also felt that Srivichai was not a rebel. Instead, like Wachirayan he expressed the opinion that Srivichai lacked understanding and should be educated.

²⁷ Charas Khosanand, *Khruba Jao Srivicha, Ariyasongh haeng Lanna* (Khruba Srivichai, Noble Monk of Lanna) (Bangkok: Fueang Fa, 2006), 99.

Two important old Chiang Mai temples, Wat Phra Singh in the mid-1920s and Wat Suan Dokh around the time of the revolution, were restored under Srivichai's inspiration and direction. In 1923 he lived in a *kuti* built for him by Luang Anusansunton at Wat Phra Singh. Luang Anusan also took the lead in funding and gave more than 10,500 rupees for the rebuilding of the wat.²⁸ The restoration took several years. While unhappy with Srivichai's independent streak, the Bangkok establishment eagerly participated in his merit making. In January 1927, a celebration at Wat Phra Singh to mark its complete restoration coincided with a visit to the north by King Prajadhipok and his queen. With considerable fanfare, Chiang Mai people received the foreign royals who visited the temple and added their sacred aura to the site.

In 1932 Jao Dara Rasami, near the end of her life, and her brother Jao Kaeo Nawarat wanted to rebuild Wat Suan Dok and they asked Srivichai to look over the project. Kaeo Nawarat was the last lord of the Lanna dynasty. His sister had been wed to Chulalongkorn decades earlier as a way to cement the allegiance of the northern dynasty to the rising power of Bangkok.²⁹ By our time, they had no genuine political authority and lived on a stipend provided by Bangkok (and perhaps their memories of more grandiose times). Lacking real political influence, it is

²⁸ Ibid, 93-94. Readers will bear in mind that Indian rupees circulated widely in the north throughout our period and were often the common currency.

²⁹ For a recent discussion of the gendered politics of the north during the Chakri reformation, see Leslie Ann Woodhouse, "A 'Foreign' Princess in the Siamese Court: Princess Dara Rasami, the Politics of Gender and Ethnic Difference in Nineteenth-century Thailand" (Ph.D. diss., University of California-Berkeley, 2009).

understandable that the Lanna ruling family would turn with renewed energy to religious good works in order to shore up their crumbling social position and deposit some spiritual capital for the next life. Merit making is arguably one of the two leading methods in Theravada countries for uniting the social classes under wealthy and/or politically powerful patrons.³⁰ In this case, the northern royals used their connections to enlist, among others, a Chinese businessman. Thaoke Ngaeo (or Jek Ngaeo, "Chinaman Ngaeo") was a leading Chiang Mai businessman. He worked with the Asiatic Bangkok Co. in iron and cement sales in Chiang Mai and was influential in local construction. Years earlier, he had provided the car for Srivichai's transportation to Chiang Mai when the latter had been summoned by the authorities. This time the planners used him again to ferry Srivichai from Wat Phra Singh (where he was staying at the time) to Wat Suan Dok to oversee the restoration. With the lords' money, Ngaeo's logistical and material support and Srivichai's spiritual authority, the rebuilding of Wat Suan Dok took one year and three months.³¹ During the work, Phraya Suriyanuwat wrote to the government in Bangkok that Kruba Srivichai "is more powerful than any lord" in the north and has followers all the way up to Chieng Tung in southern China. He explained that the faithful - the Ngiao (Shan), Lao, Thai and Burmese -- had sent in 60,000 baht

³⁰ The other being blind patriotism. Despite the best efforts of King Vajiravudh and then Phibun Songkham, this method hadn't become very popular outside of Bangkok during our time because of the weak integration of the state. Temple restorations had the advantage of long-standing importance in all the kingdom's local traditions.

³¹ Charas, Khruba Srivichai, 101-103; Chirawat, "'Khruba Srivichai'," 87.

for restoration of the vihara at Wat Suan Dok. Suriyanuwat contended that the same work in Bangkok would have cost 200,000 baht. Women, the elderly and minority hill people all contributed their labor to build the temple in sumptuous fashion with gold flake and stained glass.³²

Kruba Srivichai's zeal for renovation led at least 58 temple restorations between 1920 (when he returned from Bangkok) and 1935. These ranged all over the north, from Mae Hong Son in the west, Tak to the southwest, Nan in the east and Pitsanulok to the southeast.³³ The crowning achievement of his career, however, was not a temple but a road. Srivichai directed the building of a 12-kilometer route from Chiang Mai up to Wat Doi Suthep, the revered hilltop wat above the town and the surrounding plains. Because of popular enthusiasm for the project, the road was completed in just under six months at the end of 1934 and beginning of 1935. With only small budget allocations for roads and rural development, some way had to be found to undertake projects that would socialize the investment while also enhancing the government's prestige for delivering on their promise to develop the nation.

An all weather route to Wat Doi Suthep had been desired for some time. In 1917 engineers for Prince Bowondet, viceroy of the north, had estimated that construction would cost 200,000 baht and take two years to

³² Phraya Suriyanuwat to Bangkok, July 1932 in "Phraya Suriyanuwat" in NA, SR.0201.8/20, box 1, suan bukkhon chao thai.

³³ Some records put the number at 108. Interestingly, despite his valorization as a Lanna freedom fighter, Srivichai planned all of these repair jobs using Bangkok artistic styles, not those of the north. Chirawat, "'Khruba Srivichai'," 87. Perhaps he felt that northern culture was ultimately doomed, or that the state wouldn't interfere with his work if it were seen to be flattering Bangkok's aesthetic sense and promoting their culture?

complete. The project was shelved. After the coup Luang Sri Prakat, the Chiang Mai MP, wanted not only a road but also electricity to reach the temple. Confounded by the cost estimates, Sri Prakat turned to Khruba Srivichai.³⁴ A few days after their initial meeting, Luang Sri Prakat, Jao Kaeo Nawarat and a leading Chiang Mai monk from Wat Doi Suthep all visited Srivichai again. Srivichai told them that while he was recollecting himself, he felt a person in white leading him up a naga-framed staircase at the side of a mountain. Srivichai took this to be a good omen for the success of the venture.³⁵ Luang Sri Prakat and Jao Kaeo Nawarat each personally financed the printing of 50,000 fliers that were distributed all over the region to announce the start of the project and to call for volunteers.³⁶ With the backing of the Chiang Mai MP and the support of local bigwigs, the project began in November 1934. Jao Kaeo Nawarat, Prime minister Phahon, Luang Sri Prakat and his wife, and Mr. Ngaeo all presided over the ground-breaking ceremony. Villagers from Pitsanulok, Chiang Rai, Chiang Saen, Lampang and Lamphun, in addition to the local faithful, all labored on the project, upwards of 4-

³⁴ Charas, *Chiwit lae Ngan*, 104.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 103-105. The Thai word *athithan* I've translated as recollection. There isn't an exactly corresponding English word, with other glosses like meditation or contemplation not fully capturing the meaning. *Athithan* gives the sense of a time traveling power. Khruba Srivichai probably experienced, or felt he was experiencing, the ability to see into the distant past and the uncharted future.

³⁶ *Prawat Khruba Srivichai, Nak Bun haeng Lanna Thai: Prawat Kansang thang kheun Doi Suthep le Prawat Wat Phra That Doi Suthep* (A History of Kruba Sriwichai (The Buddhist Saint of Northern Thailand): The Story of Making the Road up Doi Suthep and a Historical Chronicle of Wat Phrathat Doi Suthep) (Chiang Mai: Suthin Press, 2006), 44-45 (Part One, Thai) and 36-38 (Part Two, English).

5,000 people a day. Srivichai saw the hand of providence in the popular enthusiasm: "these are the gods that have come to help us."³⁷ On April 30, 1935 - five months and 22 days from the start of the project -- the authorities held an opening ceremony for the road, with Srivichai riding in Ngaeo's car up the mountain to the temple. Srivichai's ambitions didn't end with the road. The project formed part of a four-fold undertaking, which included restoration of three temples that ran along the route. The mundane projects were mirrors of the four stages of knowledge and freedom from kilesa: sotapanna (Wat Sri Sodaram at the base of the hill); sakathakami (Wat Sakitthakha, subsequently abandoned); anakhami (Wat Anakhami, a project interrupted by the subsequent recall of Srivichai to Bangkok); and arahant (the road and the temple at the top of the mountain reflected the saint's career).³⁸

Widespread support for Srivichai, however, couldn't prevent further trouble from the state authorities. The last few years of Srivichai's life saw a renewed tangle with Bangkok, further incarceration in the south and ultimately Srivichai's formal acknowledgement of Bangkok's power over him. His recalcitrance, which the absolutist state thought had ended in 1920, continued to irritate the Bangkok religious elite under the democracy.

In June 1935, Phra Thammakosajan, a Thammayut elder and the Sangha head for monthon Phayap, seems like a hard character in the archive. He presented Bangkok with a grave assessment of the peril posed by Srivichai's independence, explaining that 50 wats in 10 kweng (districts) wanted to

³⁷ Charas, *Chiwit lae Ngan*, 110.

³⁸ Charas, 113 and *Prawat Khruba Srivichai*, 42 (Part Two).

leave the Sangha administration and be placed under the jurisdiction of Srivichai directly. Thammakosajan informed the government that around 200 monks had already disrobed from government-controlled wats and re-ordained under Srivichai's authority. Some wats had returned their certificates of registration to the government. Local faithful had prevented the heads of the Sangha hierarchy from installing new abbots who were not pro-Srivichai.³⁹ Most of these were probably wats under the direction of abbots who had helped with the renovation projects and remained deeply impressed with Srivichai's character. In August, Thammakosajan wrote again warning that scores of Chiang Rai monks and whole temples were planning to renounce Sangha rules. Wachirayan had thought Srivichai misguided but innocent and that re-education would correct his wayward character. Thammakosajan doubted that gentle persuasion would convince Srivichai to obey. Thammakosajan didn't believe Srivichai's protestations that he had no political agenda. In 1934, Srivichai had told him that he "had no great aim to rule over the Sangha; I only wish to do construction and repair for merit. I wish thusly to reach nirvana." Thammakosajan asserted to the government that this was completely fake. He described Srivichai's hold over his home province as nearly magical, with 80% of the people behind him. While Thammakosajan believed that the people were "too stupid" to organize themselves into any coherent fighting force and were extremely docile, their religious stubbornness ran high and they would only

³⁹ Jao Khana Monthon Phayap to Director of Religious Affairs Department, June 28, 1935, in NA, SR.0201.10/61, "Phra Sri Vichai mai prong dong kab Khana Song."

listen to those whom they revered. As with the Mae Hong Son situation detailed in chapter two, the Lamphun faithful were very jealous of their freedom. Thammakosajan estimated that only 10% of the people there knew Thai letters and they had destroyed school furniture as a way to sabotage state inroads into education. Kamnan (district) officials, he asserted, were helpless to intervene and in risk of harm if they tried. According to his investigation, there had been 2,000 cases of Srivichai ordaining monks in recent years, with some of them below the statutory age for ordination (20 years). Thammakosajan explained that those who returned to their wats wouldn't listen to their elders or participate in temple affairs. Unless the state made an example of him, the Sangha's authority would weaken further. Thammakosajan related to his city colleagues there were already rumors that once recalled, Srivichai would become the highest Sangha authority there.⁴⁰

Perhaps feeling the heat and wanting to show his power, Srivichai backed away from restoration projects. In September, he wrote to the prime minister from Wat Phra Singh that he would no longer assist in Wat Doi Suthep's road and temple restoration, and that many villagers who had previously assisted had left the project because it became too burdensome. He asked that civil officials take over.⁴¹

That autumn the state lost its patience with Srivichai and applied renewed pressure. Sindhu Songkramchai, the education minister, argued to Prime Minister Phahon that

⁴⁰ Thammakosajan to director of religious affairs, August 1, 1935 in *ibid.*

⁴¹ Srivichai to Phahon and civil servants, September 5, 1935 in *ibid.*

gentle steps to rein in Srivichai would fail and that he must be dealt with severely. He recommended that the government "invite" Srivichai to Bangkok after the rains retreat. He shouldn't get the idea that he was being punished.⁴² In a subsequent cabinet meeting, Thamrong Nawasawat (interior minister at the time) cautioned that the recall should be handled carefully; he was nervous that state intervention could have an unpredictable outcome in the north.⁴³ After further discussion, it was agreed that Srivichai should be brought down to Bangkok by train with an elite escort. The authorities took him to Wat Benjamabophit, the marble temple designed in Italian style, in the company of the governor of Chiang Mai and representatives of the religious affairs department. Exactly one year earlier, the prime minister had broken first ground on Srivichai's road project to considerable fanfare; this year the state detained him for re-education at a leading urban temple.⁴⁴

⁴² Sindhu to Phahon, October 12, 1935 in *ibid.* He suggested that Srivichai be asked to assist in the restoration of the royal Wat Mongkonbophit in Ayutthaya and/or invited for religious training in Bangkok.

⁴³ Cabinet meeting minutes, October 21, 1935 in *ibid.*

⁴⁴ "That Puzzling Priest," *Bangkok Times*, November 9, 1935. The *Bangkok Times*, while legally immune from state interference, generally promoted the government's social agenda. While the paper didn't doubt his spiritual credentials, the *Times* echoed the state's opinion that Srivichai needed religious education (i.e., needed to obey the instructions of the Bangkok religious hierarchy and its definitions of proper practices). Other voices were more critical of the state. A writer at a Thai paper presented a long article on the same day as the *Times'* report that explained the confrontation with sympathy for the regional tradition. The reporter contrasted Bangkok religion with upcountry practices. Bangkok monks were *jao tamra* (scholastic masters, book smart) and they often acted arrogantly towards more senior local monks. Bangkok's reach in the north, according to this writer, extended only to the main towns. Additionally, the

Srivichai's house arrest became a public affair. The government explained on radio and in print that order, discipline and a respect for authority would prevail over chaos, moral laxness and anarchy. In statements issued in the first two months of his Bangkok confinement, the authorities labeled freewheeling monks as socially dangerous and Srivichai a divisive figure. They reiterated Thammakosajan's main accusations.⁴⁵ The state charged the religious rebels with promoting a permissive atmosphere. Srivichai's ordination of all comers allowed entry to ill-disciplined and ignorant people seeking a shortcut to heaven, including unsuitable candidates that the authorities had already blacklisted. Putting their own interests above those of the Sangha, the Chiang Mai governor explained, Srivichai's group remained ignorant of what Buddhism stood for and what the state since Chulalongkorn had been trying to achieve.⁴⁶

Treating them like wayward children, the authorities promised that none of the offending novices or monks would be punished if they returned to the fold and agreed to

Bangkok bhikkus sent to the provinces were used to wealthy temples that could use their endowments for grand projects. By contrast, rural people formed the *jao sattha* (lords of the faith), who spent lavishly on maintaining their local temples. "Kha tam khunaphap khuan ploi le pongkan hai kert prayot dai yangrai" (How should the hidden value be released and defended?), *Sri Krung*, November 9, 1935.

⁴⁵ Illegal ordinations bred an insubordinate mindset among his followers, the government asserted, with many of Srivichai's disciples said to be throwing away their (legitimate) ordination certificates and refusing to abide by any Sangha rules. November 28 and December 28, 1935 announcements of Chiang Mai governor Anuban Payapkit ("Thalaengkan Ruang Phra Srivichai," parts one and two), in NA, SR.0201.10/61.

⁴⁶ November 19, 1935 report, "Thalaengkan Ruang Phra Srivichai pai Krungthep", *Thalengkan Khanasong* 23, no. 10 (January, 1936), 580-581.

Bangkok's rules. They pledged also that Srivichai could return to the north if he submitted to state authority. For the first few months of his incarceration, he stubbornly resisted. Saying that he was already an old man, in February 1936 Srivichai asked that he be allowed to live quietly at a forest hermitage and pledged that he would assist in building projects when the faithful requested him. He still refused, however, to abide by the rules of the Sangha act.⁴⁷

Perhaps worn out by his captivity and homesick, Srivichai eventually gave in. On April 21, 1936 he signed a statement, writing his name in Lanna script, at Wat Benjamabophit. He agreed to four main points: to abide by the Sangha Act and the rules of the order (presenting an account of the monks in his area; following official ordination procedures and informing his superiors of new ordinations; using only Sangha-approved certificates to confirm ordinations; and undertaking temple restorations according to the Sangha's stipulations); to assist in construction of schools and encourage people to obey the primary schools act; to foster pariyatham study per the Sangha act and edicts; and to remind abbots and monks/novices in various wats to obey religious and civil authorities. He agreed to Sangha inspections of temples under his influence.⁴⁸ In May, Srivichai traveled back to Wat Ban Pang in Lamphun where he was kept in quasi-custody, and had to receive permission to travel. Scarred by his tangle Srivichai vowed never to return to Chiang Mai, which

⁴⁷ Srivichai to Thammakosajan, February 4, 1936, in NA, SR.0201.10/61.

⁴⁸ "I Khruba Srivichai," April 21, 1936 in *ibid.*

he likely identified as an outpost of the Bangkok establishment. In the last years of his life Srivichai mobilized villagers and monks to rebuild the vihara at Wat Ban Pang, to renovate Wat Camadevi, an eighth-century Lamphun temple founded by Lamphun's old royal house, and also to build a bridge across the Ping river that would bring easier communication between Lamphun and Chiang Mai. He became ill in the summer of 1937 and died at Wat Ban Pang in February 1938.

In the 1930s, thousands of people from diverse ethnic groups strongly believed that the expanding secular state could not conquer the spiritual power of a local saint.

The Thammayut - originally a small movement focused on the palace and then an important vehicle for the spread of state moral and intellectual leadership - spearheaded the re-education of Khruba Srivichai. The People's Party, a secular movement seeking to create a strong state, followed the Sangha elites' long-standing plan to subdue northern Buddhism.

Khruba Srivichai and his followers never mentioned rights or constitutionalism in their struggle against state power. His intellectual maturation preceded by decades the popularity of these ideas, and in any case the main goal was northern autonomy. A unitary state with its laws was the enemy. Another embattled group, however, eagerly seized the opportunity. When the rhetoric of 1932 became part of the social vocabulary, disgruntled monks had a new weapon. Despite the differing language, both groups primarily sought to defend local custom in which popular consensus determined religious authority. In the 1930s for the first

time, Mahanikai monks sought to reform the entire system from a provincial base.

The Mahanikai Revolt

Preferential treatment for Thammayut monks and their arrogance formed the main grievances of the Mahanikai protesters. Like the Khruba's movement for religious autonomy, anti-elitism had a long history. Unlike the Lanna case, Mahanikai activism received an intellectual boost and became confrontational only after the political climate changed.

Soon after the coup, stories circulated of junior monks rebelling against their abbots and elders and claiming that the new democracy guaranteed their freedom from the old relations.⁴⁹ The first stirrings of organized resistance to Thammayut dominance of the Mahanikai came in 1934 after several years of disquiet in the eastern seaboard provinces. On December 3, 1934 the Sangha committee for three districts in Nakhon Nayok province wrote a long, detailed letter to Phra Sarasas Prapan, the education minister. Representing 536 monks at 43 wats and 1,875 villagers, they asked that Phra Muni Naiyok, the head of the Nakhon Nayok Sangha and his superior Phra Ratchakawi, the head of the Prachinburi monthon be prosecuted. All the monks represented were Mahanikai.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Virginia Thompson, *Thailand*. A similarly anarchistic feeling was reported elsewhere. Chulalongkorn University students, for example, walked out of lectures and refused to listen to the administration.

⁵⁰ By their description they were those of the "left side rolled and uncovered" (*muan sai chai waek*), which refers to the exposed left shoulder that marked the Mahanikai. Thammayut monks generally wore their robes to cover both shoulders. Wang Krajom,

The cases are a bit complicated but can be briefly sketched out. The two accused Sangha authorities - both Thammayut monks -- had been in their positions for about four years. Phra Ratchakawi, the Mahanikai monks argued, had unlawfully elevated Phra Mahajarun - a relatively inexperienced naktham instructor -- to preceptor status at a local wat, and soon thereafter appointed him abbot of Wat Sri Muang, a bigger, more important temple. But following local custom, a local Sangha meeting had already chosen a resident Wat Sri Muang monk as interim abbot. Phra Yan Naiyok (Pleum), the Mahanikai head of the provincial Sangha prior to the appointment of Phra Muni Naiyok, had told this to Phra Ratchakawi several times. The Thammayut interference also contravened Sangha regulations that no non-abbot could be placed as a preceptor, and no non-head at the basic level of Sangha administration could be head of the higher level (the khweng or district level in this case, which Mahajarun also became) without the local head's approval.⁵¹ The administrative details are harder to remember than the central fact of the protest: that the Thammayut allegedly contravened local custom and the Sangha's rules.

Ban Na and Pakpli were the three districts. NA, SR.0201.10/33, "Phra Song ampher wang Krajom Nakhon Nayok Klaothot Phra Muninayok le Phra Rajakawi", Sangha committee (khana song) to Phra Sarasas Prapan, December 3, 1934.

⁵¹ The 1902 Sangha Act patterned ecclesiastical administration on the civil service hierarchy. Thus, power in the Sangha spread from the Council of Elders in Bangkok to heads of monthons, provinces, districts (kweng or amphur), townships (tambons) and individual temples. The Mahanikai monks thus complained that Mahajarun's elevation was unlawful, in addition to his abbotship contradicting the consensual spirit of local Buddhism. On the Act, see Somboon, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), 37-40.

The petitioners also protested the dismissal of Phra Plek Amaro, acting abbot of Wat Tha Chang, by Phra Muni Naiyok with Ratchakawi's approval. The two Thammayut monks alleged that Phra Plek Amaro was unsuitable and in the previous few years showed his arrogance by lording it over local villagers. Soon after he was dismissed, Amaro was forbidden from giving any statement (*kammawaja*). On May 22, 1934 a large group of monks and laypeople petitioned Phra Muni Nayok to explain Amaro's case. Muni Nayok stated: "He hasn't done anything wrong. It's just that he can't get along with people in Wat Tha Chang village very well, so we held that he is lacking ability."⁵² This vague explanation didn't satisfy anyone. Later, Phra Muni Nayok refused to allow some petitioners from Wat Tha Chang to see the order relieving Amaro. Amaro himself also asked Ratchakawi what he had done, but was told evasively in part that "it is better that you are not the abbot."⁵³ On June 28, Phra Muni Nayok showed Amaro a letter from Ratchakawi to the Tha Chang khana in which his superiors alleged that Amaro didn't listen to them, was the object of complaints and should be relieved.

Unsurprisingly to the Mahanikai monks, Phra Muni Nayok became the abbot of Wat Tha Chang after Amaro's dismissal and directed any further inquiries to his office. Again referencing local Buddhist democracy, the Mahanikai report on this point contended that such high-handed treatment of Amaro went against the general practice in which local people and monks together decide by a majority who should

⁵² Sangha committee to Phra Sarasas Prapan, December 3, 1934, 3 of letter.

⁵³ Ibid.

be abbot.⁵⁴ Later, in an apparent attempt to silence any opposition, Ratchakawi forbade any new ordinations or overnight visits by non-resident novices to Wat Tha Chang.⁵⁵

The Mahanikai monks raised a third example from Nakhon Nayok. It was arguably the most grievous case. Phra Yananayok (Pleum) was the abbot of Wat Udomthani in Wang Krajom district and had a 30-year monastic career. The Sangha in November 1931 stripped Pleum of his ecclesiastical ranks and position as head of the Nakhon Nayok Sangha. Phra Muni Nayok replaced him. This move against a highly respected local Mahanikai monk came as a great shock to local monks and villagers. Two points were at issue. For one, Pleum disliked one of Ratchakawi's men and protested actively against him acting as a preceptor at Wat Tha Chang. Secondly, an anonymous letter had been circulated publicly prior to his removal that alleged Pleum had had physical relations with a local woman and stolen temple funds. On November 27, 1931 a case against Phra Jon, the abbot of Wat Tha Sai and head of his township, was heard in the provincial court after Jon's name surfaced as the likely author of the letter against Pleum. The court gave him a three-month jail sentence and a 300 baht fine. Three years later, in November 1934 local officials and the

⁵⁴ This practice is confirmed in the 1902 Sangha Act, Article 12. The district Sangha head called a meeting among local monks and laypeople.

⁵⁵ Amaro and others remained in the dark about the case's origins or motives at the time of the Mahanikai letter to the government. Local villagers, meanwhile, had sought help from Phraya Wiset Singhanat, the MP of Nakhon Nayok. He directed them to Council of Elders Chair Phra Phutthakosajan, who refused to get involved and re-directed them - as well as Amaro when he petitioned Phra Phutthakosajan directly -- to lower levels of the Sangha, including the two men whom the petitioners believed were behind the conflict.

Nakhon Nayok Sangha met to discuss the Pleum case anew. Pleum had put the Sangha in a bad light by taking his case to civil court. By custom and under the 1902 act, decisions of the Sangha on internal affairs should be final and no civil petitions allowed. But the chair of the elders' council, Khosajan, had told Pleum that he had the right to argue in provincial court. In the end, Pleum was not evicted from the Sangha because of his longstanding service to the community. Local villagers, however, according to the Mahanikai petition remained unsatisfied with the disrespect shown to the lifelong monk.

The petitioners asserted that the cases showed a distinct double standard. Phra Ratchakawi and Phra Muni Nayok promoted their fellow Thammayut monks and demoted Mahanikai monks like Amaro and Pleum that stood in the way. They argued that Article 3 of the Sangha Act, which only allowed general governance of Sangha affairs in a particular jurisdiction by provincial or monthon heads, had been abused to favor the Thammayut. The signatories asserted that even if Mahanikai monks were in positions of power they would not have been allowed to govern Thammayut temples or their monks.⁵⁶

The events in Nakhon Nayok became fuel for the activism of a growing number of young Mahanikai monks. Sending messages through the "Monk's Bowl Post" (*praisani bat*), a group of Bangkok and upcountry monks solicited interest in forming a Mahanikai group. Phra Thamma Woranaiyok and Phra Mahaphrayat -- disciples of Pleum -- spearheaded the movement. They traveled to Bangkok seeking

⁵⁶ Sangha committee to Phra Sarasas Prapan, December 3, 1934, 9-10 of letter.

the help of Phra Jan Sukhuma, a friend of Phra Mahaphrayat from their student days at Assumption (and also one of Pleum's disciples). At the time Phra Jan lived at Wat Suthat. He was well placed to help; Jan's family owned a pharmacy and Jan offered funds and logistics for the set up of a Mahanikai group to petition the government over religious administration.⁵⁷

On January 11, 1935, 400 monks met in the capital's Bangrak district. They styled themselves the Khana Patisangkhn Kan Phrasatsana (The Religious Restoration Party) The group rejected "revolutionary" (*patiwat*) or "reform" (*patirup*) because of their worldly associations and because they sought a restoration of what they felt the original spirit of Buddhism.⁵⁸ Young educated monks led the movement and the interest of Bangkok Mahanikai bhikkus ran high. Important in the new group were: Phra Mahasanit, a 23-year old parian seven scholar from Wat Chetuphon; Wat Mahathat's Phra Mahasombun, a 26-year old parian six monk; Phra Mahayaem, a parian nine scholar from Wat Phakinath, also age 26; and the aforementioned disciples of Pleum, the 22-year old parian three monk Phra Maha Phrayat and 26-year old Phra Thamma Woranaiyok, both from Wat Mahathat. None of these men held a position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy when the movement commenced. We can see, however, that their status was tied to the Bangkok establishment. Most of the original leaders of the movement had advanced scholastic training but found that favoritism excluded their religious network.

⁵⁷ Khaneungnit, *Kankluenwai*, 106-108.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 70-71.

Late in the following month, the group letters to Phra Sarasas and Sangha leaders. They also drafted a new Sangha Act. From the requests that the heavy handedness and partiality of the Thammayut in Nakhon Nayok be stopped, the debate moved to a broader criticism of prevailing inequality in the Sangha. Phra Mahasanit in his colorful language wrote that his aim was "to give my sect, like a waning moon clouded by ignorance and greed, the chance to wax into fullness like a new moon."⁵⁹ Organic or rhythmic metaphors recur to represent the new system. The petitioners contended that democracy was the natural outcome of human development, in which "everything should turn smoothly in place, in all parts of society." The constitution extended political freedoms to all of society: "(it) gives equal protection and rights to all in the Siamese nation."⁶⁰

In April 1935, Phra Plat Jek, a leading member of the Khana Patisangkhn, explained the feelings of the Mahanikai:

"In truth, if someone says 'before why was it that you were ruled thusly, I would have to respond that the administration of the country then was 'absolute' (English transliteration), so we had to put up with it. Even if we raised our voices no one dealt with it. The fact that we're speaking up now is because we see that the government is a real democratic one. If we speak of the administration of religious affairs, it has always been democratic (i.e.,

⁵⁹ February 25, 1935 letter to the education minister, NA, SR.0201.10.43.

⁶⁰ February 25, 1935 letter to chair of the council of elders, in *ibid.*

Buddhism is a democratic religion). When the secular power changes and adapts itself to become a democracy, then the religious realm must also turn accordingly. This is the main aim of the group to reform Buddhism."⁶¹

The group's draft act mandated free movement between the two sects (i.e., a Mahanikai monk who wanted to become Thammayut would not have to re-ordain) and the end of Thammayut management of Mahanikai. It also called for eventual unification of the sects.⁶² On the same day, a letter representing 800 monks (120 with parian ranks) at 110 wats in 14 provinces was sent to Phra Sarasas Prapan, and later (March 5) the minister received another two letters - one representing seven provinces, 1,177 monks from 92 wats; the other 12 southern provinces, 368 wats and 2,080 monks - in support of the group's proposed reforms.⁶³

These impressive numbers suggest the popular support. But the government opposed the Khana Patisangkhn and as in the Khruba Srivichai case deferred to Sangha elders. Sangha elites tried to get abbots to chase out offending monks. Accused monks were treated harshly. Under judgment by Thammayut and Mahanikai officials, the accused were confined in isolation, charged with treason (kabot) and denied food and water. Civil officials also treated the accused without respect. Some for example forced the monks

⁶¹ Phra Plat Jek's letter to Phra Sarasas, April 3, 1935, reprinted in Khaneungnit, *Kankluewai*, 287.

⁶² "Phra Ratchabanyat Laksana Pokkhrong Khana Song le Kan Phra Sasana Pho. So. 2477," in *ibid.*

⁶³ The 14 provinces were: Bangkok, Thonburi Ayuthaya, Nakhon Pathom, Suphanburi, NST, Ratchaburi, Samut Prakan, Chachoengsao, Nakhon Nayok, Saraburi, Khon Kaen, Pijit and Surat. NA, SR.0201.10.43 and Khanuengnit, *Kankluewai*, 114-115.

to sit or stand at a lower position than their interrogators -- an unthinkable inversion of the etiquette governing lay-religious interactions -- and spoke rudely. Mahamakut Academy, the premier Thammayut college, issued statements that banned promotion of those associated with the movement. Senior figures seen as closet members of the party were pressured to resign their positions.⁶⁴

After a year, the Sangha made a decision. In February 1936 the education minister explained to the prime minister that the Council of Elders had rejected Phra Mahasanit's argument. The letter quotes Phra Sasanasophon, the deputy chair of the Council of Elders and the abbot of Wat Mongkutkasat, a leading Thammayut temple established by King Mongkut. He explained that the council "in the main doesn't agree with Phra Mahasanit, and in fact there are only a couple of people working behind the scenes for him ... we request that the ministry reject any further troublesome monk issues."⁶⁵

Inaction did not placate the Mahanikai, however, and the group scored a small victory soon after. In 1937, Phra Rajakawi became involved in another big dispute with a local monk. He accused Phra Wimonmettajan, the 73-year old head of the Trat province Sangha, of disrespect and slander at a Sangha meeting. In a spirited letter of January 18,

⁶⁴ Khaneungnit, *Kankluenwai*, 128-131. The author uses the example of Phra Thammapidok (Pheuan) a venerated Mahanikai head of the Ratchburi monthon Sangha. Council of Elders chair Phra Phutthakosajan thought he was attempting to spread the party's influence in his area through a recent promotion of another Mahanikai monk under his supervision as a tambon head in place of a Thammayut monk who lived too far away to be effective. Around the beginning of 1936, Thammapidok resigned his position.

⁶⁵ MoPI to PM, "Phramahasanit rong kho hai jat kan kaekhai kanpokkhong khanasong" in NA, SR.0201.10/43.

1937, Phra Wimon responded that Rajakawi's recent move to install Phra Mahatawan, a seventh grade parian scholar and pupil of Somdet Wachirayanwongse, as Phra Wimon's deputy was a thinly veiled ploy to engineer a Thammayut takeover of the Trat Sangha. "Would I be so stupid," Wimon asked, "as to ask ... a Thammayut monk not under the control of Trat province to become the deputy provincial head?" Further, contrary to Rajakawi's justification that the appointment stemmed from the local Sangha's disorderliness under Phra Wimon, the latter asserted that the Trat Sangha ran its affairs well: "What magic does he have, which can help in the management of the Sangha?"⁶⁶

The following week, Wimon sent another equally strong letter to the chair of the council. He laid the additional charge that Phra Mahatawan's planned to move into Wat Lamduan, a Mahanikai temple, along with other Thammayut monks would cause hardship to the resident monks who would have to make room for the new arrivals. Most likely, he contended, the Mahanikai monks would be forced to camp in the forest. Local people would not look kindly on the imposition. Perhaps most tellingly, Wimon criticized the elitist outlook of Bangkok Thammayut monks. Reacting to what he felt was an obsession with titles, Wimon maintained his aloofness from high parian ranks. "Nothing in this can substitute for goodness."⁶⁷ Mahatawan's temple, Wat Khao Yuan, was four hours river journey from Wimon's Wat Paihom. What help would he be, Wimon asked, being so far from his superior. Wimon wrote that he had seen seven heads of the

⁶⁶ Trat Sangha head to deputy MoPI, January 18, 1937. "Phra Rajakawi jao khana monthon Prajinburi klaothot Phra Wimonmettajan jao khana jangwat Trat", NA, SR.0201.10/76.

⁶⁷ January 25 letter to the Council of Elders' chair in *ibid.*

monthon Sangha come and go; now Rajakawi, the eighth such official, was bent on destroying the local Sangha.

Rajakawi didn't shy from the fight. Soon after he learned of Phra Wimon's accusations, Rajakawi requested that the elders investigate Wimon. He complained that Wimon's sharp-tongued sarcasm showed extreme disrespect and that his mutinous behavior would have bad consequences. In a victory for local Mahanikai monks, the chair refused Rajakawi's request. He advised that they sort out their differences and that the Sangha preferred leaving the deputy position vacant to sowing discord. He also reproved Rajakawi for his suggestion that not conducting an inquiry was equivalent to blaming Rajakawi for creating the problem. A disappointed Rajakawi threatened to raise the issue with the head of the Thammayut order if his request was not re-evaluated. At the end of April, the education minister told Rajakawi that the case was closed.

Despite this Mahanikai victory, the Thammayut elite's refusal to entertain any democratic possibilities remained a contentious point over the years after the Khana Patisangkhon first raised the issue of Thammayut dictatorship. One of the fascinating aspects of the issue is the new government's ambivalence. The Mahanikai's activism took the new regime by surprise. When a group of teachers challenged the status quo, the new government deferred to the authority of the old regime aristocrat Thammasakmontri, who labeled the group as troublemakers. In religion as well, the government deferred to the old religious elite who denounced young progressive monks similarly. Unlike education, which the state declared a priority, the People's Party initially said little about

religion. The secular nationalist regime focused on the economic and political problems of the country. The energy driving intra-war religious debates came mainly from the public sphere and young monks who remained marginalized by the Sangha hierarchy.

But the Mahanikai group's activism pushed the issue of equality between the sects onto the national agenda. The group made parliamentary contacts who supported their movement and brought the issue to the floor of the assembly. Among the backers, the Sakon Nakhon representative Voranit Pricha - he of the inexhaustible plans for rural development - was among the first approached because of his sympathy to the movement. In addition, the group found a backer in Mahasarakham representative Thongmuan Attakon, whom we met in the second chapter when he described his province's backwardness on radio, and Thong-in Buriphat, the Ubon MP who irked the publicity bureau with his outspokenness.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Khanuengnit, *Kankluenwai*, 140-148. Earlier, Phra Thamma Woranaiyok and Phra Mahaprayat, the disciples of Pleum who helped found the movement, had met Pridi via Thawatt Ritidej, a prominent labor activist of the pre-war years. Mahaprayat sought out Thawatt as the latter was friend of Mahaprayat's father. Initially Thawatt - who had ordained as a youth in a Thammayut temple -- refused to get involved, saying that religious issues weren't his area. He relented, however, and took the men to meet Pridi. The two monks met Pridi and Thawatt at the latter's house to discuss their plans soon after the initial meeting of the Religious Restoration Party. Pridi - claiming to be already aware of the Mahanikai group through the police special branch (Santibal) - supported the idea of a new Sangha Act. Thawatt and Pridi's backing was a success by one measure, giving the group some crucial support outside the order, but also created suspicion. Princes Damrong and Narit wondered whether the Pridi association confirmed that the group was a front for communists. *Ibid*, 117-119.

Beginning in August 1938, the national assembly took up the issue of equality in the Sangha. The ensuing debates divided the house. Some MPs felt that the status quo should prevail, and argued that the secular authority could not regulate religious issues; the Council of Elders' decisions on Thammayut/Mahanikai issues should be final. Another group, however, contended that government intervention in the issue was necessary since the argument was tarnishing the standing of Thai Buddhism and inequality between the sects was not in keeping with the democratic times. Luang Sindhu Songkramchai - education minister at the time - offered the assembly four possibilities: return to the arrangement in the Buddha's time, which meant merging the sects under a single administration; leave the sects separate (in conducting ordinations, for example) but create an equal administration for them; completely separate the administration of the two sects upcountry while maintaining the authority of the Council of Elders; or maintain the status quo of Mahanikai subordination to the Thammayut. In the end, the second option of separate but equal status for the sects gained the most votes. No one voted to maintain the status quo.⁶⁹

Three main developments followed Mahanikai activism. At the end of 1937, the first Mahanikai Supreme Patriarch in nearly a century was elected to lead the Sangha. Somdet Phra Wannarat (Phe Tissathera) of Wat Suthat took the position after the death of Prince Chinaworasit, who had been Supreme Patriarch since 1921. Second, in 1941 the government issued a new Sangha Act that superseded the 1902

⁶⁹ Ibid, 149-155.

law. The new act used the language of representative politics. It featured a Sangha Assembly (Sangha Sapha) of 45 members as the legislative branch, a Cabinet (Khana Sanghamontri) and Sangha Nayok (equivalent to a Prime minister) as the executive, an ecclesiastical court system as the judicial branch for all monks regardless of sect, and a reorganization of the national administration into four functional departments that treated both sects equally.⁷⁰ Third, in 1941 the government established Wat Phra Sri Mahathat in northern Bangkok - also known as Wat Prachathipatai (Democracy Temple) - as a joint Mahanikai-Thammayut temple. The temple initially housed 24 monks, 12 from each sect. In July 1941 Phraya Phahon, the most senior People's Party member and second prime minister after the coup, became the first monk ordained. To much government publicity, on June 24, 1942, the 10th anniversary of the coup, the government held a formal opening of the temple.

It is debatable whether these official developments owed more to a genuinely democratic consciousness or the advantages they offered in state politics. Khaneungnit, whom I have partially relied upon to narrate the activities of the Religious Khana Patisangkhon because of his invaluable source material, argues that election of a

⁷⁰ "Phraratchabanyat Khana Song Phuttasakaraj 2484" (Sangha Act of 1941), *Rajanukitchabeksa* 58 (October 14, 1941): 1391-1410. There is an English translation of this (and the 1902 and 1962 laws) in *Acts on the Administration of the Buddhist Order of Sangha* (Bangkok: The Mahamakuta Educational Council, The Buddhist University, 1963). Articles 11 to 27 cover the Assembly; 28 to 37 address the Cabinet and its Prime Minister; 33 outlines the administration; and 50 to 52 the court system. In addition, the government issued supplementary explanations that clarified the national hierarchy. See Ishii, *Sangha, State and Society*, 103-104.

Mahanikai SP, the 1941 act and the opening of Wat Prachathipatai, were all direct outcomes of Mahanikai activism.⁷¹ Somboon, a leading source on twentieth century state Buddhism, doubts that Mahanikai activism led directly to creation of a more democratic Sangha. Instead, he views the government as the driving force for the changes. It advanced its ideology as a counter to the authoritarianism of the kings, and Somboon appears then to see the developments as a strictly political maneuver to gain support and unseat the old power.⁷²

I would argue that the Mahanikai movement is the most important, perhaps the only, example in the country's dominant cultural institution enacting People's Party rhetoric for a popular movement. It also provides the stellar example of the way the new regime co-opted rural democracy to engineer a new nationalism and distance itself from the old order.

The distance was more apparent than real, however. Ishii points out that the new Sangha hierarchy under the act sounded very democratic. In place of the secular designation of rath (or ratha) meaning state or secular authority, the hierarchy substituted sangha for the positions outlined above. The four functional departments also sounded very People's Party-esque: administration, education, propaganda and public works. Each was under the supervision of a minister.⁷³ But while reorganization of the national hierarchy (as clarified in additions to the act), ended up favoring Mahanikai interests because of their

⁷¹ Khanuengnit, *Kankluenwai*, Chapter Five.

⁷² Somboon, *Buddhism and Politics*, 42.

⁷³ Ishii, *Sangha, State and Society*, 102-103.

vastly greater numbers, ultimate control of the Sangha theoretically lay with the government. The king - in 1941 a young boy under the control of the People's Party-dominated regency -- appointed the SP and the government could intervene in any Sangha business it thought necessary. Actual power however remained with the elders.

Similarly the new order arguably envisioned Wat Phra Sri Mahathat as a premier symbol of the modern nation and from the beginning planners emphasized its symbolic value for the state over its democratic charter. In the discussions for its construction, Wichit Wathakan explained that the government wanted a "Pantheon of Siam" to house the ashes of the leading members of the People's Party. Like the French example for the republic's great citizens, the new order would have a holy site permanently commemorating what they brought to Siam.⁷⁴ The temple featured the new state architecture, planned as the modern standard of Thai temples: plain, unadorned angular

⁷⁴ Wichit warned that the temple could not fall prey to party politics, as had happened to the Pantheon in France, where remains had been dug up and cast out when different groups took power and reconsidered the historical contribution of their enemies. Legislation and control were needed, he argued, to prevent the memory of great men being tarnished. This is a prescient observation given the bitter backlash against the People's Party after the war, which attacked all People's Party leaders' reputations and in part at least decried new order architecture as ugly and possessing none of the spiritual power of the royal style. In the event, no one attempted to dig up any remains. Instead, the temple became largely Thammayut and was ignored by the royal-military governments after the war. Wichit to cabinet secretary, April 22, 1941 and latter's reply, May 1, 1941 in "Wat Phra Sri Mahathat," NA, SR.0201.46.

structures that marked the aesthetic popular in the Phibun group.⁷⁵

But even with their grand plans, the government remained a relatively weak player in religious affairs. The 1941 act sounds dramatic but like the expansion of education detailed in the last chapter, it isn't clear how much of a qualitative difference it made in rural life. The Sangha's tradition of mentorship and networks continued as the backbone of intra-Sangha relations, regardless of sect affiliation, and the higher status and wealth that the royal sect always had enjoyed continued. While supposedly its mixed community was a democratic model of the way forward for Thai Buddhism, Wat Phra Sri Mahathat became Thammayut. Tisso Uan, the abbot, was a conservative Thammayut elder from the northeast who had sparred with Isan monks in the past over the hierarchy.

Further, while co-opting the democratic spirit in the Mahanikai movement, the new order often seemed unsure of how much of a challenge could be mounted against the status

⁷⁵ "Prakat Rueang Kan Borichak Sap Ruam Kusol nai Kan Sang Wat Phra Sri Mahathat" (Announcement on the Donation of Wealth for Merit in the Construction of Wat Phra Sri Mahathat), March 1941 in *ibid.* See Chatri, *Sathapatchyakam* for a discussion of the new style in public architecture. While the state enthusiastically promoted the new democratic temple, it wasn't very keen on paying for it. The planners estimated the total cost of the temple as 700,000 baht, most of which they hoped could be supplied by the public and wealthy temples. They tapped willing monks to lecture to the people on the virtues of giving by explaining this meritorious activity via the Mahachat jataka tale, in which charity figures prominently. They estimated that 300,000 baht could be gained this way from Bangkok temple donations, and another 100,000 from upcountry wats. The strategy hence was one of privatizing the spiritual profits -- by storing the ashes of People's Party members exclusively -- while socializing the expense. Wichit and Vilas Osathanon to cabinet secretary, February 14, 1941 in NA, SR.0201.46.

quo. During the war, a series of cabinet meetings addressed how to make Buddhism more politically useful. The meetings stemmed from a report commissioned by the government on the state of Buddhism in the country that was submitted in January 1940. The participants - all senior People's Party members or supporters -- didn't look too favorably on the country's religious professionals. At a spring 1941 meeting, Wichit asserted flatly that Buddhism was not separable from politics. Sarit Yutasilp had strong words on the social role of the Sangha. He argued monks should understand that if the nation died, religion was doomed. Thamrong Nawasawat asserted that most monks at the time realized that religion was not a separate "kingdom," and that no real harm would be done if the state had to meddle.⁷⁶ Wichit and others thought minimum educational standards should be imposed on monks, that they could be made to study modern medicine, or that bhikkhus could be forced to give only "useful" sermons. Also maybe the state could supervise morality more closely, since it was felt that ill-disciplined bhikkhus had tarnished the religion. Possibly they could be prevented from wasting time listening to music on the radio or if they must, they could be limited to tuning in for the Man-Kong nationalist dialogues or state news.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ See May 1941 cabinet meeting, in NA, SR0201.10/101.

⁷⁷ June 2, 1941 cabinet meeting, in *ibid.* The Nai Man - Nai Kong (Mr. Firm and Mr. Steady) radio series was broadcast to instill patriotism and martial valor during the war. Scholars frequently cite them as evidence of Phibun's nationalist social program. See Craig Reynolds, *National Identity and its Defenders*.

As far as the historian can tell, none of these plans bore fruit. The government was unsure of how much it could control the religion, and admitted as much. Commenting on the 1941 act Thamrong Nawasawat doubted that the lay government really had the

Conclusion

This chapter has described popular Buddhism's challenge to official power and the role of the People's Party state as overseer of the faith. We see more political continuity with old regime culture than radical policy change. While a nationalist movement similar in some ways to anti-colonial politics in neighboring countries, religious reform did not form a key aspect of the new politics in Siam. The People's Party continued the centralization of political and cultural power that had

authority to intervene in religious affairs through the council. August 18, 1941 cabinet meeting in NA, SR.0201.10/101. Kat Songkhram hoped that the Thai Sangha wouldn't wind up enjoying the autonomy of the Catholic Church, which he thought beyond all secular authority.

As another example, the committee report explained that the estimated lay monk population ratio of 70:1 was far too high and that there were many temples with few monks that could probably be consolidated. The situation upcountry was extremely chaotic. Some places had many temples very near each other, elsewhere very few wats scattered far apart, many decrepit relics without custodians. Wichit, Pridi and others however doubted that anything could be done about the situation, as forcible disrobement or temple razing were far too socially sensitive issues. One participant asked if the education ministry even had the authority to dissolve wats; the answer from another was no and any decision would have to be made by local abbots. January 30, 1940 and April 10, 1941 cabinet meetings in *ibid*.

Temple wealth presented another problem. The cabinet wanted temple assets released from their overseers for spending on education. An education ministry representative told them that this was not possible. The big temples in Bangkok - all Thammayut - refused any outside scrutiny of their assets. The representative further opined that 95% of all temple wealth nationwide was not managed by the government at all. Phra Chamnan in meeting, June 16, 1941 in *ibid*.

In a fitting close to this long discussion, we can relate the opinion of cabinet member Kat Songkhram. In the spring of 1941 at a meeting, Kat said forthrightly that the cabinet lacked a real understanding of how the religion operated in the country and that elite monks should be asked in to explain things to the government and lists of questions should be sent to the leading temples. March 27, 1941 cabinet meeting in *ibid*.

been set in motion during the fifth reign reforms. The constitutional government relied on the royalist Thammayut sect to enforce religious orthodoxy, as the state had done since the late nineteenth century.

And yet state control of popular Buddhism remained weak. In both the Khruba Srivichai and Mahanikai cases a secular authority faced widespread popular movements that asserted local custom over the state. The Mahanikai activists used democratic discourse, which they claimed as the central feature of both original Buddhism and constitutional democracy, to resist Bangkok's domination of provincial Buddhism. Khruba Srivichai, seemingly a relic of "traditional" Lanna culture, enlisted people from diverse ethnic and class backgrounds to his cause for regional autonomy. This had unintended consequences; many state officials sought his spiritual power for its merit-making opportunities and thereby contributed to regional resistance.

A later chapter discusses trends in intellectual Buddhism during these same years. Unlike the cosmopolitan moderns who rethought Buddhism in global terms, the religious professionals presented here argued their case in local traditions. Local is an elastic term however. The Mahanikai case shows clearly that the local tradition of popular consensus accommodated the new discourse and used it in domestic politics. Khruba Srivichai's followers also zealously defended a local religious democracy and forced the democratic government to stand against its rhetoric for the expansion of state power.

Chapter Five: Fiction and Social Consciousness

The current chapter examines representations of Thai society in interwar fiction. Realistic fiction became popular in the first few decades of the last century as the market for pleasure reading expanded. A hobby of palace writers and readers at the turn of the century, the evolving form was dominated by commoners by the 1930s. But the growth of middle class writing masks a thematic continuity in fiction from old regime to new. Old regime sensibilities animated the middle class writers before and after 1932. One reason for this is the uninterrupted primacy of the networks of influence and the role of elite schools that bound commoners to patrons from elite families. Additionally and perhaps more importantly, market forces commodified traditional culture. Old regime characters filled the pages of the new writing; even as royal power weakened in the twenty years before the coup, its archetypes and their moral dilemmas figured prominently in fiction. The social impact of the modern economy fills the stories. Capitalism's grubbiness -- an obsession with money and appearance -- and the solvent effect it had on aristocratic values were dominant themes.

In telling this story, the city takes center stage. Then as now, Bangkok was the intellectual and cultural heart of royalism, a force that resisted the corrosive effects of capitalism even as it eagerly shopped for its wares.

The City and Consumer Society

The global economy began to transform Bangkok in the late nineteenth century. In 1892 Lucien Fournereau, an advisor to Rama V, described Bangkok as a "true tower of Babel ... an absolutely cosmopolitan city: all the races of Asia are represented."¹ New Road (Charoen Krung), the center of commerce that runs along the river from Samphaeng (Chinatown) to Rama III Road, "presents a thousand different things." Fournereau observed all manner of occupations and people: monks out for alms at first light, women filling the morning markets to buy food for the day, policemen on the beat, postal workers, Chinese workmen and vendors, old women selling grilled maize ears or banana fritters. The road was the headquarters of the leading foreign firms, the imposing Oriental Hotel (readers could find *Le Temps*, *Figaro* and British or German magazines), the Post and Telegraphic Services, the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, the Calvary Church and mansions of the wealthy. Nearby were the British and German clubs, sights of alcoholic carousing until early in the morning. Strolling in the cool of the evening, Fournereau described the open-air restaurants and the Chinese stalls lit by smoky petroleum lamps: "(O)pen-air theatres and gambling houses, open all night ... where they also smoke opium." The scene is remarkable for its cultural and historical jumble:

"Everywhere in all these things that belong to another age, another civilization, modernism has cast its sturdy imprint: near a Siamese dwelling, a European house; beside

¹ *Bangkok in 1892*, trans. Walter E.J. Tips (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1998), 42.

a pagoda, the chimney of a factory; on a steam launch, a monk with a shaved head ... "²

Fournereau wrote at the beginning of the administrative reforms that created the modern state. In the first decades of the last century, the city and its commerce grew enormously. It is estimated that Bangkok's population trebled in a generation, from about 365,500 in 1910 to more than 700,000 in 1929, and 890,000 in 1937.³ From the 1880s to around 1920 Bangkok changed from a river and canal-oriented city to one of land development and ownership with an expanding road network.⁴ The royals became the largest city landowners. A series of new palaces built around the turn of the century displayed their wealth.

Aside from rice and saw milling, controlled by foreign interests, there was hardly any industry. The royal and aristocratic elites generally made poor businesspeople. They were, however, avid shoppers. Love of the consumer lifestyle, culturally the most important outcome of Bangkok's integration into global capitalism, originated in the palace. Prince Wachirayan, austere Thammayut disciplinarian, remembered his obsession with appearance as a young man:

"What above all ensnared me was wasteful spending. I had no conception of frugality ... Having clothes made at a Chinese

² Roger de Beauvoir, quoted in *ibid*, 20.

³ Porphant Ouyyanont, "Bangkok's Population and the Ministry of the Capital in Early 20th Century Thai History," *Southeast Asian Studies* 35, no. 2 (1997): 247-249.

⁴ Porphant, "Bangkok's Population," 240-260; and "Physical and Economic Change in Bangkok, 1851-1925," *Southeast Asian Studies*, 36, no. 4 (1999): 437-474.

shop was, as they say, inappropriate. They had lots of stuff, but I would be embarrassed to wear their clothes. The Western tailors were more expensive, so my first wish was to go there. The Indian shops, with their clothes and household items, couldn't compare (to the prestige) of the foreign goods. They were not as wealthy looking, and they also demanded cash payment ... The foreign department stores gave credit, I only had to sign my names to the bill ... Their goods were very refined and I could wear them proudly ... The foreign department stores became my orbit. Whatever I fancied I went and bought. Since it was on credit, it was like it was free. To bargain for the price would have been very vulgar, as if I were a shabby person."⁵

Charles Buls's memorable description of the kitsch art in Chula's palaces humorously captures the growing materialism of the early century:

"I had often asked myself where all the horrors which are exposed in the World Expos end up. I imagined that they would furnish the castles of our upstarts ... (I)t is to the poor Asian princes that the unscrupulous industrialists sold, without doubt for double or triple their value, the pendulums with a power hammer or in the form of the Eiffel tower, crystal candelabra, colored negroes, chairs in

⁵ Somdet Phra Mahasomanajao Kromphraya Wachirayan Warorot, *Praprawat tras Lao* (Autobiography) (Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1971), 201-202. Wachirayan wrote his autobiography in 1915. He relates that he successfully conquered his profligacy at around age 17. A rainy day prevented his usual afternoon horseback or carriage ride. Sitting around at home, he came to see his material things in a new light. An expensive table, for example, that he once adored now appeared to him poorly built. He reflected on the limited use he made of it, and now felt his spending was a complete waste. *Praprawat tras Lao*, 206.

twisted wood, statues in gilded zinc, vases in sculpted alabaster."⁶

The old Lords of Life, in Peleggi's phrase, became the Lords of Things.

From the royals, consumerism spread to all levels of urban society. Aside from the monarchy, the bureaucracy was the most important state institution. Buls commented on the new government type at the turn of the century:

"The officials are on the way to their offices, to the Court of Justice. These are modernized Siamese. Their costume consists of a soft, felt hat, a longish white jacket with gilt buttons, of a pha-nung that forms baggy pants, white stockings and shoes with a buckle. They lean on a stick with a knob in chiseled silverware. From a distance, they project the false impression of an eighteenth century bourgeois."⁷

Middle class people both in and outside the bureaucracy followed the fashions that originated in the palace; foreign goods and styles became indispensable for good social standing. K.S.R. Kulap, an iconoclastic commoner writing at the turn of the century, described further the trappings of the rakish (*ko ke*) crowd. They sported thin gold watches, crocodile skin belts, jackets and shirts from John Samson's store, and thick European-style linen handkerchiefs. They used Swedish matches for their Egyptian cigarettes, enjoyed their lunches at the

⁶ *Siamese Sketches*, trans. Walter E.J. Tips (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1994), 141.

⁷ *Siamese Sketches*, 20.

Oriental Hotel, and drank brandy or Lawson's whisky and soda.⁸

The Palace Origins of Reading for Pleasure

Modern print technology, introduced around mid-century,⁹ contributed to Bangkok's growing cosmopolitanism and by the fifth reign fueled the demand for entertainment and new knowledge. As with the taste for luxury goods, reading for pleasure started in the palace. Three phases can be identified: an initial period when young King Chula's faction challenged the old elite in the mid-1870s; a middle phase, a decade later, by which time Young Siam had cemented its cultural authority; and a final period around 1900-1910 when the first generation of overseas educated princes and some lucky commoners returned to staff the upper tiers of the new state.

In 1874, Prince Kasemsantsophak, a half-brother of Chulalongkorn, and Chaophraya Phatsakorawong (Phon Bunnag) introduced *Darunawat* ("Lessons for Young Men"), the first Thai literary magazine. Experimenting with short fiction and advice columns, *Darunawat's* royalist writers introduced these new genres to the kingdom. *Darunawat* was also an intellectual channel for Young Siam to combat the

⁸ Quoted in Somrak Chaisingananont, *Rotniyom: Phasa nai Sangkhom Thai yuk Boriphokniyom* (Taste: Language in Thai Society in the Age of Consumerism) (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 2001), 100.

⁹ The American missionary Dan Beach Bradley introduced the first Thai-language printing press in 1835, a machine that had been built in Burma. His *Bangkok Recorder*, published in 1844, became the first newspaper in the kingdom. A few years earlier in 1839, missionaries printed the first government document, an edict banning the import of opium. *Ratchakitchanubeksa*, the Royal Gazette that published new laws, became the first Thai periodical in the late 1850s.

traditional elite centered on the regent and the old noble families that resisted the modern state. Contributors advanced reformist ideas, albeit obliquely.¹⁰

Darunowat was only published for two years, in 1874 and 1875. A decade later, *Wachirayan* (1884-1915) and *Wachirayan Wiset* (1886-1894) became the next important platforms for the young palace elite, who by this time had cashiered the old guard. In addition to the king, Prince Pichit Prichakon, Prince Bhanurangsi Sawangwongse and Prince Devawong Varopakorn, all brothers of Chula, were the key players involved. The Wachirayan National Library published the periodicals. The library became the central cultural authority in the new state's ideological project, and the new magazines advanced the dominant culture of the palace.¹¹ Narathip Phraphanphong, Prince Wan's father, was a frequent contributor whom Sumali credits with introducing more skilled prose techniques than *Darunowat* had managed. The Wachirayan group avoided politics (the crisis of 1893 was not mentioned, for example) and the group focused on advice and education (including explanations of Western philosophers and literary giants, like Socrates, Homer, Francis Bacon and Shakespeare), Buddhist tales and ethics, and the gentle mockery that the princes developed.

¹⁰ See Sumali Viravong, Introduction in *Roi Kaeo Naeo Mai khong Thai, Pho. So. 2417-2453* (New Directions in Thai Prose, 1874-1910 (Bangkok: PEN International Thailand Centre, 1987) and Wibha Senanan, *Kamnert Nawaniyai nai Prathet Thai* (Birth of the Novel in Thailand) (Bangkok: Dokya, 1997), 128-154.

¹¹ See Tanapong Chitsanga, "'Wachirayanna' lae Kansawaengha Khwamru khong Chonchan Nam khong Siam Pho. So. 2427-2448" ('Wachirayanna' and the Pursuit of Knowledge of Siamese Elites, 1884-1905) (M.A. thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 2009).

That light, seemingly inoffensive tone sometimes backfired. Prince Prichakorn's "Reuang Saneuk Neuk" (Fun Thoughts) appeared in *Wachirayan Wiset* in 1886 and is arguably the first original modern Thai story. Prichakorn poked very mild fun at the nation's religion in a description of a group of young monks at the royal Wat Bowonniwet. The story was not well received. Only the first installment appeared, as the abbot of the temple took offense at Prichakorn's use of the temple's name and his levity in religious affairs. Chula and Prince Damrong explained that the abbot was unfamiliar with Prichakorn's project, which was to write a Western-style "novel," and didn't understand that Western fiction often used real place names.¹²

The third phase is most important here because commoners, in addition to their administrative role, also were key in developing state culture. Royalty had a profound influence on the ennobled commoners, and kingly patronage bred loyalty. Prince Pithayalongkorn (a member of the royal family) and four nobles (Chaophraya Thammasakmontri, Phraya Surintharatcha and two men from the Bunnag clan) established *Lak Witthaya* ("Stolen Knowledge")

¹²Wibha has reprinted the first installment in *Kamnert Nawaniyai nai Prathet Thai* (The Birth of the Novel in Thailand) (Bangkok: Dokya Press, 1997), 470-472. Also see the criticisms of the story by the king and a reader who wrote to the magazine in Suphani Worathon, *Prawat Kanphraphan Nawaniyai Thai tangte Samai rerm raek jon theung Pho. So. 2475* (The History of Thai Novel Writing from the First Age to 1932) (Bangkok: Munithi Khrongkan Kantamra Sangkhomsat lae Manutsayasat, 1976), 56-59. Damrong's explanation, written in 1929, is reprinted in Wibha, *Kamnert*, 242-243.

in 1900.¹³ The most famous of the returned students, King Chula's son Vajiravudh, organized the Thawi Panya Samoson (The Society for Enhanced Wisdom) literary club in 1904, and his group, a mixture of princes and commoners, published a magazine of the same name until 1907. In the latter year, Luang Wilatpariwat, penname Khru Liam and like Phraya Surin one of the first of seven commoners to study in England on a royal scholarship, established and edited *Samran Withaya*, another the key magazine.

All of these early magazines developed technical skills in the new genre, often by pirating foreign stories. Light topics, romance, adventure or gentle humor, prevailed.¹⁴ Discourses on manners and morals, adapted to Western-style short stories or vignettes also were featured.¹⁵

While aiming to entertain readers, the young elite also frequently expressed their conception of virtue. Selflessness, sacrifice, thrift, honesty, kindness to

¹³ The magazine was short-lived, as the editors closed it within two years because of the demands of their official work. Phraya Surincharatcha translated Marie Corelli's *The Vendetta*, the first full length Western novel to appear in Thai, here in 1902.

¹⁴ Vajiravudh, for example, was an avid Sherlock Holmes fan and adapted Conan Doyle's plots to a Thai setting for Thawi Panya with his "Nithan Thong In" (Tales of Thong In) series. Coupled with Marie Corelli's *Vendetta* produced by Phraya Surin, the crown prince helped detective and adventure fiction to become popular.

¹⁵ In addition, East meets West vignettes (destined, in the form of Eastern prince meets Western girl, to become a staple of interwar writing) or elite Asian reflections on overseas life were popular. Unlike their fathers' generation, these young men gained first hand experience of European society during their formative years, and their writing reflected their upbringing. Two famous examples are Pithayalongkorn's *Jotmai Jang Wan Ram*, most of which was published in *Thawi Panya*, and Vajiravudh's *Huajai Chai Num* (The Heart of a Young Man), which appeared in *Dusit Samit* magazine in 1921. Both employed letters from lead characters as their vehicle.

inferiors all were prominent. This sensibility had profound long-term impact, as we will see. Further, ambivalence about consumerism and modern life, which simultaneously attracted and repelled the guardians of official culture, was an important aspect of the writing.

Khru Liam's 1915 novel *Khwam mai Phayabat* is worth describing briefly as it is considered the first full-length original Thai novel and because it pioneered the fiction of royal-aristocratic romance and ethics that governed creative writing before and after 1932.¹⁶

The protagonist, Jian, is a middle class civil servant who falls for Mae Prung, daughter of an ennobled government officer. Mae Prung grows up in Thonburi, across the river from Bangkok. Khru Liam presents Thonburi as a country area of quiet canals, cool river breezes and sanity. After moving to live with Jian in Bangkok, Mae Peut is bewitched by material things and is led astray by Phak, a lecherous man who is able to offer her a life of relative luxury. Immoral and undisciplined, Phak lives for nightlife; he takes Mae Peut out on the town and gives her expensive gifts. Jian, by contrast, is an ideal Buddhist. While he sometimes despairs at Mae Peut's waywardness (and spends lots of time tracking her down to the city's evening spots), he doesn't judge her and treats her kindly. Death and dying, as often in Buddhist tales and fiction, frame Khru Liam's

¹⁶ It was probably also the fastest written novel in Thai history. Published initially in two hardcover volumes, Khru Liam wrote his novel in three weeks during the summer of 1915. The story is 730 pages long! The owner of the Thai Publishing Co. (Rong Phim Thai) asked Khru Liam to write a Thai novel and gave him a copy of *Khwam Phayabat* to use as an example; he cautioned Khru Liam, though, "don't produce a farang story." Suchat Sawatsi, "Khwam mai Phayabat," in Nai Samran, *Khwam mai Phayabat*, 107-112.

moral commentary. Jian's dying mother is deeply attached to Mae Peut, whom she knows only as an innocent country girl. The girl ignores during the latter's long illness and is always out with her paramour. Mae Peut's lack of compassion breaks Jian's heart. But, as with her infidelity, he forgives her this as he cultivates his virtue. The patient cuckold practices his Buddhist compassion with an inspiring singularity of mind. The farang say that vengeance is sweet, Khru Liam reminds us at the beginning of the story; non-vengeance (the book's title) is even more rewarding.

The themes and descriptions in *Khwam mai Phrayabat* are similar to other Asian novels written during the interwar years. Rapid changes in city life and growing commercialization strike a common chord. Khru Liam describes, for the first time in modern Thai fiction, the nightlife, the streets, and the superficiality of urban society. Still, however, the dominant role of aristocratic Buddhism in the story shows the strength of belief in traditional values as a way to maintain social order. Further, ordinary people, the vast majority of the Bangkok population, hardly register in the story.

Reading: From Palace to Mass Market

In the three princely phases of writing, magazine circulations were small and readers formed a select group. After World War I, however, the reading public grew rapidly. More than 160 newspapers and magazines circulated in the 15 years of the sixth reign.¹⁷ From 1925 to 1935, 212 papers

¹⁷ Newspapers started to become popular during Chula's reign but circulated very narrowly. In 1875, *Court* became the first Thai daily newspaper. As its name suggests, it focused on the dynasty.

were read; around 50 new papers were established after the coup.¹⁸ Newspapers developed their style and structure as city readers demanded more, and some of the leading papers employed foreign expertise. The Siam Free Press group, for example, published three dailies in the 1920s that commanded a large, maybe largest, share of the market. The group hired American journalist Andrew Freeman as editor of the group's English *Bangkok Daily Mail* in 1924. Along with talented Thai writers like Louis Girivat (at the time manager of the Daily Mail and editor of the Thai edition), Freeman's pioneering style propelled the group into alliance and conflict with the government.¹⁹

Freeman was the first (at least according to him) to feature eye-grabbing headlines and news on the front page

In the next decade, the foreign community found a voice with *The Bangkok Times*. Owned by a Scot, *The Bangkok Times* became Bangkok's first English daily in 1887. It proved to be one of the longest running papers, closing only in 1942 due to wartime paper shortages and financial hardship.

Siam Free Press and the *Siam Observer/Sara Rasadon* were also important newspapers that started around the same time, in 1891 and 1893, respectively. Khana Thamngan Prawat Kanphim nai Prathet Thai, *Syampimphakan: Prawatisat Kanphim nai Prathet Thai* (Syampimphakan: The History of Publishing in Thailand) (Bangkok: Matichon Books, 2006), 90-91.

Unlike the short-lived *Darunowat* and other palace magazines, *Court* and the first crown-backed or crown-friendly newspapers were not story oriented. Featuring advertisements from the main city businesses on the first page, shipping news or arrivals/departures of important people, the papers revolved around royal and merchant society. Readers seeking light diversion would have to buy or borrow the magazines that featured stories until fiction became a staple of newspapers from the mid-1920s.

¹⁸ Syampimphakan, 484-499. The figure is all types of print for consumers. Supaphan states that around 25 daily newspapers were established after 1932. Supaphan Bunsat, *Prawat Nang Suephim nai Prathet Thai* (History of the Newspaper in Thailand) (Bangkok: Bhannakij Trading, 1974), 79-83.

¹⁹ See Girivat, *17 Pi Prachathipatai*, and Freeman, *Brown Women and White* (New York: The John Day Company, 1932).

of a Siamese paper. In his memoir, Freeman recalled his initial encounter with Thai journalism. On his first day at the Daily Mail, he looked over the paper after Girivat and a colleague left the room:

"They were staid British sheets with advertisements on the first page. Except for one column of cables, each paper contained a monotonous array of clipped items from six weeks to three months old. They were set up under lifeless headlines like black clay pigeons waiting to be shot."²⁰

While racy stories and catchy headlines made news reading more exciting, editors also found that serialized fiction and other light reading generated revenue in a tough market. Among the leading periodicals of the 1920s that carried fiction were the monthlies *Sri Krung* (1913-1927), *Senaseuksa lae Phae Withayasat* (commencing in 1915), *Sap Thai* (1920-1927) and *Thai Kasem* (1924-1935), and *Syam Ratsadon* daily. Translated foreign fiction, Chinese epics, Western film scripts and new local fiction all attracted readers. *Syam Ratsadon*, for example, owned by Sino-Thai businessman Sukri Wasuwat, attracted readers with its translations of Chinese epics.²¹ *Senaseuksa*, published by the army strategy office, was widely read for its translated fiction and also for the original stories it commissioned. Its editor Luang Saranuprapan committed the paper to encourage Thai writers. His "Phrae Dam" (Black Satin), sometimes regarded as the first Thai detective

²⁰ Freeman, *Brown Women and White*, 58.

²¹ Syamphimphakan, 120-121; Wibha, Kamnert, chapter four.

story, appeared in the journal in 1922.²² Under the patronage of Vajiravudh, *Sap Thai* published commoner fiction, including stories by Kulap Saipradit, in addition to new royal fiction like that of Akatdamkerng Rapiphat. (Both of these writers will be discussed below.)

Luang Saranuprapan, among others, argued for "serious" fiction as a necessary new Thai genre;²³ i.e., Thai settings and characters with which the reading public would identify. Market forces contributed to the importance of local stories in the 1920s. Additionally, palace culture became commodified in print. Young writers of all backgrounds earned money with stories of the elite and their preoccupations. Politics, however, including current events and their participants, remained off limits. In describing the composition of Phrae Dam for example, Saranuprapan related the care with which he had to avoid transgressing state law or offending government officials.²⁴ This caution had to be exercised even in the seemingly tame adaptation of a Hollywood film!

Middle class writers, important as translators and writers, avoided sensitive issues and stuck with adventure and romance. Malai Chupinit, whom we will meet shortly,

²² While the author claimed that the story was his own invention, the masked baddie plot borrowed from popular foreign movies. Suphani links Prae Dam's plot to the film *House of Danger*, starring Onslow Stevens and Janet Chandler (*Prawat Kanphraphan Nawaniyai Thai*, 107-114). This doesn't make sense since the film appeared in 1934. Still, Saranuprapan's plot was obviously foreign derived. See David Smyth, "Ban Maha Phai and Phrae Dam: From Silent Movie to Novel," *Journal of the Siam Society* 91 (2003): 223-239.

²³ See the selections from his *Senaseuksa* editorials in Suphani, 178-183.

²⁴ Editorial column, *Senaseuksa lae Phae Withayasat*, 6 (July 1922): 753, quoted in Suphani, 183.

translated Marie Corelli tales in the 'teens, for example, while Phraya Anuman Rajathon, destined to become a Thai literary icon, translated Haggard's *Virgin of the Sun* in 1915 and Allan Quatermain stories around the same time.²⁵ "Saengthong" (Luang Bunyamanoppanich) made the first translation of Alexandre Dumas's work in 1915, and later adapted Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* to a Thai setting in sixteen stories he wrote between 1923 and 1934.²⁶

A Hollow Crown: The Long Half-life of Royal Culture

While the Hollywood adaptations and stories of danger and adventure fed the appetite of the expanding reading market, Siam was undergoing a profound change. Amidst the rapid growth of the city, the royal-aristocratic elite

²⁵ He also produced a Buddhist novel that combined romance, adventure and profound philosophy. Phya Anuman and Nagapratheep, his long time collaborator, published *Kamanita* in 1931. A novel set in the Buddha's time, *Kamanita* was written originally in Karl Gjellerup in German in 1906 and translated into English by John Logie in the 'teens. The Thai version was an instant classic and the vivid translation led many readers at the time to think *Kamanita* was an original Thai work. Yaa Khop, the pen name of Choti Phraepphan (one of the founders of Suphaphburut, discussed below), praised the story for its language, multiple voicings and non-linear, metaphysical time narrations. See Yaa Khop, "Kamanita, Khwamrak nai Reuang khong Phutthasasana" (*Kamanita, Love in a Buddhist Story*), *Suan Kulap Witthaya* 13, no. 11 (March 31, 1935): 92-106. The Thai is brilliant and outdoes the English original at times.

²⁶ Suphani, *Prawat Kanphraphan Nawaniyai*, 80-100. Saengthong wrote that his main goal was to humor people: "Please laugh out loud, the more laughing the more honored I will feel. However happy my stories make you, just that much will I feel gratified." Luang Bunyamanoppanich (Saengthong), "Khamnam khong Phu Taeng" (Author's Introduction), in *Ruam Rueang Khun Theuk doi Saengthong* (Collected Stories of Khun Theuk by Saengthong) (Bangkok: Phraephattaya, 1953), x. Khun Theuk was Saengthong's Mr. Pickwick; Mr. Chat (Winkle), Nitthaya (Tupman), Suwan (Snodgrass) and later Ah Phong (Samuel Weller) round out the group. The first story appeared in *Sap Thai* in the summer of 1923, and the last in a Thepsirin school magazine in December 1934.

formed a shrinking slice at the apex of the social pyramid. The explosion of new information in the interwar years challenged royal political and cultural hegemony. Still, a constant dialectic whereby old values were reasserted amidst commentaries on the waning of elite power fed the gathering storm of anti-absolutism.

In the interwar years, the Lords of Life were a shrinking class. Unlike the Lao, Lanna and Burmese monarchies, status in the Bangkok dynasty declined over generations. The system is complicated, but the important point is that sons and daughters always held a lower status by one degree than their parents. Children of a king were chaofa ("heavenly lords," those born from a queen) or phra ong chao (usually born from a king's consort) royals, while mom chao designated grandchildren, mom ratchawong, great-grandchildren and mom luang great-great grandchildren of kings.²⁷

The male palace elite - the celestials, meaning the king and the chaofa and phra ong chao classes -- monopolized power in the fifth reign. The system worked well to buttress royal power so long as the monarch produced lots of children. The polygamous kings did their part. King Mongkut (r.1851-1868) had 82 children, while his son and heir Chula had 76 children (32 sons and 44 daughters). Thereafter, however, the pool shrank. Vajiravudh wasn't interested in women; he fathered one girl,

²⁷ Nakharin explains the five-tiered system, replete with complicated royal vocabulary, in *Kanpatiwat Syam*, 33-36. Foreign readers who prefer to avoid the tedium of reading rajasap can consult Wyatt's glossary in *The Politics of Reform in Thailand* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 391-394. Mom luang is not given in Wyatt's glossary.

born just before he died in 1925. Prajadhipok had no children. Thus, the palace crowd aged and diminished. There were 86 men and 80 women of phra ong chao status around the time Vajiravudh ascended the throne in 1910. Ten years later, the numbers had fallen to 72 and 70, respectively. By the late 1920s, there were 52 phra ong chao men and 56 women.²⁸

In 1929, King Prajadhipok commissioned a survey of royals in the civil service. We learn that there were 144 princes of mom chao rank upwards in government at the time.²⁹ This tiny class occupied the top positions in an administrative system heavily skewed by favoritism. The one hundred-plus royals controlled the kingdom accompanied by a few hundred senior nobles. At the beginning of his reign, Prajadhipok's Privy Council had over 200 members with 150 Phraya and 20 Chaophraya.³⁰ While noble titles were not issued after 1932 they still carried enormous weight. Chaophraya titles were very rare, only about ten played an important political role after 1932. The two classes presided over a bureaucracy of around 70,000 civil servants.³¹

²⁸ *Ratchasakunawong* (Royal Lineages), Cremation Volume for Sanan Bunyasiriphan (Bangkok, 1969), 44-96.

²⁹ Nakharin, *Kanpatiwat Syam*, 54. The army officer corps accounted for nearly one-third of this group; the elitism of the army frustrated many young commoners and contributed to the 1932 coup. See the interviews with Phraya Phahon in Kulap Saipradit, *Buanglang Kanpatiwat 2475* (Behind the Revolution of 1932) (Bangkok: Mingmit, 1999 (1941)). The interviews were originally published in Kulap's *Suphaphurut* newspaper during Phibun's government.

³⁰ Sorasak Ngamcachonkulkid, "The Seri Thai Movement, the First Movement against Military Dictatorship in Modern Thai History," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2005), 78-80.

³¹ Nakharin, *Kanpatiwat Syam*, 78-79.

Several high royals close to Chula died in the ten or so years before the coup, thus weakening the projection of royal power. Their palaces were mini-worlds, with dozens of servants, clients and hangers-on. But as patrons died, clients lost their livelihoods and social standing. Somdet Phra Si Patcharintra, one of Chula's wives, died in 1919; her Phraya Thai palace had been a focal point of the network monarchy but lost its prominence after she passed. Somdet Chaofa Pitsanulok, a son of Chula, died the following year. Parutsakawan palace, his home, also declined in importance. It is hard to recapture the anti-royalist anger around the coup. In one among a series of insults to the old lords, the People's Party turned Parutsakawan into a military barracks. Luean Saraphai, a royalist imprisoned by the People's Party in 1933, wrote sorrowfully of the lords' fall. A military escort shepherded him to his wife's funeral in 1936, his first time out of gaol since his incarceration. Driving past Bangkhunphrom Palace, someone remarked: "This palace was built with the blood and sweat of the people." Bangkhunphrom was the home of Prince Nakhon Sawan, arguably the most powerful official of the seventh reign and Luean Saraphai's patron. The radical insult wrecked his happy memories of the palace and royalism's heyday.³²

Sensitive royals saw the demise of high society as a national crisis. Gone, at least in part, was the old confidence in princely authority. Mom Chao Akatdamkerng (1905-1932), a son of Prince Rabi (himself a half-brother

³² *Fanrai khong Khappajao*, 231. Chula Chakrapongse describes life in both palaces in his memoirs. See *Kert Wang Parut* (Born in Parutsakawan Palace) (Bangkok: River Books, 2009 (1951)).

of Chula and a key legal reformer) was the most thoughtful commentator on the shrinking royal class in the interwar years. As their numbers shrank, two problems stood out: the undue importance of money and the snobbishness of high families. In his 1931 story "Samakhom Chan Sung" (High Society), Akatdamkerng describes a psychological pressure that resonates with the fiction of many chroniclers of aristocracy's morbidity around the world:

High society is a vast, unbounded heaven. But it limits membership in the club. Members must have both wealth and elite family blood; one or the other isn't enough. Wealthy people who are not from an elite family but who try to enter the club may as well try sailing a boat in a storm at sea; they will be blown hither and yon until they vanish. Those with the name but without wealth will struggle much like those sailing in a storm; they will try in vain (to be accepted) and in the end will go mad.³³

With the demise of polygamy, the middle tier mom chao class accounted for the majority of royals. But they were scorned by the celestials and not accepted by middle class commoners. Describing one of his mom chao characters, Akatdamkerng explains:

"Praphansiri knew well the incongruity of membership in high society ... He never felt at all that he was a lord. All he knew was that one of his ancestors had been a Thai king, and he was the very last of the line ... Praphansiri often asked himself 'Am I a lord or a commoner?' When he

³³ "Samakhom Chan Sung," in *Wiman Thalai* (The Heavens Fall) (Bangkok: Bang Luang Press, 1990 (1931)), 102.

was with royalty, they made him sit in the back row ... commoners never accepted him either. They viewed him as a lord, and laughed at him.³⁴

Some conservative writers sought to rejuvenate high society with a return to patriarchy and traditional morality. Akatdamkerng's gloomy portraits don't offer a clear way out of the dilemma. The ultimate disaster, to this melancholic young prince,³⁵ was the disappearance of the Thai people into a racial soup. He pictured a dark, miscegenated future as a direct result of the elites shirking their patriotic responsibility to lead the nation.

"Jao mai mi San" (Kings without Courts) describes the demise of the Thais via a narrator's dream. The narrator says that a book lent to him by a foreign friend about the Russian revolution and the elimination of the Romanovs prompted his imagination. In his dream, he travels to America to visit friends. In New Jersey, the narrator chances upon an Asian man sitting in a parked fruit delivery van. To his amazement, the stranger addresses him in Thai. The narrator tells his friends at the Thai legation in New York about this encounter. The assistant to the ambassador laughs and tells him that they know the man: Prince Payungsak. The narrator tracks Payungsak - now known

³⁴ "Samakhom Chan Sung," 110-111.

³⁵ Akatdamkerng killed himself in Hong Kong in May 1932. Kulap Saipradit, a friend of Akatdamkerng at Thepsirin, wrote a commemoration of him in *Phu Nam* newspaper where he described the young author as a "streak of lightning, brightly lighting up the sky for only moment, and then gone." Quoted in Orasom Suthisakhon, ed. *Jao Chai Nak Phraphan, Buanglang chak Chiwit khong Mo. Ch. Akatdamkerng Raphiphat* (The Writer Prince, Behind the Scenes in the Life of Prince Akatdamkerng Raphiphat) (Bangkok: Dokya, 1987), 21.

as Jack -- to a fruit store on East 27th Street. Jack takes him to visit his family in Chinatown, which the narrator describes as very dirty and chaotic, "most of the people on the street were Chinese, Japanese and Negroes" (95). Down a dirty and narrow lane, Jack leads him to his home in a dilapidated building. Jack has married a proletarian (*phrai rap*); the narrator notes how dirty she and couple's two children are. The encounter with the déclassé Jack leads the narrator to meditate on his nation. He pictures a bleak future, in which the once-strong Siamese race has become weak because of the cowardice of lesser lords who, in seeking to be free of social pressure, have weakened their country.

Rumor and superstition highlighted the frailty of royal power. Many accounts of 1932 suggest the inevitability of the coup. Rumors of a revolt or disaster that would end absolute kingship were common, with the most famous the legend attributed to Rama I that the Chakri dynasty, established in 1782, would only last 150 years. Nineteen thirty-two was doomsday. Some thought that King Prajadhipok, a reluctant and sickly monarch, was inevitably doomed since he was born in 1893, a year of national humiliation when France piloted gunboats up the Chaophraya river to demand territorial concessions from the Chakris.³⁶ An unsuccessful 1912 coup by military officers alerted the palace that modernization was changing the military

³⁶ Poonpisamai Disakul, *Sing thi Khappachao phop Hen* (The Things I've Seen) (Bangkok: Matichon Books, 2004 (1943)), 4. Momchao Poonpisamai was one of Prince Damrong's daughters. Like Akatdamkerng, she identifies the snobbery and money-obsession of the elite families as primary causes of social discontent and the revolution. Ibid, 98-99.

leadership's ideals. Loyalty to the throne was no longer taken for granted. The putsch, betrayed from within before it accomplished anything, had a strong influence on the People's Party in two ways. Pridi credited the boldness of 1912 as opening the eyes of young people. The People's Party also made secrecy a priority after seeing what happened to the 1912 radicals.³⁷ Five years later the fall of the Russian monarchy, among whose members the Chakris counted many friends, scared the dynasty. Anti-communism, a never-ending psychological battle with a mysterious foreign threat, then formed a core aspect of monarchic discourse until very recently.

The divisiveness of Vajiravudh's reign, which alienated many of his father's close friends, also tarnished the monarchy's image.³⁸ At the coronation of Prajadhipok in 1925, the British minister in Bangkok asked Prince Nakhon Sawan what the new king should be called. He replied referencing the demise of royal authority: "(N)ot Rama anyhow - we have done with Ramas."³⁹ Prince Damrong Rajanuphap, key fifth reign administrator and half-brother of Chulalongkorn, fell out with Vajiravudh early in his reign. Damrong remarked in 1926 that Prajadhipok was saddled with a "deplorable inheritance" because of the fall of royal prestige and the sixth king's raiding of the

³⁷ Thaemsuk Numanond, *Kabot Ro. So. 130, Yangterk Runrek* (The Revolt of 1912, The First Generation of Young Turks) (Bangkok: Saithan Publishing, 2002).

³⁸ See Stephen Greene, *Absolute Dreams, Thai Government under Rama VI, 1910-1925* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1999).

³⁹ Quoted in Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy*, 31. Nakhon Sawan cryptically added "it must never happen again," which the British minister took as criticism of Vajiravudh's reign.

treasury for his fanciful projects.⁴⁰ Perhaps summarizing all of these currents of pessimism, Prince Wan opined that the "People's Party proclaimed that they had toppled the absolute monarchy. Actually, all they did was sign the death certificate."⁴¹

Officials didn't resist the erosion of royal authority with much enthusiasm or confidence. On the eve of the People's Party takeover, education minister Dhani Nivat proposed an overhaul of the school system to cement loyalty to the throne. Dhani, inspired by Mussolini's plan for national education⁴² wrote glowingly of the fascist way to Chaophraya Mahithon, the head of the Royal Secretariat.⁴³ Mahithon forwarded the letter to Prince Nakhon Sawan. Underlining sections on the absolute obedience that fascism required, Mahithon wrote in the margins to Nakhon Sawan:

"Will we be successful in teaching Thai people that the absolute monarchy is superior to all other administrative systems? I highly doubt it. To begin the process now is too late. It is impossible to restore the old reverence for the monarch because the fathers of the children currently

⁴⁰ Chakrapongse (1978, 26), quoted in Susan Fulop Kepner, "A Civilized Woman: A Cultural Biography of M.L. Boonlua Thepyasuwan" (Ph.D. diss., University of California-Berkeley, 1998), 113.

⁴¹ Quoted in Nakharin, *Kanpatiwat Syam* 2475, 64.

⁴² Dhani read about the plan in Eustace Percy's Yearbook of Education for 1932. The Conservative MP for Hastings, Percy was president of the Board of Education in Stanley Baldwin's government from 1924 to 1929.

⁴³ The Royal Secretariat, as Batson described it, stood "(B)etween the king and the world" (*The End*, 48). It handled all correspondence addressed to the monarch. Chao Phraya Mahithon's comments on Dhani's letter show Prajadhipok's opinion.

studying have long been accustomed to, and enjoy, talking badly about the king."⁴⁴

A few weeks later, the absolute monarchy exited the stage quietly. Ancient prophecies, international politics, a controversial king and commercialization combined to strip the monarchy's aura of invincibility.

And yet the monarchy's high public profile maintained the ennobled and palace crowd as cultural icons amidst social change. Royal power, both an inchoate ideal and a concrete reality on display in ceremonies and art, dominated urban society.

We can look at two examples of the influence palace culture exerted on young writers: Dokmai Sot, a minor royal, who most elegantly expressed the persistence of elite values after 1932 in a series of popular novels; and the Suphaphurut group, young commoners who announced a break with tradition even as they plotted their stories with the old society's characters and their moral dilemmas.

To the Manor Born: Dokmai Sot's World

Dokmai Sot, "Fresh Flower," the pen name of Mom Luang Bupha Kunchon (1905-1963), is a Thai literary icon. Her fame is all the more striking because it rests on her unabashedly elitist novels written during the democracy.

⁴⁴ Chao Phraya Mahithon to Nakhon Sawan, June 1, 1932, in NA, R.7, *Kanseuksa* (Education). Dhani's letter to Mahithon is dated May 26, 1932. Mahithon also noted that constitutional monarchy was the only way to halt the institution's further loss of respect. He said that a Mussolini-type dictatorship wasn't possible in Siam, partly because foreigners would view Siam as uncivilized. Mahithon argued that the Italians didn't have to worry about foreign opinion (because they were Europeans? or because he saw them as a military power?).

The archetypical old elite family and their wealthy estate is her fictional milieu.

Like the palace-worlds of senior princes described briefly above, Bupha's home at Wang Ban Mo (Ban Mo Palace) formed a closed society. It was a focus of the interwar elite, with the best writers in the king's family visiting often. Prince Narit, a brother of King Chula, stands out as a key influence because of his literary skill and fame. From an early age Bupha absorbed the literary tastes of absolutist culture. As with all young women from good families, she led a sheltered life under the care of men. Bupha didn't leave Wang Ban Mo until her marriage at the age of 49.⁴⁵

Dokmaisot's father Chaophraya Thewet (Mom Ratchawong Laan Kunchon) was a great-grandson of King Rama II (r. 1809-1824).⁴⁶ He sent Bupha to the king's palace for schooling and manners training when she was five. She later studied at St. Joseph's Convent in Bangkok, a favored destination for elite girls. After her father died in 1922, the 17-year old Bupha came under the stewardship of her half-brother Phraya Thewet. He gave her a 50 baht monthly allowance, a large sum then for a single person.⁴⁷ She spent

⁴⁵ Kepner, "A Civilized Woman," 17. Kepner's highly informative study of Dokmai Sot's half-sister Boonlua gives a vivid description of the elite's early twentieth-century world.

⁴⁶ As a boy, he was close to King Chulalongkorn; the then teen-aged Chula would arrive unexpectedly at Wang Ban Mo (along with palace bodyguards) to collect the young prince for late evening noodle snacks in the city. Kepner, "A Civilized Woman," 10-11.

⁴⁷ Sompop Chantraprapha, *Chiwit dutthep Niyai khong Dokmai Sot (The Life like a Heavenly Tale of Dokmai Sot)* (Bangkok: Phrae Pittaya, 1966), 51. Kepner explains that in the 1930s the family fell on hard times. Dokmai Sot's novels started to generate modest revenue for the family ("A Civilized Woman," 130). Phraya Thewet temporarily solved the financial crisis by turning Wang

her time reading the great English women novelists of the Victorian age and modeled her writing on theirs.

Luang Sansarakij, the editor of the Thai Kasem monthly literary journal in the 1920s, took an interest in her work and published her fiction.⁴⁸ In 1929 when she was 24, Thai Kasem published her first novel *Satru khong Jaolon* (Her Enemy) in installments. Between that year and 1942, Bupha published 12 novels. Along with other realist fiction that appeared around the same time,⁴⁹ *Dokmai Sot* is often regarded as among the first to provide an accurate portrayal of an elite Thai family. While Khru Liam had already presented many features of interwar domesticity and its moral relations, *Dokmai Sot's* long, slow moving novels gave more penetrating and sweeping representations of the ruling caste.

But what type of realism does she create? The world in her novels is not a world in crisis, as many at the time

Ban Mo into a movie house complete with a brass band. Open at eight and closing at eleven every night, the theater did well from 1927 to about 1930 when bigger, more modern cinemas featured talkies. See Somphop, *Chiwit dutthep Niyai*, 63-65.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 53-56. Polasak Chirakraisiri identifies Thai Kasem as a venue for conservative writers, while Supaphburut was supposedly progressive. *Wannakam Kanmuang* (Bangkok: Graffice At, 1979), 183.

⁴⁹ Three novels - *Satru khong Jaolon* (Her Enemy), Kulap Saipradit's *Luk Phuchai* (A Real Man) and Akatdamkerng's *Lakhon haeng Chiwit* (The Play of Life) all appeared in 1928-1929. They have been canonized as the first Thai novels. See Wibha, *The Genesis of the Novel* and David Smyth, "Towards the canonizing of the Thai novel," in David Smyth, ed., *The Canon in Southeast Asia Literatures* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 172-182. Thak has asked why and how these three have been canonized, while other works from the 'teens and 1920s are ignored, such as Khru Liam's work discussed above. See "Making New Space in the Thai Literary Canon" and "Khru Liam's *Nang Niramid*: Siamese Fantasy, Rider Haggard's *She* and the Divine Egyptian Nymph," *South East Asia Research* 15, no. 1 (2007): 29-52. I'm not concerned here with the Thai canon but wish to focus on thematic continuity in fiction despite, or because of, the demise of old society.

understandably saw it. The crisis is largely a-historical, and has beset humanity from the beginning: the destruction wrought by greed, selfishness and delusion. Dok Mai Sot's characters are old nobility, wealthy businesspeople, government servants, students returned from Europe; the language includes many English words. But, while filled with details of Thai bourgeois society and its obsession with things and amusements - cars, jewelry, clothes, furniture, movies, dances - the stories remain with the reader mainly for their ethics. Duty and stewardship, twin pillars of the old elite, govern the reaction to social change. There is a strong echo of Mae Peut and her relations discussed in chapter two.

We can focus on her 1937 novel *Phu Di* (The Good People) as best exemplifying the class attitudes that were meant as a safeguard against materialism and self-indulgence.

In the novel *Wimon*, a young woman from a good family is thrust into the center of family politics when her polygamous father dies and she is left to manage the family property. (Her father, a Phraya rank supreme court judge has two wives and a third minor wife.) Most of the story revolves around *Wimon*'s attempts to manage the family economy without sacrificing her dignity or ideals.

There is always someone who can act as a moral exemplar in the hierarchic society. The court had the king and his institutionalized charisma, the young students and bureaucrats had *Pridi* and *Phibun*. *Wimon* closely models her behavior on that of her stepmother, *Se*. *Se* is described at one point as the master template for the young woman (510). *Se* instructs *Wimon* in the good qualities. To be a *phu di*,

one must act like one, Se says. She must govern the house so as to make those beneath her love and fear her. Se says Wimon must have forbearance and patience with those of a lesser station. Nang Phrom, her father's minor wife, is a constant pain in the neck for Wimon. But Nang Phrom's rudeness and selfishness offer lessons for the *phu di*: "If nu (Wimon) were not born in this type of family, how would you know the meaning of sacrifice? Or if you were nobly born without having education, how would you know the meaning of sacrifice?" (517).

As Thammasakmontri might have hoped, Se is an ideal modern noblewoman. She has a high school education, speaks English and is a landowner and successful small capitalist. Se is equally at ease discussing the international rubber market and world economy as the values of the old elite.

Living in a world dominated by market forces and shallow materialism, Se and Wimon constantly try to remain above the vulgarity that surrounds them. At her dad's funeral, Wimon is distressed that many guests treat the ceremony as a fashion parade. Men wear heeled shoes without socks, Western outfits and brown shoes. Women attend in high heels, leave their calves exposed and wear flashy jewelry.⁵⁰

Wimon's household economy drive, while mocked by others,⁵¹ introduces a life-changing character to the family.

⁵⁰ Just a few days before her father died, he and Wimon had been to the cremation ceremony for one of dad's official colleagues. He states "people now dress for funerals like they're going to the movies or theatre. They are very *siwilai*, but more so careless and showy" (228).

⁵¹ In a blow to some family members' sense of propriety, Wimon expedites her father's funeral so as to save money. She sells the family car, and also plans to find a renter for the main Bangkok

Polawat Wiwitakari, a 34 year-old Phraya-rank civil servant, rents the main house while Wimon and others move to the former servant's quarters at the back of the property.

Like Khru Liam's Jian, Phraya Polawat is a noble, selfless man.⁵² He becomes a focus of Wimon's family's attention. Her brother Manop, a mathayom eight student bound for university, worships him. Wimon hides her true feelings very well. Polawat's wife is tubercular. His devotion to her touches Wimon, and Wimon also draws inspiration from Mrs. Polawat. Although she is sick, Mrs. Polawat remains in charge of her household. Wimon feels that her own problems aren't that serious by comparison.⁵³

house. Like many real life cases at the time, Wimon is a noblewoman in straitened circumstance. She takes on work as a seamstress to help meet the bills of the family; this practical move is mocked by a family acquaintance who has never worked a day in her life (387).

⁵² Dokmai Sot said she modeled Polawat on her brother, whom she deeply admired.

⁵³ Mrs. Polawat despairs that she is keeping her husband back and wants to make a big sacrifice. At one point, with her husband standing in the room, she tells Se that he should get a new wife and enjoy life (he refuses). Master template Se opines that the only remedy is patience on the part of the wife and self-restraint by the husband (526).

All of Dokmai Sot's novels feature self-reliant female protagonists. But, while they draw strength from their mentors and from their Buddhist ethics, they are inevitably emotionally frail and naive. While Wimon is capable, she is still a woman. During one of the interminable wrangles over money that divides the extended family, Phraya Polawat tells Manop that he needs to step up and be a man. Although Wimon does an admirable job of managing the family, "women are never really trained to be relied upon" (483). In a crisis, Polawat tells him, she won't cope well. Polawat finds the family a lawyer to stem off one such crisis, a lawsuit brought by Nang Phrom (one of the patriarch's wives) to regain custody of her children. Wimon confesses to Se that she doesn't know anything about law or lawyers (512); the shy, sensitive head of the household still needs a man. Polawat's intervention is decisive, and Nang Phrom withdraws her case. Wimon, ever compassionate to those of poor judgment or

Dokmai Sot's fiction best expresses a key moral dilemma facing the old lords: how to remain untainted by a corrupt world even as they relied on its wealth, comforts and distractions. A reader of magazines from the 1930s will encounter dozens of stories of similar theme and orientation, although not as skillfully written. A consideration of the ambiguous legacy of 1932 must account for the long shadow that kingly culture cast over middle class life, even as royalism faced repeated crises and ultimately failed to stem social change.

Suphapburut and the 'New' Man

Most of the writers of the pre-war period were young graduates of Bangkok's elite schools.⁵⁴ The *Suphapburut* group and its four founders, Kulap Saipradit, Malai Chupinit, Sanit Charoenrat and Choti Phraepan reflect this milieu. Except for Malai, all studied at Thepsirin. Their good fortune in schooling contrasted with difficult upbringings. Kulap, the leader of the group and 27 years old when the magazine commenced in 1929, for example, was a Bangkok native of modest background. His father was a clerk in the railways department and the family lived in rented housing near the main train station. Elder died when the

understanding, takes in Nang Phrom and she is reunited with her children.

⁵⁴ Young writers had an opportunity to publish their work in magazines and newspapers. Thai Kasem, Suphapburut and Senaseuksa are examples of the most widely read. The universities and good schools also had literary magazines. Chulalongkorn University, the offspring of the civil service school, published *Mahawithayalai* while Thammasat after 1934 published an eponymously titled journal. Suan Kulap's *Withaya* and Thepsirin's magazine are examples from the best high schools. Among newspapers, *Prachachat* after 1932 commanded a large share of the market and featured fiction as a way to generate sales.

boy was six and his mother eked out a living as a dressmaker to supplement the family's precarious finances.⁵⁵

These young men found an influential patron who advanced their careers. They embarked on their new profession under the guidance of their Thepsirin teacher Ob Chaiyawasu ("The Humorist" in his columns).⁵⁶ Meeting at Ob's house near Wat Chanasonghkram and Khao San Road in the summer of 1929, the group proclaimed their freedom from the uncertainty of making a living as a writer and out dated social conventions.⁵⁷ A full time literary career was an ongoing dream of many aspiring novelists. But in the very competitive market of the 1920s and '30s, writers often had to self-finance their works. Moreover, they usually had to produce easily digestible stories very quickly (a prior section described the types of stories that sold well, first in translation and later in original Thai form).

The Suphapburut ("Gentleman") group pledged to be different. In the 1920s, they argued, the Thai upper and middle classes were filled with superficial men who

⁵⁵ Kulap Saipradit, *Manut mai dai kin klaep*, Suchat Sawatsri, ed. (Bangkok: Khana Kammakan Amnuay Kanjat Ngan, 2005) and David Smyth, "Kulap Saipradit (Siburapha): His Life and Times," in Siburapha, *Behind the Painting and other Stories*, trans. David Smyth (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1. Also see Smyth's informative discussion of Kulap's career and literary status "Siburapha, The Making of a Literary Reputation," in Manas Chitkasem and Andrew Turton, eds. *Thai Constructions of Knowledge* (London: SOAS, 1991), 63-83.

⁵⁶ As often in Thai history, we find that the patron-client relation didn't entail a wide age difference. Ob was born in 1901. Kulap was four years younger. As revealed by the new requirements for teachers in the 1930s discussed in chapter three, instructors were often just slightly older than their pupils.

⁵⁷ Suphapburut 'Hiwmeris' (Suphapburut "The Humorist"), Suchat Sawatsri, ed. (Bangkok: Krongkan Anurak Wannakam Kao lae Hayak, 2002), 85-102, 152-159, 167-174.

affectedly sipped their whisky and wasted most of it to show their wealth. Pretentiousness passed for manners.⁵⁸ To the board of the new magazine, the gentleman was not a blue blood dandy.⁵⁹ Instead, the *suphapburut* should literally be himself: a man (*burus*) of an exalted condition (*su phap*).⁶⁰

The gentleman lived according to universal principles of good conduct. We learn early on however, that the *suphapburut* ideal needed concrete lessons to be made practical. He needed some help, in other words, in understanding social relations in the modern age, and especially as they impacted his love life.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Bannathikan, "Phutkan chanta pheuan", *Suphapburut* 1, no. 1 (June 1, 1929): 92-93, in article by the editor, 90-99.

⁵⁹ They rejected any meaning of the term tied to family: the group declared "three generations make a gentleman," a phrase borrowed from Britain, as an outdated adage.

⁶⁰ Laem Thong, "Suphapburut," *Suphapburut* 1, no. 4 (July 15, 1929): 602. They countered with a list of gentlemanly qualities that applied to all, some of which will be familiar to the reader who recalls the description in chapter three of the refined MP offered a few years later by the Public Relations Department: a gentleman doesn't harm others or provoke them, doesn't speak idly, doesn't take criticism personally, isn't overly suspicious of others, and doesn't take advantage of them. He is helpful, friendly to all, forgives his enemies, is kind to inferiors and deferential to superiors, remains calm, is willing to sacrifice for others, and is brave, patient, and fair in evaluating oneself and others. Bannathikan, "Phutkan chanta pheuan," *Suphapburut* 1, no. 2 (June 15, 1929): 247-255.

⁶¹ In the first four issues, Sanit Charoenrat wrote his *Lilasat* (The Science of Love) column, a long series of reflections on love and relationships for a young generation ostensibly free to choose their own partners, unburdened by tradition or overbearing parents. Sanit wrote that he wanted to educate young people on the pitfalls that came with their new freedom.

By the 'teens, as Khru Liam's novel reflected, nightlife had become an established part of Bangkok. Many cafes, bars and movie houses opened after World War I. Young men and women mixed more freely at night; advertisements for venereal disease drugs formed a staple of newspaper ad revenue. Newspapers and magazines frequently discussed changing attitudes about sex. On the city

While changing gender relations is an interesting topic in all the fiction described in this chapter, I prefer to focus on the young writers' social outlook more broadly. Especially, that they borrowed much of their self-image from the elite consumerism that they disliked. In an interesting compilation of the gentleman's indispensable weapons for finding the right girl, for example, readers learned that they had to have: an Elwood-brand hat, a Parker pen in their shirt pocket, steel-rimmed spectacles (which if they weren't being worn should be placed in the pocket next to the Parker, so that one arm of the glasses hangs over the outside of the pocket), their hair parted down the middle and kept in place with Starcomb Cream, Army Club cigarettes or another suitable brand, a full book of bus or tram coupons (in the unfortunate event that the man doesn't have his own car), a gold Election watch and even a gold tooth, to be seen prominently when he smiles!⁶²

The list reminds one of the artificial qualities Khru Liam attributed to his character Phak, or the image of the civil servant described 40 years earlier by Charles Buls. The column is both tongue-in-cheek and serious. The high melodrama of the magazine's fiction gives the impression that the writers wanted to help the young dandy succeed in this world of fakery, not escape from it.

and the young generation, see Jirawat Saengthong, 185-189 and Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok*.

By the 1930s, newspaper advertising focused on the young pleasure-seeking crowd. Advertisements for foreign whiskey, cigarettes and foreign films. A range of medicines of dubious efficacy and provenance advertised their cures for baldness, stress, impotence, VD and other maladies of the late to bed consumers who had the money to experiment with them.

⁶² "Laksana Wanjai khong Satri samrap pi 2472" (Ways to Charm a Woman for 1929), *Suphaphurut* 1, no. 14 (1929): 2,305-2,307.

Further, the group's pledge to represent a non-traditional generation didn't introduce a radical structure of feeling in their prose. The gentleman idea - if it was meant to convey a brand new personality -- sits uneasily with the stories of the nobles and comfortably well off government officials or businesspeople that filled their pages.

The best example is Kulap's 1937 novella *Khanglang Phap* (Behind the Painting). It remains a part of the Thai secondary school syllabus and was made into a film in the 1980s. Kulap became the editor of Prince Wan's *Prachachat* newspaper after 1932, and the story first appeared as a serial in the paper.⁶³

The story describes the quiet but deepening desperation of Mom Ratchawong Kirati, an aristocratic lady around 35 years old who tours Japan with Chao Khun Attikanbodi, her much older husband. The old aristocracy still dominates the world of international politics. Like a fictionalized version of Dokmai Sot, Kirati was born into a high family and never allowed to go out on her own. "(The lords) lived in a different world" in the old days, she says, explaining her captivity.⁶⁴ Her main companion was an old English governess who tutored her, and preserving her looks as she was taught in the *Vogue* and *McCalls* magazines supplied by the governess her main occupation. Kirati has a high social standing and a completely barren emotional life. Though she is still young, Kirati feels that her best days

⁶³ Early in 1938 it was published as a complete book, retailing for 1.50 baht. Smyth, "Kulap Saipradit," 24 and 38.

⁶⁴ Siburapha, *Behind the Painting and Other Stories*, trans. David Smyth. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 95.

have passed her by: "My youth and beautiful dreams all came and went." (64)

The woman falls for Nopphon, a young commoner Siamese who is in Japan on a study tour and acts as the couple's guide. As the two become close, she discovers a long suppressed dimension of herself. Class loyalty, however, trumps the stirrings of the woman's heart: she remains committed to her aloof though generally agreeable husband out of social convention and refuses the young man's advances. "It's my duty to be loyal to Chao Khun ("lord," her husband), to follow him wherever he goes" (105).⁶⁵

The novella is similar to Malai Chupinit's *Kert peng ying* ("Born a Woman"), a long serialized story of the unhappy lives of two nobles published in *Suphaburut* in 1929 and 1930. Like Kirati, Marasi is an upper class woman trapped by social expectations; she is about to submit to a loveless arranged marriage. She escapes the demands of high society by disappearing to the seaside resort of Hua Hin with the bare minimum of servants. "I ask no more of the world than to be free, to live like a commoner can," she declares at one point.⁶⁶ It isn't clear what she means,

⁶⁵ Several years later, Nopphon visits her in Bangkok as she lays dying. She recalls a moment they had years earlier in Japan: "You fell in love, Nopphon. You fell in love ... and your love died there. But for someone else, love still flourished in a wasted body," 152. Udom Srisuwan, the Marxist writer introduced in chapter two, presented the interesting but unsubstantiated argument that Kirati's hopelessness reflected her class's demise, while Nopphon somehow stood for the comprador bourgeoisie, "which flourished after the end of the absolute monarchy." He/they cared nothing for other people. Nopphon, in Udom's reading, cruelly elevated Kirati's hopes and then destroyed them as he pursued his life and career. Udom quoted in Smyth, "Siburapha, The Making of a Literary Reputation," 76-77.

⁶⁶ (Mae Anong (Malai Chupinit), "Kert peng Ying," *Suphapburut* 1, no. 22 (April 15, 1930): 3550.

since at Hua Hin she lives very well in a large house high on a hill overlooking the sea and the town. Marasi is tubercular, like Mrs. Polawat in Phu Di. The male protagonist, Praphas Jarikabutr, is a high-born fellow brought low by dissipation. He is a mysterious stranger in the coastal town, living quietly and refusing to divulge any information about his past.⁶⁷ Despite his alcoholism, Praphas creates an industrious life, raising livestock and market gardening.

Marasi appears to him like a dream figure one day as he lounges in a drink-induced stupor on the beach. Marasi lies to Praphas that she is a lady in waiting for an aristocrat. The two form a bond: "Today we are no different from prisoners sent into exile."⁶⁸ Somewhat predictably, Praphas's hedonistic selfishness erodes as he becomes fascinated by the woman and starts to care about her.

Were these young men victims of "false consciousness" who remained in awe of the old elite, or savvy writers who knew that to create an independent profession they would have to produce what the market wanted? Was it then the middle class reading public that held to royal-aristocratic tastes and restrained the development of other types of writing? Or were readers too a complex group representing diverse backgrounds and opinions, who chose to read romances, for example, from among a range of options as a way to relax after a day working?

These are difficult questions to unravel. People chose what to read and write, but from among themes or styles

⁶⁷ It turns out that he has fled his Bangkok family after getting into a series of legal disputes that incurred heavy debt.

⁶⁸ "Kert pen Ying," *Suphaphurut* 1, no. 20 (March 15, 1930): 3219.

that sold well and that reinforced cultural stereotypes. Among hardworking writers, this was best achieved with elite characters who likely fascinated people. The complex power of the monarchy and its world and real life lampoons of the entitled coexisted. Ranks and family wealth commanded power and respect. This did not change after 1932. Power and wealth were not always mocked because the ruling classes were seen as social parasites, although this is an important dimension of some pre-war journalism. Rather the scorn was for the elites who sometimes failed the nation and didn't set the proper moral example. Writers imagined scenarios focusing on the pressures of elite life, and often appear sympathetic to people whose experiences they didn't share. They seemed to absorb the aristocratic prejudice that being born to a good family was a burden. It was not social inequality that caused suffering and made life unfair, but the taxing liability of having to sit at the top.

Poh Intarapalit: The Triumph of Silliness

From Akatdamkerng's fiction of crisis to the Suphaphurut group's prescriptions, from Khru Liam's bodhisattva to Dokmai Sot's neo-traditional ethics, pre-war Siamese fiction seems preoccupied with elite morality.

But entertainment also was key to the new fiction, and in the hands of a skillful ironist could offer acute social commentary. I will close this chapter by looking at the work of Poh Intarapalit, the best example of 1930s satire. His seemingly superficial, humorous stories on one level admirably met people's desire for entertainment. But his funny tales, filled with biting social caricatures, offer a

deeper social commentary. In sparing no one from his pointed satire, Poh expresses an attitude that undercuts most of the representations of pre-war society. His irreverence delights in unmasking pretensions to *siwilai* and good manners. Unlike the work of Dokmai Sot or Khru Liam, there is no saving grace from materialism. He thus seems to wreck the narrative of fiction's pre- and post-1932 preoccupations. I have included him in this chapter, however, because his characters are all wealthy and win the reader's sympathy. That they lack grace and ignore moral dilemmas doesn't count against them; their faults are forgiven and their social standing commands respect, however ludicrous their behavior.

Like Kulap and the Suphapburut group, Pricha Intarapalit had to work for a living. Born five months before the death of Chulalongkorn in 1910 into a middle class Bangkok family, Pricha (or Poh., as he is usually known) attended the military cadet academy where the future dictator Sarit Thanarat and the royal intellectual Chula Chakrapongse counted among his classmates. His father was a teacher at the academy and also for a time the editor of the army strategy office's *Senaseuksa lae Phe Withayasat* journal.⁶⁹ Poh. didn't continue on a military career, but instead continued in school, probably to mathayom eight, at Thepsirin school. While working at different jobs (as a chauffeur for hire for example, and with his brother in river shipping) he developed his writing. In 1933, Ploenchit Publishing's Saw Bunsanaw, one year older than

⁶⁹ Phon Trawen (pseud.), *Poh. Intarapalit, Nakphraphan Aek Phu Khian Nangsue dai thuk Rot* (Poh. Intarapalit, First-class Writer of All Types of Books) (Bangkok: Saeng Dao, 2001), 28-31 and 99-101.

Pricha and a mathayom eight graduate of Wat Benjamabophit school, gave him his first opportunity when he published Poh.'s "Nakrian Nai Roi" (The Cadet).⁷⁰ Saw published the weepy tale of love and disappointment in an initial print run of 22,000 copies.⁷¹ Pricha turned out a series of melodramas through the decade. Thus far, his career is very similar to other romantic writers.

It was with his "Samkler" (Three Friends) series, however, that Pricha created a fresh style in Thai fiction and became beloved to generations of readers.

He introduced readers to the irreverent duo of Pon Patcharapon and Nikon Karunowong in his first story "Ai Phuying" (Girl Shy). Soon thereafter in the third story of the series, Kimnguan Thaithiam, is added. All three come from comfortable commercial-bureaucratic families. In the initial phase of the trio's misadventures,⁷² Pon is the manager of the Patcharapon family department store. He is a handsome ladies' man, labeled the Tyrone Power of Siam. Nikon - Pon's cousin - starts as a modern-day tax farmer, collecting rents and interest for his father Phraya Wijit Bannakan's business. (Chao Khun Prasit Nitisat, Pon's father, was formerly a judge in Ratburi province.) Unlike Pon who takes the lead in the group's shenanigans, Nikon often appears as a sleepy, useless young man. Kimnguan's father is said to be the wealthiest Chinese in Siam, and

⁷⁰ Saw trained under Luang Saranuprapan, the author of Siam's first detective novel mentioned above, at the latter's *Saranukul* magazine before it went bust in the mid-1920s. Phon Trawen, Poh. *Intarapalit*, 118.

⁷¹ Phon Trawen, *Poh. Intarapalit*, 99.

⁷² Poh. *Intarapalit* added to the Samkler series over subsequent decades; the stories read as a running commentary on Thai society.

represents all the correspondingly stereotypical business interests: rice milling, forestry, steamships, diamond and gold jewelry store ownership. Kimnguan makes a frequent display of his wealth, burning banknotes in public or using them to roll his cigarettes. When he first appears, he is the manager of a family store, "Siwilai Panich" (Civilized Commerce), which is nearby to Pon's family store. Kimnguan meets his new, soon to be inseparable, friends at the Happy Hall, one of the city's nightclubs offering foreign whiskey ("Davidsons" brand), western music and liberal attitudes about male/female fraternization. Kimnguan strides up to Pon and Nikon's table at the club wearing Western clothes, "slightly hunchbacked, head forward, his pipe clenched in his mouth, arms akimbo, with the bearing of a haughty man."⁷³

By day, the boys are meeker than the archetypically retiring Thai woman. In "Ai Phuying" Prasit and his wife try to find their son Pon a marriage partner. They first have to socialize him, and hire a manners teacher for Pon and Nikorn. The obstinate boys learn nothing from the woman and poke fun at her as an old maid, though she's only 29.

While seen by their parents as socially inept and naïve, the boys in fact have their own social philosophy. Nikon believes that the modern age is evil; the more civilization spreads, the more moral conduct retreats. Nikon informs Pon that Yama, the lord of the underworld, is an accomplished metalworker who for a long time has fashioned belts of gold, silver and copper alloy and made

⁷³ Rerngchai Phuttaro, *Poh. Intrapalit, Chiwit khong Khon Khai Fan* (Poh. Intarapalit, The Life of the Dream Seller). Bangkok: Book Street, 1986), 95.

handsome profits in hell from women who fall there and buy them. "People who die today mostly go to hell, not heaven," he says.⁷⁴

The sinners enjoy their lives. In interrogating one of the boy's servants in "Ai Phuying," their parents learn that the two are carousing every night at the aforementioned Happy Hall. Everyone at the Happy Hall (that is, men who are escaping from their wives and families) is jolly for a few hours. It is the swankiest place in the city and "makes the old feel young again" (99). Nikon and Pon are like "Prince Charmings to the server girls at Happy Hall" because they are flush with cash (101); the staff at the club are quasi-prostitutes. On the night the boys' parents track them down Pon has gotten drunk and made a fool of himself, but no one interferes because he and Nikon are wealthy. Although the parents are dumbstruck by the boys' real nature, the fathers (at least) are somewhat pleased. Having thought that they were hopeless, it is rewarding to learn that their sons have some manly qualities.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ "Ai Phuying," in Ruamrueangchut Samkler, Chut thi 12 (Collected Stories of the Three Buddies, Set 12) (Bangkok: Padungseuksa, n.d.), 71. Poh. Intarapalit gets creative in describing Yama's hold on the world. He has sent his henchmen to cut down all the kapok trees to use as fuel for his smelting operations.

Adulterers that die don't have a kapok tree to climb, and become adulterers in hell. Yama has hundreds of such wives in hell.

⁷⁵ Men's public drunkenness and lewd behavior (and brothels) all feature regularly in Thai fiction of the interwar period. In the gendered construction of ethics, a lapse of control leads men to act shamefully. Women, on the other hand, were rarely seen as having even potential authority over themselves. Female characters often went astray because of their gullibility and lack of ability to reason appropriately. Khru Liam's novel showed this, as does *Ying khon Chua* (The Evil Woman), Koh. Surangkhanang's still-popular 1937 novel about a rural girl

Fakery is central to the boys' lives.⁷⁶ In all the stories, the superficial consumer world is a character in its own right. But we also need to discuss his political satire. To close this section and chapter I will discuss "Ratniyom" (The State Mandates), one of Poh. Intarapalit's most memorable "Samkler" stories. Here he tackles state affairs directly, but the representation of Thai politics is refreshingly told from the perspective of a-political (albeit well-off) people rather than the prime minister's office. While poking fun at everybody, the story nonetheless has a distinctly royalist flavor to it, as we will see.

Beginning in June 1939, Phibun Songkhram's government introduced a series of cultural policies that aimed to create a "modern" citizenry and strong, unified country. The *ratniyom* institutionalized ethnic chauvinism, changing the country's name in the first edict from Siam to Thailand. Thais should be self-reliant and take economic control from

seduced into prostitution by a handsome, well-dressed city man that she fancies. David Smyth, trans. *The Prostitute* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁷⁶ In the second installment "Num Raksanuk" (The Fun-loving Boys), Pon and Nikon decide to move out of their houses as a revolt against their parents. They rent a room for six baht a month and attempt to pass themselves off as poor people. Their new landlord, a homely, keenly status and money-conscious middle-aged woman, doesn't notice their fair skin, which belies their claim of being hard up. Nikon tells her that he is a pawnshop worker and Pon is a fortuneteller to Bangkok's elite. (Among his clients he claims are Luang Wichian Phetyakhom and Wachira Phyaban, two real life government officials of the time.) Through guesswork and deduction, Pon accurately tells the landlady's fortune, and gets her to give him six baht for the session, thus covering the rent. He also convinces her that he is the guardian of two spirits that need tea and toast to be happy and peaceable, which she provides. "Num Raksanuk" in Ruamrueangchut Samkler, Chut thi 12, part two, 41-69.

the Chinese. The mandates also targeted self-improvement, giving advice in personal hygiene, fitness, diet and the proper use of one's time. In the ruling elite's obsession with measuring up to Western civilization, Phibun's government mandated hats and western attire for men and women, that men should kiss their wives goodbye in the morning, that people should use cutlery when eating, betel chewing was banned, and so on.⁷⁷

Contrasting with the new world envisioned by a modernizing regime, Poh. Intrapalit presents a fickle urban culture that mocks both itself and the government's passion for social engineering.

The story opens with Chao Pachaneuk, a high-society friend of Pon's father and a lead character by this time in the *samkler* series, inspired by Phibun's economic nationalism in a curious way. He awakes one morning during the Chinese New Year and discovers to his dismay that it is impossible to find his favorite food for breakfast (Chinese noodles with fried mussels) since all the shops are closed. A rumbling belly first, and foreign control over much of the urban economy second, drives Chao Pachaneuk to establish a *ratniyom* society in his neighborhood. After drawing up by-laws, he commands his associates to his house that evening to discuss the urgent problems facing the country.⁷⁸

From the beginning, Chao Pachaneuk's endeavor is stymied. Predictably, Pon, Nikon and Kimnguan arrive drunk, disheveled and late; their sleek Ford careens into the

⁷⁷ See Craig Reynolds, ed., *National Identity and its Defenders, Thailand 1939-1989* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University, 1991).

⁷⁸ "Ratniyom," in *Ruamruang Chut Samkler, Chut thi 15* (Bangkok: Padungsueksa, n.d.), 1-3.

compound, comes to a screeching halt and the three tumble out (8-9).

Pachaneuk has hardly embarked on a stirring speech about sacrifice when he is repeatedly interrupted. Explaining that Thailand must take its place among civilized countries (*arya prathet*), one of the women interrupts Chao Pachaneuk to ask what countries count as civilized. After listing Germany, Britain, France and Japan, he gets a little further before a commotion erupts among the three drunken friends who haven't been paying attention. Losing his temper, he threatens to thrash them if they interrupt again. He manages several sentences about the need for Thais to awaken and take control of the rich natural resources and commerce of the "golden axe" (*khwan thong*).⁷⁹ Predictably Pachaneuk's call for a national awakening falls flat. He notices that his friend Wijit is nodding off. When confronted, Wijit requests that Pachaneuk cut short his long-winded introduction to the meeting (it has in fact been only a few sentences) and get to the point, since he (Wijit) is having trouble understanding Pachaneuk's point (27).

Pachaneuk attempts to enforce his rules with impromptu inspections at his friend's homes and offices to determine the national origins of their clothes, food, drink and household items. His discovery of, for example, foreign cosmetics used by the three wives leads to little homilies on the benefits to the nation of using locally made products instead (like red crayons!). When confiscating

⁷⁹ This is a reference to Thailand's shape on political maps. The Phibun government published many maps showing current and desired boundaries of the kingdom.

Nikon's foreign-made tennis racket, Chao Pachaneuk ignores Nikon's entreaties that the item is essential to his health. Chao Pachaneuk replies that he can try hopscotch, takraw, horseback riding or other "Thai games" that are equally healthy and save money as well (81).

While Pachaneuk is the most committed to the ratniyom, he does not escape his committee's censure. Pon, Nikon, Kimnguan and the women turn the tables and conduct their own inspections at his house. At one point, he loses his foreign belt and is forced to keep his Thai trousers about his waist with one hand. His precious foreign cigars are also sacrificed to the patriotic dictates of the ratniyom. The friends discover his expensive foreign camera and his eyeglasses bearing a Western name, which they take as signs of foreign pollution. Armed with a crowbar, hammer and axe, the three friends smash the camera after playing "baseball" with it (126-132).⁸⁰

Like all his stories, the ratniyom tale highlights the shallowness of urban high society. But Poh. Intrapalit views Phibun's nationalism as more than a farce: it is a cultural tragedy as well. Kimnguan at one point forces Pachaneuk to open a locked room used as a family museum. Here Pachaneuk has assembled old and very expensive art that reflect Thailand's diverse cultural inheritance. Heedless of Pachaneuk's protests that he doesn't know what he is doing, Kimnguan wrecks some porcelain Chinese vases as "foreign" (133-139). Poh. Intrapalit comes close to a

⁸⁰ When his eyeglasses are destroyed, Pachaneuk flies into a rage and retrieves his Colt 6.35mm pistol from under his pillow. He starts shrieking and threatens to shoot anyone who touches anything else. The friends manage to calm him down and conduct their search further.

political attack on the idiocy of the entire endeavor to buy and use only "Thai" things. It's likely that he viewed Phibun's ethnic chauvinism as threatening one of the cherished myths of the Thai character that developed under royalism: its genius for assimilation and tolerance. In the official narrative that Poh. would have grown up learning, the cosmopolitan society is held together by self-assured monarchs who lead by moral example and patient kindness to everyone under the royal umbrella.⁸¹ Now, however, the old social harmony under a wise king faces attack from a reactionary government with an inferiority complex. Once, anyone was Siamese; now society was divided and the Thais take center stage.

The ambiguity of "Thai-ness" is often raised in the story. Kimnguan's Chinese ancestry is highlighted, though this does not prevent him from being "Thai." In this story, in fact, his surname changes from Thaithiam ("equivalent to a Thai") to Thaithae, a "real Thai." The author mocks the *ratniyom* with this word play, and suggests cheekily but very presciently that the meaning of Thai-ness should include the Westernized lifestyle.

Amidst the silliness and superficiality, Poh. Intarapalit writes with a sympathy that reminds a reader of the tolerant, easygoing religiosity of Theravada Buddhism. It also calls to mind Northrop Frye's classic definition of ironic literature as presenting characters in which one can see oneself. Much of the mental and material world of 1940s

⁸¹ Prince Damrong's 1927 lecture delivered to the Siamese Teacher's Association *Laksana Kanphokhrong Prathet Siam te Boran* (*Characteristics of the Siamese State's Rule from Ancient Times*) is a central text. Damrong stresses tolerance, assimilation and love of national independence as core Thai values.

Thailand has been buried under the explosive growth of the post-war economy. But while Dokmai Sot's fiction reads like a museum piece, Poh. Intarapalit's humor seems as current as ever. The "we're all fools in this (political situation, samsaric wheel) together" theme resonates. State policies and practices always concern actual, usually flawed, people. In many readings of Thai history, people always seem to be thinking politically. Maybe ordinary people didn't actively support or oppose a demand, but preferred to be left alone.

Conclusion

Poh. Intarapalit was the most widely read popular writer of mid-century. This chapter closed with the buffoonery of Pon, Nikon and Kimnguan because it comments most vividly on the rapid social and economic changes that Siam underwent in the interwar period. Market forces dominated publishing after the three palace phases of writing had passed. His unprecedented volume of writing, more than 100 stories between 1939 and 1942 attests to the pressure to write quickly.⁸² His characters reflected more truly than Dokmai Sot, Kulap or his colleagues the drivers of change in urban society: middle class consumers.

But "change" in the last sentence needs to be qualified. His characters are all well-off (albeit ridiculous) people. They weren't interested in politics. Politics remained largely an abstraction for most people, a

⁸² Vichitvong na Pombejra, *Wiwathanakan Sangkhom Thai kap Hasaniyai chut Pon Nikon Kimnguan (The Evolution of Thai Society and the Comedies of Pon, Nikon and Kimnguan)* (Bangkok: Saengdao 2001), 531-535. Poh. wrote about 1,000 sam kler stories between 1939 and his death in 1968. See Vichitvong's loving two-volume biography.

matter of state affairs. In the absence of a free political atmosphere, the old moral leadership was still viewed as largely legitimate. Poh. suggests this with his attack on the ratniyom.

More bluntly than the samkler author, others directly looked to the past for guidance. Never afraid of pitching their tent on the moral high ground, aristocratic writers maintained that the old elite must govern society despite, or because of, royal authority's weakness in the sixth and seventh reigns. The nation's future depended on it.

The commoners who took power after 1932 assumed that they now represented the nation. But their power, vested in some sections of the middle-tier military and civilian bureaucracy, arguably lacked a secure cultural foundation, at least as many people at the time saw it. The main political reason that stories of highborn or wealthy people remained popular long after 1932 rests in the ambiguity of what rebellion meant in a state that had never had a violent dis-establishment of the kingly prerogative to enforce obedience.

And yet, international forces were changing Siam, with long-term political consequences. The next chapter describes how cosmopolitan cultural influences -- and not just the will to shop - excited many people to imagine a different future that departed, sometimes radically, from the obedience model of the past.

Chapter Six: The Self and Society: Conceptualizations of Thai Literature

The Siamese state's adoption of some aspects of Western liberalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries opened space for a discursive struggle over the legitimacy of elite power. A contest over cultural authority quickly developed as an important component of a changing intellectual society. At the risk of oversimplification, a new middle class subjectivity stressed the importance of the individual, while the old elitist outlook preached conformity to the social hierarchy. How should the new ideas be used, for the freedom of the individual or the enhancement of national strength?

Furthermore, an argument over Thai exceptionalism has colored the discursive battle. Repeatedly, the perception of national, cultural and historical difference shaped the reception of foreign ideas. The elite's attempt to simultaneously learn from the West as well as resist its overwhelming power has been a constant feature of the kingdom's intellectual culture. The coup of 1932 marked an outcome of this decades long movement; it simultaneously enshrined Western bourgeois ideology in law and preserved rule in a small class that used neo-traditional ideology to legitimize itself.

This and the following chapter describe two aspects of the impact of the West on Thai culture and its spokesmen. In the interwar period, foreign currents inspired new philosophies of literature and Buddhist polemics and explained Thai difference.

The literary ideas of Song Thepasit, So. Thammayos and Wit Sivasriyanond are an intellectual trajectory. Song in the 1920s rejected traditional literature and argued that the realistic novel had to become an aspect of Thai expression for the country to be modern. In the 1930s So. continued Song's advocacy for modern literature, while also rescuing (as he saw it) old Thai literature from oblivion. Further, he argued for individuality of expression that valorized the experience of common people. Finally, during the war Wit employed Western literary theories to argue for the preservation of traditional literary forms, elevated national culture over subjective expression and rejected the modern novel.

This dialectic captures the crooked course of Thai modernity: an embrace of the West led to a more thorough understanding of Thai culture and ultimately an assertion of Thai superiority.

What is Realism? Song Thepasit and the Beginnings of Literary Criticism

Two young intellectuals in the interwar years inaugurated Thai literary criticism and the modern critique of culture. Song Thepasit's interest in novel writing and the philosophy of literature set the tone for his generation. His literary science paved the way for Saen Thammayos, an intellectual polymath who wrote fiction, philosophy and history. Western philosophy and literature inspired both men to re-evaluate Thai culture. Song and So. advanced scientific positions on reading and claimed their views as objectively correct. In both cases universal

categories explained what Thai literature was and ought to become.

A commoner born in 1900, Song Thepasit developed an interest in literature from a young age. He came to the attention of Chaophraya Thammasakmontri as a good candidate for a career in government service, which he began in 1917 as a high school teacher at Suan Kulap Withaya. He lived with Pia Malakul (Phra Sadet), Thammasakmontri's patron. Phra Sadet was not only a leader in absolutist-era education but also a prominent aesthetic authority and man of letters. Phra Sadet's learning undoubtedly shaped the young Song's interests. Song contributed frequently to literary magazines in the 1920s. Norman Sutton, Suan Kulap Withaya's headmaster, became the third important authority in Song's life and recommended him for overseas study two years after the latter began teaching at the school. Without money or a prominent family name, Song obtained a government scholarship to study in England with Thammasakmontri's help. He developed tuberculosis in England in 1924, which curtailed his studies and he returned to Siam in 1926.¹ Song then taught English literature at Benjamarajalai. Apparently consumption made teaching too exhausting and Song transferred to the textbooks division in the education ministry. He climbed the ranks of the civil service hierarchy, but became seriously ill and died in March 1928 aged 28.²

¹ He had wanted to stay in England to study Sanskrit at Oxford but Thammasakmontri said the government couldn't pay for it.

² So. Plainoi, ed. *Khwam Rak Chiwit le Ngan Song Thepasit, ton baep khong Santi Thewaraks* (Love of Life and the Works of Song Thepasit, the Model for Santi Thewaraks) (Bangkok: Dokya Press, 1993), n.p.

Song was the first Thai to discuss European and Thai literature in a common interpretive and historicist frame. It can be recalled that in the 1920s writers jettisoned the old reliance on foreign plots for Thai settings and characters. Song made a crucial contribution to the modernization of Thai fiction and the legitimization of novel writing as a serious endeavor.³

His major 1926 work contrasted "Ruang Pralom Lok" (tales to comfort the world) with "Ruang An Len" (modern fiction). Inspired by the authors he read in England, Song juxtaposed the modern novel (ruang an len) with traditional fables and stories meant to distract (ruang pralom lok). While arguing that modern fiction stemmed from "new needs, hopes and dreams" and must resolutely face the modern world, he sympathized with ruang pralom lok:

"According to a principle of Dhamma, life is filled with suffering. The world contains only error and evil, and the truth (of life) is pitiful. Therefore, happiness consists in a flight from these things. This causes us to pick up soothing tales. The world is a fevered person; books have to be the medicine."⁴

Song's history of literature rested on a first principle invented by the Buddha. Dukkha, the first of four truths, is the foundation of consciousness and the source of our representations of the world. But while the Buddha

³ See Thanapol Limapichart, "The Prescription of Good Books: The Formation of the Discourse and Cultural Authority of Literature in Modern Thailand (1860s-1950s)," (Ph.D. diss.: University of Wisconsin Madison, 2007), chapter three.

⁴ "Rueng Pralom Lok," in So. Plai Noi, *Khvamrak, Chiwit lae Ngan Song Thepasit*, 141.

faced the reality of suffering head on, Song criticized the Asian flight into fancy (which he termed utopia) that he argued was an outmoded reaction. Especially this applies to Indian-derived literature, but also characterizes the court and battle (*wong wong jak jak*) tales that account for much of traditional Siamese literature. He argued that an existentialist Hamlet, self-tortured, moody and introspective, would never appear in Southeast Asian tales.⁵

Unsurprisingly, Song found the best examples of modern literature in the West. He was the first to argue that European literature was superior to Thai because it allowed common people to be heroes or protagonists, and portrayed the intersubjective world. In this first Thai literary criticism, the author drops lots of names without discussing them in any detail. His chosen authors form a catchall category of the modern: the realism of Shakespeare's characters (Ariel and Puck, for example, in addition to Hamlet), Rousseau, Chateaubriand and Hugo are esteemed. He argues that Tolstoy and Balzac on a grand scale, and Katherine Mansfield and Anton Chekhov's short stories, undertook this daunting task with admirable results.⁶ He mentions Marcel Proust, D.H. Lawrence and

⁵ Song's classificatory zeal leads to some confusion for the reader. He contrasts utopias, for example, with "romance" (*ruang pralom lok thi thae*, "genuinely comforting tales"). He contends that romance can and often does accurately describe the real world. Some Thai tales, Phra Aphaimani and the Inao for example, convey real social types and situations. Ibid, 144.

⁶ Ibid, 155-156. Religion claims to offer the complete picture of our place in the world, Song argues, but its references to past lives as causal explanations for the present lead to escapism. Science and logic also are not adequate because they chop up our experience into discrete segments and lose sight of the totality.

Pierre Loti, and the children's writers Walter de la Mare and Sir James Barry (sic), as exemplary writers for Thais.⁷

It would be easy to poke holes in Song's Western literary history, but would also miss the point of his endeavor. Song's somewhat confusing catalogue of the modern is meant to condense literary history for Thai readers and highlight the historically necessary emergence of the novel (ruang an len). Song argues that modern literature's focus should be the inner life of people and its real genius is in extracting from the ceaseless flow of life the meaning of human affairs. Life usually doesn't seem to make any sense, he writes, and the skill of the modern writer shapes a narrative from this chaos. While ruangpralom lok in Siam traditionally had avoided realistic portrayals of human affairs, the modern novelist is duty bound to explain life as we encounter it.⁸

Song's arguments were novel and Western, but also had native roots. His historicism and allegiance to a scientific view stemmed from an intellectual movement that went back to the beginning of the modern state in the fourth reign. In the years after the Bowring Treaty, the aristocratic educator Chaophraya Thipakorawong classified most Thai literature as nonsensical fables with no pedagogic value. His 1867 *Kitchanukit* (A Book Explaining Many Things), the first modern Thai book, asserted:

"Our Siamese literature is not only scanty but nonsensical, full of stories of genii stealing women, and men fighting with genii, and extraordinary persons who could fly through

⁷ Ibid, 144-145.

⁸ "Ruang an len" in *ibid*, 152-154.

the air, and bring dead people to life. And even those works which profess to teach anything, generally teach wrong, so that there is not the least profit, though one studies them from morning to night.”⁹

The next chapter will have more on Thipakorawong's influence over twentieth-century thought. Song's idea that properly written fiction could expose a hidden meaning in human affairs, a modern version of a very old Indian two worlds theory portrays how humans are prone to misunderstand what is happening to them. Only a few spiritually or intellectually advanced people could see through the veil to an underlying coherence. In Song's scheme, the novelist would become a new spiritual and psychological authority.

Song, however, radically reoriented authority to include anyone who understood the Western tradition and the universal historical movement to self-awareness and wisdom. He also can be seen as the first Thai humanist. Song wanted to present the human panorama without gods and demons. While he may have battered a straw man in revisiting Thipakorawong's argument, Song Thepasit was a commoner pioneer who asserted that modern literature should serve everyone.

⁹ Henry Alabaster, *The Wheel of the Law. Buddhism* (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1972 (1871)): 4-5. Alabaster was an official at the British consulate in Bangkok in the 1860s and 1870s and a friend of Thipakorawong. He translated much of the Kitchanukit in this work.

The Next Step: So. Thammayos and the Art of Literature

Song died when the next important Thai literary critic was 14 years old. So. Thammayos, born in Lampang in 1913, was a precocious youth from the old Lampang royal family. By the time of his birth, the dynasty held only symbolic power under the Bangkok state's control of real political authority. In 1934, after So. attended high school at Thepsirin, Phra Sarasas Pholakhan, a People's Party education minister, and So.'s foreign teacher at Thepsirin funded a one year scholarship for So. to study philosophy in Vietnam.¹⁰ So. also taught English in the French colony and worked as an assistant editor at *La Lutte* journal. He returned to Siam in 1935 and taught at Chulanak girls' school under Chaophraya Thammasakmontri. In addition to literature, So. wanted to introduce modern philosophy. Terming it the mother of all knowledge, he called for its study in Siam but met with resistance from his superiors who thought that modern European ideas were irrelevant or dangerous in the Siamese context.¹¹ So. died in 1952 aged only 39. In his short life, he produced an amazing volume

¹⁰ Udom Ratthawut, "Namruang, Prawat khong So. Thammayos" (Introduction, *The Life of So. Thammayos*) in Asithara, *Chiwit lae Phonngan So. Thammayos* (Life and Works of So. Thammayos) (Bangkok: Rich Publishing, 2008), 19. Udom writes that So. was educated at the Iang Jeng Than school of philosophy in Vietnam. I'm not sure what this school is or where it is located.

¹¹ Chapter three explained that Thammasakmontri and other progressive aristocrats wanted compulsory education, but mainly as a method of economic growth and social control. Both the education ministry and senior officials at Chulalongkorn University opposed So. Wichai Nopharasmi, "Prawat lae Phon Ngan khong So. Thammayos (Life and Works of So. Thammayos), in *Silapa haeng Wannakhadi* (The Art of Literature) (Bangkok: Mingkhwan, 2000), 2-3. Wichai's article originally appeared in *Lok Nangsu* (Book World) 1, no. 7 (April 1978): 44-52.

of literary criticism, novels and short stories, philosophy and history.¹²

In the 1937 book *Silapa haeng Wannakhadi* (The Art of Literature), So. greatly expanded Song's Western-derived interpretive framework. In addition to championing individual Western novelists, as Song had, So. read more widely in the influential books of the time. Will Durant's *Foundations of Civilization*, H.G. Wells's *The Outline of History* and Hendrik Willem Van Loon's *The Story of Inventions* all shaped his historical views. Heinrich Mutschmann on philology, John Macy's *The Story of the World's Literature* and John O'London's (Wilfred Whitten) *The World's Best Books* comprised the literary authorities that formed his views.

So. continued Song's advocacy for wannakham, modern Thai fiction as the next historical step in Thai writing. He also wanted to rescue wannakhadi, high literature, from oblivion. He writes in his introduction that he:

"(W)as confident in the certain and absolute desire not to let Thai literature preserve its beauty in isolation as in past ages; it must join "universal beauty" or "world literature" with its equally artistic writing."¹³

So. argued that Thai literature should be explained with universal categories. With results that are sometimes more obfuscatory than enlightening, he organizes Siamese

¹² Among his best-known works are the historical biography of King Mongkut *Phrachao Krung Syam* (Rex Siamen Sium) and *Saochingcha*, a collection of short stories. So. produced the 800 page tome on Mongkut shortly before his death, while *Saochingcha*, published in 1970, was probably written in the late 1940s.

¹³ *Silapa haeng Wanakhadi*, n.p.

writing into four main types: classical, romantic (which he terms "romantism"), parnassist and symbolist, and realist. Classical writing stemmed from Siam's Hindu and Buddhist inheritance, as well as Chinese, Javanese, Persian and Arab civilizations. The great court poems and poets, including the eighteenth century Aniruddha of Sri Prat, Rama II's Ramakien and Inao also fall into classicism. Classicism extends into modern times. Contemporary examples include Rama VI's poetry, and Prince Narathiphraphanphong's original literature and adaptations of foreign stories such as Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat. So. contends these are the Siamese equals of French seventeenth century classicism or Milton and Shakespeare in England.¹⁴

Despite its artistic merits, So. presents classicism as a stilted and sterile form. He values innovation more than tradition, and the individual genius over the socially sanctioned. This leads So. to Rousseau and romanticism. *Silapa haeng Wannakhadi* devotes by far the most attention to "romantism," which comprises more than one-third of the book, and is 10 times the length of the classicism section, 15 the realism description and 45 the account of symbolism. While he is ostensibly dedicated to a science of literary forms and not a class analysis, So. writes at length of the genius of middle-class Thai writers who remain unknown or unappreciated. Above all, Sunthorn Phu captures So.'s attention. So. highlights his poor background and revolutionary style, which he argues changed Thai writing forever and has influenced all Thai writers, even unconsciously, since.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid, 104-113.

¹⁵ Ibid, 128-142.

So. describes romanticism as heartbreak, sadness, idealism, dissatisfaction with life and anti-intellectualism, and its writers as often eccentric loners and literary pioneers.¹⁶ Sunthon Phu brought his social world to life in his poetry, but the high literary tradition ignored him. His brilliance created enemies who, without skill themselves, resorted to gossiping about his low birth to belittle him (132). So. argues society greets with contempt because people cannot understand it (127). "If only Sunthon Phu were born overseas!" He should be honored alongside the highest-ranking English poets, So. argues (141). Sunthon Phu's powers of observation, description and humanism not only changed the Thai language, but also reflected his status as a towering philosopher.¹⁷

In So.'s history of world and Thai literature, the lonely romantic genius largely disappeared with the demise of poetry as the primary form of expression. The novel must become the dominant mode he implies, but the Thai version was artistically immature. So. views modern Thai novel writing, "realism," as largely superficial.¹⁸ Unlike the

¹⁶ Rousseau is the best Western example of the "high degree" (digri sung) romantics, while the best Siamese case is Narin Thibet, whose 1809 poem of farewell (nirat) Tanaosri stands out as the most poignant (and first?) Thai romantic literature.

¹⁷ So. explains that all deep thought originated in poetry, in Siam as elsewhere (138).

¹⁸ He credits only Kulap Saipradit's Songkhram Chiwit (The War of Life) as a genuinely romantic text. "It has the language of bitterness, it is delicate, it shows an inner (buang lang) depth to every phrase—finely, violently, the bitterness of life emerges from romance many times (in the novel)" (195). Kulap published the novel just before the June coup. Modeled on Dostoyevsky's Poor People, Songkhram Chiwit tells the (partly autobiographical) story of an idealistic young man with aspirations to pursue a literary career who falls for a high-class woman. She breaks his

centuries long development of classical and then romantic verse, the Thai novel is too new to have created a genuine style. It is "written very fast, read very fast, and forgotten quickly" (199). So. argues that most Thai literature is "sentimental realism." While authors presented realistic environments, the portrayal of human situations was often melodramatic and a reflection of the author's hopes or prejudices. Unlike Sunthon Phu they didn't write from first-hand experience (of loss and bitterness for example), and their stories were not accurate depictions of society.

Among the most interesting parts of So.'s complicated book is his critique of Dokmai Sot's fiction. He examines her novel *Nung nai Roi* (One in 100). Like *Phu Di* discussed in the last chapter, this 1936 novel is very long and centers on an elite woman who is thrust into family politics when her father dies. She succeeds under difficult circumstances by relying on Buddhist virtue. Playing on the title, So. argues that Dokmai Sot presents the two lead characters, one woman (Anong) and one man (Khun Phra Atthakhadiwichai), as "typical characters" but actually they are unrealistic archetypes (215). She jettisons, So. argues, all of the bad characteristics of the nobility. Rather than showing the real world So. contends that Dok Mai Sot's fiction is a frozen, 50-year old portrait of a bygone time and its attitudes.¹⁹ In the Buddhist moral

heart, and is equally stifled by social conventions that stifle her true feelings.

¹⁹ That Dokmai Sot's protagonists reflect a bygone age contradicts So.'s prior assertion that her characters are completely ahistorical.

universe and sermonizing "that fills every page" (223), he asserts that Dokmai Sot's world is make believe.

As with the descriptions of classicism and romanticism, So. Thammayos comes close to a class analysis in criticizing Dokmai Sot's style:

"Realistic fiction, especially written by writers with high education, usually is unnaturally focused on their artistic abilities ... they prefer linguistic conventions, sentence form, word weight, all filled with strict structures. All of this is in contradiction to the deep meaning of art" (219).

He continues that this artificiality is not found in lived experience, where art originates:

"A poor country boy, who doesn't realize his poverty, listens to the sounds of the birds. His innocent eyes see a leaf fall gently in the cold season, his young ears hear the sound of water drops in the evening, and however these feelings issue into human language, that is a realistic view of life, emerging ordinarily" (ibid).

How the country boy's experience of nature becomes the great art of Sunthon Phu isn't clear. And So.'s valorization of romanticism is contradicted by his "scientific" approach to literature. Nonetheless, his critique focuses on the artificiality of high society and its aesthetic accomplishments, and their redemption in natural expression. So. follows his country boy vignette with a glowing tribute to Jacques Henri Bertrand de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*: the lovers' freedom, equality

and challenge to social norm, and a life close to nature, are authentic experiences.

Moreover, he has an ambivalent view of modern civilization. While So. commends Dokmai Sot for bringing Buddhism out of the wat, her portrayal of the triumph of Eastern spirituality over Western materialism is too predictable. Traditional ethics is hopelessly outmatched by the aggressive capitalism of the western powers, which invades and exploits poor countries. So. argues that the peculiar morality of a nineteenth century gentlewoman cannot meet the challenges of a world where power is centralized in the advanced economies.²⁰

Both men thought that the scientific method could be applied to the imagination. But how and why? The distillation of reality that both advocated in a new literature would seem to transform whatever reality they claimed to show in the narrative. Their selective approach is hard to reconcile with claims of scientific objectivity. So. for example admired Momchao Akatdamkerng Rapiphat's *Piw Luang Piw Khao* (Yellow Skin, White Skin) as an accurate, politically charged novel of interracial relations, but claimed that *Wiman Thalai* (The Heavens Fall, described in the last chapter) was not political and that *Lakhon Haeng Chiwit* was sentimental realism (203-205, 200-201). These confusing classifications muddy what a modern reader would probably see as similar representations of old order

²⁰ So was convinced that the globalization of culture was unstoppable. In his language, the twentieth was a "synthetic century." The power of modern technology and ideas, he writes, would produce within 100 years a single world culture; the values of an elite class in an agricultural backwater of the world economy would fade away (226-227).

decrepitude and ambivalence about how "traditional" Thai culture would survive. Further, while Akatdamkerng's jaundiced view of his class contrasts sharply with Dokmai Sot, the creativity and sensibility of each writer - Dokmai Sot's mansion-worlds governed by Buddhist ethics and Akat's gloomy predictions of miscegenation and the feeble response of Buddhist homilies to an aggressive modernity - both created the reality they portrayed.

Still the takeaway I propose from this discussion of Song Thepasit and So. Thammayos is less about their problematic classifications and doubtful objectivist claims. Both were autodidacts who, in their short lives, established themselves as the first Thai thinkers to see their literary heritage in global terms. The result was not merely to categorize Thai expression as a copy of a process that had already happened in the West, but rather (especially in So.'s case) engaging narratives of Thai writing in its historical trajectory²¹ and a call to take the next step to modern writing. Prompted by their interest in Western thought, these literary pioneers rescued Thai

²¹ In addition to foregrounding Sunthon Phu, So. also described his female disciples and their creation of the first Thai literary club in the nineteenth century (148-177). Additionally, as a northerner, So. esteemed Lanna culture and was arguably the first to view the northern literary tradition as equaling anything produced by Bangkok poets (184-193).

culture from its amnesia and were among the first non-palace voices to challenge elite cultural orthodoxy.²²

²² So. Thammayos was also among the first Thais to engage with Western philosophy (indeed, according to Supha Sirimanond, he was the first to understand the Western tradition). He wrote a history of philosophy in 1935, but the book has regrettably been lost. We can, however, reconstruct his philosophic views from a January 1947 lecture delivered at a Sangha teacher-training program (*Sastra Pratchya* (Philosophy) (Bangkok, n.p., 1947)).

So. had a keen interest especially in the American pragmatists who were influential across Asia in the first decades of the twentieth century. Most of So.'s 1947 lecture is an outline of William James's ideas (although he uses Charles Peirce's term "pragmaticism" for his philosophy). En route to James, he gives a quick history of Western philosophy that is noteworthy for its compression and its moral narrative. So. describes any worthwhile philosophy as concrete, liberating and socially useful. In addition to a basic introduction to the Western tradition for the monks, So. uses the lecture to attack metaphysics. He argues that since Plato metaphysics has been a method to enslave men or turn them into daydreamers. In contrast to the Platonists, those fixated on heaven, So. valorizes Anaxagoras, whom he contends felt that "heaven had to be built from the ground up" (17-18). From there, an epistemological tradition was born that valued provisional knowledge, humble in its claims, more than dogmatic assertions.

The main social good of the scientific tradition inaugurated by the Greeks was respect for diverse sources of knowledge. The common sense humility of William James, in So.'s scheme the inheritor of the Anaxagorean lineage, contributes to social justice in two ways: by focusing on an act's effects more than causes and a view that intelligence is more valuable than "order" (43). While the latter point isn't explained, its two possible meanings are a complete philosophic system and, more radically, an attack on tradition as the justification for social hierarchy. In So.'s conceptualization (via James), there are different sources of knowledge -- rationalism, empiricism and mysticism as the most well known -- which buttress the pragmatic belief that good ideas can come from anyone.

In his lecture to the monks and in other texts, So. is fixated on "geniusism." Possessing an entirely original character, the genius lives outside of social expectations. He or she can radically change the way their peers view the world. So. privileges geniusism as an immeasurable source of knowledge and approaches, but shies from, a social critique:

"Who will know and who will make the final decision about a youth's life and future that if he comes from Suphanburi he

A Strong Nation is Proud of its Literature: Wit Sivasriyanond and the New Cultural Nationalism

The 1932 coup opened the door to political and cultural democracy. The wartime military dictatorship slammed it shut and erected a martial nationalism that subsumed the individual into the collective and stressed duties over freedoms.

The Phibun government's cultural nationalism extended into many spheres. Through poems, plays and films, it reconstructed Thai history as a heroic tale of martial valor and projected the modern state back in time as a

won't be the next Chaophraya Yomaraj? If from Chonburi, the next Chaophraya Surasakmontri? If from the education ministry, the next great poet-philosopher, Chaophraya Thammasakmontri?" (26)

The geniuses will rule society in the future. We saw above in the discussion of his literary ideas that So. envisioned a single global culture as dominating mankind's future. While his pragmatism (and geniusism) would seem to cast doubt on scientific certainty, So. advances an authoritative vision of what is to come. Although he attacks Plato's philosophy, So.'s geniuses look very much like philosopher kings: the geniuses are the wisest and most morally superior. While "low intellectuals" peddle martial ideologies or survival of the fittest social philosophies, he argues that their gloomy views pander to the masses and will result mainly in resentment. Instead, So. advances a universal measure of intelligence through which the elite possessors can perhaps prevent "world war three." (Writing two years after the German and Japanese surrenders, So. envisioned a new cataclysm that would overtake the world.) The pending war would result from intellectual dogmatism (22-23). He suggests that only the rule of geniuses would avoid the war. Shading off into science fiction, So. describes a future where various quotients will govern humans, including sex, intelligence and personality. Everyone will carry "intellectual cards" that list their abilities and hence their social value (57-59). The main three groups, arrived at by an unspecified science, are: common people (those susceptible to persuasion by low intellectuals); supermen (one in ten million of the population); and the genius elite, who are said to number about two million in two trillion specimens (48).

natural territorial unit since the thirteenth century.²³ In propaganda, the wartime regime attempted to remake contemporary society as a patriotic community of equals under the leader. The cultural mandates and associated discourses created the ideal man and woman, peasant, worker, son, daughter, etc.

To complement its historiography and plan for contemporary society, the regime used language to create uniformity and horizontal solidarity. In the early 1940s, the Phibun government simplified Thai by eliminating rarely used letters, standardizing spelling and eliminating most royal language. It also created an official view of literature that asserted the primacy of traditional forms over the seemingly more democratic novel that Song and So. championed.

Wit Sivasriyanont was an important member of the cultural elite who constructed the literary orthodoxy. This chapter closes with a description of his 1943 book *Wannakhadi lae Wannakhadi Wichan* (Literature and Literary Criticism), which has become the official statement on literature and has been reprinted several times. Wit further developed So.'s literary science categories and argued that Thai literature was a rare treasure that would distinguish Thailand from other nations. In addition to following the leader and fighting their enemies, Thailand would flourish by cultivating their innate superiority. Literature was a manifestation of this inner strength.

²³ Luang Wichit Watakarn played the key role in military nationalist discourse. See Barme, Luang Wichit and the Creation of Thai Identity.

While So. also fought for a literary renaissance, he never gained the sanction of the cultural elite and his defense of individual expression over social convention didn't fit with military nationalism.

Wit, with degrees from Oxford and the University of Paris, was a better-educated and more informed critic than either of his predecessors. Far more than a reactionary nationalist, his self-assured cultural authority comes across in his clear outline of the history of Western literature and literary criticism. His style and attitude remind a reader of Prince Damrong's authoritative histories and cultural studies, as well as Prince Wan Waithayakon's work.²⁴

Wit argued that Western power was creating a globally homogeneous culture. While Song Thepasit and So. Thammayos welcomed globalization, Wit and other cultural conservatives bemoaned the depressing sameness of modern life.²⁵ Forced by the threat of Western power to examine themselves, the new Thai elite arrived at an old neo-traditionalist philosophy. Wit explained to his readers:

"... (T)he lives of Eastern peoples are becoming ever more the same. The thing that can help the Thais to stay Thai is

²⁴ Wan was a friend of Wit and at the time a lecturer in comparative literature at Chulalongkorn University. Both Wan and Wit contributed to the Wannakhadi Samoson (Literary Association), an exclusive club that Phibun organized in 1941 to promote Thai literature.

²⁵ Foreigners also often trumpeted the preservation of Thai culture, and saw the monarchy as the guarantor. We saw in chapter two that Josiah Crosby lamented the destruction of Thai customs brought by capitalism. He also however didn't think much of the Phibun group's cultural programs, seeing them as shallow reactions to Western power that lacked all the beauty and grace of absolutist culture.

our literature. You might say that the entire time that I studied literature in the West, (understanding) Thai literature was my ultimate aim ... I always wanted to use the learning I gained from studying universal literature to improve Thai literature and help it flourish."²⁶

Like Song and So. (and Thipakorawong in the prior century), Wit described old Thai literature as avoiding the everyday world. Poverty, the hardship of making a living, the humdrum day to day: none of these things ever appeared in Thai literature. Common people or social conflict in the Ramakien, the Inao or Khun Chang Khun Phaen, he asserts, were only foils for the heroes and heroines (93). Western literature on the other hand he argues since the nineteenth century has abandoned an ideal world and no longer discussed aesthetics as privileging the absolute good, beautiful, etc. The works of Zola, Baudelaire, Andre Gide, Francois Mauriac, D.H. Lawrence and Dostoyevsky, for example incorporated the messiness of the everyday into their art and in the process created truly significant literature that spoke directly to our experience of life. The objectification of the everyday in good art produces a wonder in us and unsettles our assumptions. The banal becomes strange and profound. We thus understand others and ourselves better with literature and feel ourselves in universally recognizable characters (93-96; 167-169).

For Wit, a globalized world that was quickly generating new knowledge and powerful technologies needed the artist more than ever. Over the last few centuries he

²⁶ Wit Sivasriyanont, *Wannakhadi lae Wannakhadi Wichan* (Literature and Literary Criticism) (Bangkok: Phrae Phittaya, 1975 (1943)), vi.

explains, science had fundamentally changed our perception of reality and stripped the world of its magic. Science and literature since the great discoveries of the seventeenth century had traveled as companions, with scientific innovations opening new vistas for artists. While the scientist, the historian and the poet all were engaged in explaining the world, poets described the biggest mystery of all: the human mind. As science became increasingly specialized, we lost touch with ourselves (172-180). Like the Buddhists discussed in the next chapter, Wit advances a discourse in which modern science must be steered by our moral imagination. Wit admires William Wordsworth, and paraphrases him:

"The world of science is only a part (of the whole), cut from a vast, unlimited world. We can understand this whole with a certain power, the imagination. This imagination is not at odds with reason. As Wordsworth said, it is 'Reason in her exalted mood.'" (176)

The literary imagination is the master key that offers the most complete understanding of humanity. It breeds sympathetic joy (muthitajit)²⁷ for others:

"(It) leads the scientist, doctor, lawyer and people of other professions to all come together in friendship, to have mutual goodwill and exchange their ideas and feelings." (180)

²⁷ Wit translates muthithajit as sympathy, but sympathetic joy conveys more accurately the meaning of the Pali term for an expansive, thorough understanding of each other.

Wit is a pleasure to read and counters a stereotypical view of Phibun's nationalist clique as arrogant, xenophobic and willfully ignorant of Thai and international history. Like others in Phibun's elite cultural circle, Wit's cosmopolitan outlook would seem to make him a strange champion of the wartime government's ethnic chauvinism.²⁸ Perhaps, like the royal apologists Dhani Nivat and the Pramroj brothers - or other Southeast Asian intellectuals living under colonialism who traveled to the metropole -- Wit returned from Europe more firmly convinced of Thai exceptionalism and the need to preserve Thai culture at all costs.

His general approach is to learn from the West how to be Thai. In a chapter on "Wannakhadi lae Prachachat" (Literature and the Nation), he argues that nothing arouses popular nationalism like a country's literature. He surveys various European nations' experience, with France, Italy and Germany figuring prominently. He asserts that Madame de Staël around 1800 was the first theorist of modern literary nationalism, and introduced the idea that all writers of a

²⁸ The politically savvy Prince Wan, Luang Wichit Watakan and Phya Anuman Rajathon are additional examples of highly cultured cosmopolitan intellectuals who helped erect the official cultural ideology. Phya Anuman's extensive writings helped codify Thainess. He wrote from a position of wide learning. His multi-volume *Lathi khong Pheuan* (Beliefs of Our Friends), written in the 1920s with his collaborator Nagapratheep is an impressive survey of world philosophies, and is especially strong in its coverage of the Indian cultural world. Sathiankoset and Nagapratheep, *Lathi khong Pheuan* (Bangkok, n.p.). The first volume is undated, the second appeared in March 1926, part one of the third in February 1928 and part two of the same in June 1928. The encyclopedic approach to world history and culture is similar to Luang Wichit's massive tomes *Prawatisat Sakon* (World History, 1928, twelve volumes!) and *Prawat Mahaburut* (Biographies of Great Men, 1928).

particular language express common national characteristics. "Italy" he argues was a new political reality that stemmed from a very old idea kept continuously alive in literature (Dante, unsurprisingly, is given central importance because of his creation of the modern vernacular). Johann Gottfried von Herder, the first German literary nationalist, liberated German expression from centuries of French domination. His influence shaped the *Sturm und Drang* movement, which marked the triumph of Germany's "complete literary and intellectual freedom and sovereignty."²⁹ Thai intellectual engagement with the West often stripped the source of its complexity. Herder was obviously much more than a German nationalist, and his cosmopolitan philosophic attitude contradicts Wit's presentation. The appropriation of Western models or ideas, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, always entered a local political discourse.

Contrary to his prior assertions that literature allows us to understand the universal and our shared humanity, here Wit's argument reifies Thai-ness. Literature expresses our difference and "cannot be imitative" (191).³⁰ Without their literature, a nation loses itself and becomes another.

Wit goes much further than So.'s claims that Thai literature had universal value to essentialize the Thai character. While So.'s romanticism saw universal human

²⁹ Wit, *Wannakhadi*, 191-192.

³⁰ Unlike some of the racial ideologies of Thai-ness current at the time, Wit posits language as the primary mark of belonging. He contends that foreigners who understand Thai can comprehend (and thus participate in) Thai-ness provided that they thoroughly feel the culture. "Foreigners who become Thai citizens can never really feel what it is to be Thai until they see the beauty and taste of our literature. This is because literatures shows the true character of a nation" (184).

nature, Wit's political romanticism elevated the poetic imagination as a natural marker of Thai-ness:

"The Thai are a poetically minded people ... in some ages like that of Narai the Great the Thai people were described as 'breathing poetry.' All the people, regardless of sex or class ... were natural poets ... Extraordinarily, despite their lack of schooling and knowledge of only basic letters, the Thai people are thoroughly versed in their literature ... they have the blood of poets." (206 and 208)

Bus and tram drivers improvise verse on the go, and the elite classes form literary clubs to express the same national inclination (208-209). There is no essential difference between social classes.

Despite their natural poetic sense, for Wit the Thai people were in danger of losing their way. In former periods of crisis, the kings would rescue the people's culture. Today, the national government through its language and literature policies was safeguarding culture in a similar way. The modern study of literature was still only at a primary stage but "(through study) we must realize what are our national characteristics and what has been borrowed from other countries' literature" (216).

Wit criticizes So.'s literary interpretations, ignores modern Thai fiction altogether, and advances the older poetic forms as national treasures that unified people. Wit and the new cultural elite's neo-traditionalism rejected wannakham -- popular fiction written by young amateurs like the Suphaburut group we met in the last chapter -- in favor of wannakhadi -- high literature - even as they claimed to

speak for the nation as a whole. As other scholars have explained, the cultural elite's rejection of Western-style fiction as a serious endeavor excluded prose from public education and the Thai literary canon until well after World War II.³¹

Conclusion

While the depreciation of popular literature is an important aspect of the royalist and bureaucratic elite's neo-traditional authority, this chapter has been equally concerned with the intellectual transformation engendered by Western culture. The preservation of elite cultural hegemony undoubtedly has been a crucial aspect of the ambiguous legacy of 1932, as we have seen in previous chapters. In the tryst with modernity however, seen here in literary philosophy and in the next chapter in Buddhism, an equally important process was unfolding. Both the kings and the new military elite codified culture as a method of social control but autonomous intellectual developments were emerging as at least potential sources of emancipatory cultural politics and non-state directed subjectivities. Song Thepasit's promotion of *ruang an len* and So.'s romanticism attacked what they saw as the artificiality of high culture and made it possible to see common people's experiences as meaningful. Wit Sivasriyanond applied much of the same Western-derived discourse of literary modernity for national service, not the promotion of individuality,

³¹ See Thanapol, "The Prescription of Good Books" and Mattani Rutnin, *Modern Thai Literature: The Process of Modernization and the Transformation of Values* (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1988).

but latent in his comparative frame is a universalist ethics.

All three men called for Thai culture to shed its naiveté and become self-critical. This movement of consciousness encompassed both the individual and society. But which of the two carried more importance created a tension that marked the People's Party era (and indeed still does). While the constitutionalists asserted that the individual was now primary, the democratic movement was enfolded by nationalism, which in turn competed in a world of militarism and mass ideologies. These ultimately controlled more ferocious weapons to enforce obedience. By the time of Wit's book, the individual conscience deferred to the state, which used new cultural ideals to buttress authoritarianism.

Chapter Seven: The Salvific Science: Cosmopolitan Buddhism in the 1930s

Song Thepasit, So. Thammayos and Wit Sivasriyanond revolutionized the study of Thai literature by interpreting it in terms derived from the West, and So. was arguably the leading champion of the study of Western philosophy. In the same period, religious thinkers also engaged in a dialogue with the West. Some ambitious young men formed a Buddhist modernist movement that sought to develop the religion as an empirically grounded psychology, in which the Buddhist science of salvation was objectively superior to the teachings of other religions. Like literary studies, the new Buddhist discourse was politically ambiguous, and available for progressive or reactionary applications.

This chapter explains the ideas of Samak Burawas, the Wat Suan Mokh group and the missionary zeal of the Italian monk Lokanatha. Samak developed a new scientific theory of Buddhism while the Suan Mokh group and others rejuvenated Buddhist practice. For the first time in Siamese history, educated middle class laypeople - and foreigners - played a central role in Thai Buddhist polemics. Most of the people discussed here had lived or traveled overseas and all were excited by new ideas in the wider Buddhist world. While in the nineteenth century the elite was concerned with defending Buddhism from the attacks of Western missionaries, 1930s Buddhists lived in a time when European and American spiritualists popularized Asian philosophy. Inspired by the positive foreign reception of Buddhism, Thai and Thai resident Buddhists attempted to prove Buddhist truths with a new science and fashion themselves as real life examples of their lofty ideas.

Radical reductions: Samak's Buddhist Phenomenology

Samak Burawas's scientific Buddhism could not have been written by the elder generation. Like Song and So., Samak embarked on detailed, complicated projects that modernized Thai cultural discourse during a time when Siam was much more closely integrated with global intellectual currents. The son of an ennobled government official and a palace lady, Samak was born in 1916. In 1932 he finished mathayom eight at Suan Kulap. Two years later, Samak received a royal scholarship to study in England. After studying at Portsmouth Technical College, he enrolled in the Royal School of Mines at Imperial College in London in 1935. He received his B.Sc. three years later, publishing a study of mineralogy at the same time.¹

From the study of earth elements, Samak turned to the sciences to explain Buddhist philosophy. In his 1936 book *Phuttha prachya atibai duai Withayasat* (Buddhist Philosophy explained with Science),² written while he was still a student in England, Samak outlined an intellectual pursuit that would preoccupy him for the next several decades.³ Buddhism, in Samak's scheme, had already thousands of years ago anticipated the central findings of modern science in

¹ *Thorani Withaya* (Bangkok, 1939).

² Reprinted in *Anuson nai Praratchathan Plerngsop Phan Ek Samak Burawas* (Cremation Volume for Major Samak Burawas) (Bangkok, 1975).

³ In 1953 he published a considerably revised version where he explained that the 1936 book was not sufficiently scientifically rigorous, hadn't engaged deeply enough with Buddhism and was a piece of armchair theorizing. Samak, *Phutthaprachya, Mong Phutthasasana duai Thasana Withayasat* (Buddhist Philosophy, Examining Buddhism with a Scientific Perspective (Bangkok: Syam Publishing, 1994 (1953), 28-29.

atomic theory, the study of light, time and space, and most importantly the unreliability of sensory perception. He claimed further that both systems were rational and pragmatic in their search for knowledge. Buddhism, however, goes further than science and explains how we should live. Samak privileges Buddhism as offering a more detailed and persuasive psychology and an ethical system that, while founded in science, gives a rational basis for how we should treat each other.

As with Song and So.'s attitude towards Siamese literature, Samak's scientific Buddhism had an intellectual lineage that can be traced to the nineteenth century. We need to make a brief detour into Thai intellectual history to explain the background.

Two overlapping strands of influence are important in the development of intellectual Buddhism. The first is the search for a rational historical Buddha that began in the first reign,⁴ and second is King Mongkut's reforms⁵ and Chaophraya Thipakorawong's influence. A substantial part of Thipakorawong's *Kitchanukit* is devoted to demystifying the fourteenth century Traiphum (Three Worlds) cosmology/cosmogony and exposing the false beliefs about natural phenomena that permeated Thai religion. Like his patron and friend King Mongkut - who in the year following *Kitchanukit*'s publication died proving that solar eclipses were caused by planetary movements and not the demon Rahula swallowing the sun - Thipakorawong was committed to

⁴ See Nithi, "Biographies of the Buddha" in *Pen and Sail* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2001).

⁵ These are discussed briefly in chapter four.

debunking mythology and creating a rational worldview for the Siamese. Both men esteemed Western science.

The nineteenth century made the first discursive association of "Buddhism and science." What does each term encompass, and what is their commonality? Buddhism meant the teachings and sermons attributed directly to the Buddha and excluding the commentaries and legends. The interpretation of science developed in three phases. In the nineteenth century, it referred mainly to Newton's theories of a mechanistic universe, in the early twentieth Einstein's relativity became popular to explain Buddha's ideas about subjective illusion and finally on the eve of the second world war to technological progress, especially of weapons of mass destruction. These phases overlapped and as we will see especially in the 1930s the latter two were interrelated.

Regarding their interconnection, both Buddhism and science shared three things in all three phases of Thai interest in Western knowledge: a common pursuit, the investigation of natural phenomena; a common assumption, that nature obeys laws of causation that can be understood by the mind; and a common empirical, inductively reasoned method. Moreover, the assumption and the method mandate an autonomous subject. The thinker does not have to rely on external authority for direction.

The discourse of the two terms and their association happened in particular political circumstances. Their enthusiasm for modern science notwithstanding, the Siamese elite's intellectual journey in the fourth and fifth reigns didn't result in an untroubled assimilation of Western ideas. It shared similarities with anti-colonial polemics

in neighboring countries with which Siam had long-standing cultural ties. The mid-nineteenth century Thai religious modernists and their dialogue with Christianity form part of a broader transnational intellectual response to Western power. Like other Asian Buddhists, Thipakorawong and Mongkut combatted the attacks of Christian missionaries (the main informants through whom the Thai elite learned about the world) that Buddhism was superstitious and nonsensical. Countering the critics, they asserted that Christianity was much more irrational and rested on hopes and fears, false promises and grisly punishments, rather than psychological facts. The Buddha's teaching, by contrast, formed a practical way to understand how the mind worked and why people suffer. God(s) was irrelevant to humans' primary problem of how to live well and peacefully. Their discourse of the superiority of Buddhism over Christianity contributed to a discursive bifurcation that would continue into our period: Western technology and worldly knowledge was acknowledged as superior, but surrendered the higher ground to Eastern spirituality. This separation was an important part of many Asian intellectual responses to Western imperialism.⁶

Ceylon was the center of Theravada Buddhist polemics against Christianity and of the creation/defense of

⁶ Created by orientalist scholarship, the binary was absorbed by Asia intellectuals living under European colonialism. An illuminating example is given in Partha Chatterjee's discussion of Bankim Chandra in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984). The Thai case is discussed by Thongchai Winichakul, "Coming to Terms with the West: Intellectual Strategies of Bifurcation and Post-Westernism in Siam," in Rachel V. Harrison and Peter A. Jackson, eds. *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 135-151.

rational Buddhism. Native Buddhists and Western spiritualists worked together. In 1873 on the outskirts of Colombo, 5,000 people attended a debate between a Sinhalese Buddhist monk and a native Christian as to which side's doctrines were more truthful. Impressed with the 1873 debate in Ceylon, Henry Steel Olcott composed *A Buddhist Catechism* in 1881 for the "scientific religion." A few years previously when he and Madame Blavatsky traveled to Ceylon to take the five vows of the lay Buddhist, he declared "our Buddhism was, in a word, a philosophy, not a creed." The Theosophists subsequent role in defending Asian religion against Christian critics is well known.⁷ Centrally important is the career of the Sinhalese layman Anagarika Dharmapala ("Homeless Strength of the Dhamma," David Hewaviratne, 1864-1933). His anti-colonial "Protestant" Buddhism vociferously denounced Christianity. In a 1924 essay he wrote:

"Every new discovery in the domain of Science helps us to appreciate the sublime teachings of the Buddha Gautama ... The semitic religions have neither psychology nor a scientific back ground."

⁷ See Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Buddhism & Science: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008). A fair summary of the Buddhism and science topic can be found in Jose Ignacio Cabezon, "Buddhism and Science: On the Nature of the Dialogue," in *Buddhism and Science: Breaking New Ground*, B. Alan Wallace, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 35-68. The topic itself, rather than its history, is outlined in Buddhadasa P. Kirthisinghe, ed. *Buddhism and Science* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984). Also Paul Dahlke's extensive treatment of the issue in *Buddhism and Science*, Bhikkhu Silacara, trans. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1913).

The next year at New York's Town Hall he told his audience: "The Message of the Buddha that I have to bring to you is free from theology, priestcraft, rituals, ceremonies, dogmas, heavens, hells and other theological shibboleths."⁸

Edwin Arnold's 1886 *The Light of Asia*, a biography of the rational Buddha, was hugely popular with Asian Buddhists and he was awarded a medal of honor by King Chulalongkorn. Arnold later asserted "between Buddhism and modern science there exists a close intellectual bond."⁹ Arnold traveled to Bodh Gaya around 1890 and described its deplorable condition and Hindu priests' ownership of the land where the Buddha gained enlightenment. Anagarika Dharmapala founded the Maha Bodhi Society in 1891 and campaigned internationally to have the space returned to Buddhist control. In the Anagarika's plan, a thriving Buddhist community at one of the religion's holiest sites would lead to an eventual renaissance of Buddhism in India.¹⁰

⁸ Quoted in Lopez, *Buddhism & Science*, 15.

⁹ An 1889 lecture at the Imperial University of Tokyo, quoted in *ibid*, 13.

¹⁰ The Anagarika's Buddhist activism intersected with the Thai elite's kingly nationalism and quest for British friendship. The results were unfavorable to the colonized.

Prince Damrong met the Sinhalese nationalist in Calcutta in the winter of 1891. On the eve of his elevation to Minister of the Interior, King Chulalongkorn sent Damrong to India to observe the administration of the colonial state that could form a model for the Thais. Along the way, combining his administrative role with his scholarly interests, Damrong discovered the origins of Thai Buddhist culture in India in the company of British colonial officials and archaeologists. He was especially impressed with the series of stupas that sacralized the spaces of the key events of the Buddha's life. In *Nithan Borankhadi* (Ancient Tales) Damrong describes in detail the stupas at Lumbini (Siddhartha's birthplace), Gaya (the scene of his enlightenment), Marukhatayana (usually referred to as Isipatana, where the Buddha delivered his first sermon) and Kusinagara (the place of the Buddha's passing).

We can now return to Samak's 1936 book, which should be read with this polemical history in mind. Both

In addition to the sights' obvious influences on Thai art, Damrong was struck by the strong public and private support for Gaya's Mahabodhi temple.

Damrong traveled to Bodh Gaya as the official guest of the British Indian government. After leaving the town, Damrong stayed in Calcutta where Dharmapala visited him in the company of a Burmese businessman. The Anagarika pressed Damrong to petition Lord Lansdowne, the Viceroy of India, to intercede in the land dispute. In Damrong's retelling of the story, the Anagarika informed him that he had been attempting and failing to convince the Brahmin zamindars of the temple lands at the site of the Buddha's enlightenment to allow Dharmapala's Mahabodhi Society full ownership of the land. Damrong, although impressed with the Anagarika's devotion (calling him a "hero of the Buddhist faith"), refused to help. Damrong considered the matter "an internal affair of the Indian government" and that as a guest of the British he could not intervene. Further, Damrong somewhat sanctimoniously writes that he told Dharmapala that the Dhamma formed the heart of Buddhism and that the material trappings of the faith were unimportant.

Dharmapala later visited Bangkok many times to drum up support for the Mahabodhi Society but failed to make much of an impact. Most people, according to Damrong, didn't understand Dharmapala's English lectures. The ones who did were put off by his combative rhetoric. The Anagarika frequently presented the revival of Buddhism in India as an attack on the enemies of the faith "who had been trying to destroy Buddhism for 700 years" rather than an opportunity to make merit. Damrong noted that the Anagarika was ultimately successful in building a temple at Isipatana and getting the Mahants to allow a hostel for traveling Buddhists to be established at Bodh Gaya.

Damrong felt the pressure of his official government position and did not want to offend his British hosts. Thai solidarity with their fellow Theravadins took a back seat to regional politics, in which the Thais desperately wanted to be accepted as an equal power by the British. See Damrong's "Ruang Seup Phrasasana nai India" (Stories on the Transmission of Buddhism in India), in *Nithan Borankhadi* (Ancient Tales). Cremation volume for Major General Thawal Sripin (Bangkok: Kasem Printing, 1990), 48-65. The Anagarika's legal dispute consumed his attention for many years. Alan Trevithick, *The Revival of Buddhist Pilgrimage at Bodh Gaya (1811-1949)*, *Anagarika Dharmapala and the Mahabodhi Temple* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006); Kahawatte Siri Sumedha, *Anagarika Dharmapala, A Glorious Life Dedicated to the Cause of Buddhism* (Sarnath: Maha Bodhi Society of India, 1999).

Buddhism's allegedly scientific outlook and its world-saving claims are present in 1930s Thai intellectual Buddhism. *Phuttha prachya atibai duai Withayasat* is a hugely ambitious work that seeks a complete explanation of how we see the world. Chapter titles give the reader an idea of Samak's self-confident handling of grand topics. The book starts with "The birth of the universe (thinking back millions of years)." From there we proceed to "nature," "sympathy (phromvihan)," "the laws of nature," "the relation of things," "dhammic relativity," "time and space," "contacts," "beauty and order," "impermanence," "the mind free of time and space," and "nirvana."

Readers familiar with Buddhist phenomenology won't be surprised with Samak's reiteration of the centrality of the six organs of contact. Sight, sound, taste, smell, touch and mind are the basis for his study. His innovation for the Siamese audience is the corroboration of Buddhist insights by twentieth-century science and the extensive lengths he travels to defend Buddhism in terms unavailable to Thipakorawong's generation. Light as electromagnetic waves, sound as a wave governed by air pressure and smell as a gas, for example, are dynamic forces that shape our experience. Phenomena reflect our dual relation to the world; they are both real and insubstantial. "This structure (pikat) of sense contact is ... the chain of life. The mind tries to be free of these fetters, and sometimes succeeds" (48).

Perhaps akin to Kant's metaphor of space and time as our spectacles for viewing the world,¹¹ Samak's analysis stresses that space and time are subjective phenomena. They are nonetheless the fundamental, interconnected field in which all phenomena reach us. Space and time, or better yet space-time, is central to Samak's book.¹²

Mind is different from the other senses as it can penetrate to fundamental reality. It alone is potentially independent of space and time and can summon impressions without the object being immediately present. While a contact zone, mind operates on two levels. The hidden or covered mind (*jai son*) is the assembler of the progression of sense-contacts and experiences that govern most of our lives.¹³ While the covered mind exists according to sensory experience (and space and time) the true mind (*jai jing*) does not.

Samak includes two different arguments, both inherited from the nineteenth century, in his study. While sometimes in his narrative he champions science above all, with Buddhism forming an Asian anticipation of the scientific method, elsewhere Samak limits the reach of modern science

¹¹ Samak admired Kant and in his conclusion credits the German philosopher's phenomenon-noumenon explanation as a Western expression of Buddha's own philosophy.

¹² He explains space-time governance of our impressions at some length. Light depends on space, sound on space and time, smell on the strength of the emission (a factor of air and temporal duration), taste on the melting of elements (a matter of both space and time). Bodily touch depends on space (size) and time.

¹³ Mind is the basis for feeling (*arom*), which is a psychic disturbance or movement. Samak lists an eightfold psychic process that he says is similar to that found in modern psychology, although the findings of the latter are not as detailed as Buddhist psychology (49-50). Samak doesn't explain the similarity, nor engage with modern psychology.

to make room for Buddhist spirituality.¹⁴ The hidden mind uses science to organize the common sense world. It relies on subjective positions or assumptions that it takes to be fundamentally true (51-52). The true mind on the other hand is nearly impossible to identify or locate. Though it somehow depends on the material world and the evolution of the species for its manifestation, the mind is also transcendent. Samak suggests that the hidden and true minds diverged over the course of evolution from an original identity (53).

Samak's two-fold mental scheme does however have a scientific explanation. The covered and true minds have their parallels (or source?) in nature. Samak interprets modern physics with the Buddhist concepts of sangkata and asangkata, and vice versa: phenomena, essentially insubstantial, and their ground. Sangkhata arise from a formless reality. Samak likens it to waves on an ocean and asangkhata to the depths, common metaphors for limitlessness.

Sangkhata can be enumerated and (dis)appear. Arising from or because of specific factors, they take two forms: quantified things, which have form, weight and temporal existence; and those that can only be given a valence. The latter are difficult to conceptualize. Samak describes them as things measured from a fixed randomly determined point in time or space; directions or points on a map are two examples. Advancement along a northern trajectory entails a corresponding and equal negative distance from south, "negative northness" (29). Space, while a compounded thing

¹⁴ Again we see the Kantian influence on Samak.

like trees or people, is an empty continuum. It is our measurement that assigns value.

Our consciousness thus not so much represents as misrepresents the world. Sangkhata and asangkhata are joined by factors (pajjai). In our contact with the world, pajjai is a result of a discriminatory faculty, force or consciousness (khanitchiwin) apprehending asangkhata. We understand the world through this faculty, but isn't a "soul;" more a temporary, changing relation of mind.¹⁵ We understand pajjai through logical thought, and know sangkhata through our senses. But we are not the mechanism of their appearance; instead, there is something in us that evaluates (khanita, 26) the sensory signals we receive.

Samak argues asangkata is best explained as a complex, changing relation of energy, be it as heat, electrical energy or something else. It has always existed as a constant quantity or state. Asangkata is also indefinable, although the mere fact that it occurs to us at all - like Kant's suspicions of god, freedom and immortality -- means it must be real:

"We know that asangkata exists because, thinking logically, it should. But when we think on it, we get to the fact that it is like a specter (pisat). It has no form, it is not a small amount or a large amount, so how do we tell others about it?" (26).

¹⁵ Khanitchiwin defies clear translation, and Samak may have invented the word. He states: "To change this word from mind (jai), to include life and to show that it operates according to mathematics, we will call it khanitchiwin. Please don't misunderstand it as "soul" (winnyan), which ordinary people mean for something that survives the body. Khanitchiwin is one aspect only of the life force (chiwin), in addition to organs," 51.

Samak enjoys destroying notions of the world's solidity, and the trustworthiness of our senses and of language. A drop of water, when considered at atomic and sub-atomic levels, is only a word to represent an unfixed state. Similarly, when we examine the atoms and sub-atomic particles in the drop of water, these words also become only designations for a complex, constantly changing force.

Samak imagines the consciousness of a jingjok. It walks on water and thinks it is solid; we would laugh at the creature and declare water is a liquid (104). Samak says neither view is right. Both assertions of reality exist only in our perception, which like natural forces, is also constantly changing.

Ruthlessly logical, Samak uses this approach to describe human perceptions of immaterial things. Death is negative alive-ness. Happiness, suffering and aesthetics are also more like linguistic or conceptual placeholders than existential realities. All of our conceptual binaries are constructs of the discriminatory faculty to assign measurement to a restless energy that cannot be quantified and separated because it bears all things within it, mixed up and indivisible. Our notions of beauty and ugliness for example rest on nothing more than an attempt to create order based on assumptions we hold about symmetry. "Beauty and ugliness arise because the mind is a slave of time and space" (106). Similarly music and poetry rely on our notions of proper timing and rhythm. Samak's unsparing view of art reduces imaginative representation to our need for logic in sense perception (63-77, 106-107).

Like Song's explanation of the origins of literature or So.'s account of romanticism, Samak's philosophic first principle is the first Buddhist truth. Despite the seeming equivalence of every material and mental process, in fact suffering is humans' first and always primary experience:

"When humans are born, we have neither happiness nor suffering. The first thing we recognize is suffering, because it is felt more (often or to a greater degree) than happiness. Happiness usually is bound up with knowledge (i.e., arises from reflection). When we are born, we first receive suffering. Evil is the same way. We know it because it is more (keenly) felt" (30).¹⁶

Happiness then only comes with reflection, and is reduced suffering. Language demonstrates this experience and Samak employs both English and Thai as examples. Thai uses "hellishly good" (*keng chip hai*), and "damn clever" (*hua raeo yang ra yam*), while English speakers say "damn nice" or "awfully nice."¹⁷

All of this stripping away of our illusions leaves the reader feeling rather glum. How does it help us live better lives? Samak goes back to original Buddhism for the answer and also stresses the importance of modern scientific research. When we realize the primacy of suffering, we are advantaged in our reaction to things. In Samak's austere

¹⁶ Samak wrote a complicated linguistic treatise around the same time as *Phutthasasana athibai duai Withayasat*, in which he argued the origins of language rested in our fear of death and nature's power. *Withayasat khong Phasa Thai* (The Science of the Thai Language), n.p., n.d. Lek Burawas, Samak's brother, wrote that the book was written in 1937.

¹⁷ *Phutthasasana athibai duai Withayasat*, 30.

formulations, we shouldn't get too glad when suffering is reduced, because it is still with us. Likewise when we suffer greatly, we don't (or shouldn't) get too perturbed. Samak presents this knowledge as the essence of "dhammic relativity" (31). This heady formulation isn't explained at much length but its twin inspirations, Buddha and Einstein, are obvious. Buddhism is superior to other religions because it corresponds with (or anticipates) modern science and avoids absolutes. Other faiths believe in eternal states of bliss or good and evil guaranteed by a transcendent god. But this is not in accord with Einstein's idea that "nothing is boundless (*anantha*) in the realm of the conditioned (*sangkhata*)" (31).

Offering us a strategy to live better also gives us a world-shaping power. Samak argues that Buddhism is an ethical system resting on the belief that terrestrial nature is an extension of a single cosmic force that binds all organic and inorganic matter together.¹⁸ Small changes or disruptions in one area can have large repercussions elsewhere. "Metta (compassion) for animals and other people is metta for ourselves, because we are connected to others with the cords of life" (18).¹⁹ In this interconnected life world, *upekkha* (equanimity) is the supreme wisdom that can end suffering. *Upekkha* is not a placid acceptance of things, but rather vigilant thought: "It is knowledge that all

¹⁸ Perhaps he had been reading Arthur O. Lovejoy. Samak's Gaia theory echoes the great-chain-of-being that Lovejoy popularized in England around the time Samak studied there.

¹⁹ Killing of animals affects us in unanticipated ways, Samak argues. Elimination of a predator, for example, of some type allows other species to flourish, which may harm us. At any rate, hunting is a primeval urge whose necessity has, or should have, long since passed. Its modern manifestation is sports, the sublimation of the killer instinct.

beings have their karma, which maintains the balance of nature" (17). Equanimity thus entails a constant struggle to maintain the balance. War also is a struggle, but of a different kind. Whereas So. Thammayos envisioned intellectual dogmatism as the roots of conflict, in Samak's vision war results from an imbalance in nature, of which misunderstanding is a symptom.

Again, Samak elevates Buddhism above its Western counterpart. Dhammic relativity does not preclude absolute transcendence. Unbounded happiness has no causal relation to suffering. It is gained from complete knowledge or insight, or the apprehension of all states of mind/things that pass us by in moments of contact (34). This type of happiness is rarely attained, except by yogis:

"If the mind is supreme and free of space and time, it will see nirvana, space, time and all the things of the world as one. If we enter into this unity, we will find a void that is unlike anything, because it is without any relation to space and time. It has no distance, no time, no birth, no age, no sickness, no death. It has no components. This land is nibbana and the mind of the person there is nibbanic" (108).

Samak's heavily detailed Buddhistic science rests on faith in the unknowable. Writing at a time when the world was rushing towards war, Samak argued that only transcendent knowledge of the interconnected whole could avoid global disaster. Common science had created a new world of impressive power, but had far outstripped our

ethical sense. Dhammic science and humanism (manusayatham) could attain peace (111-113).

Buddhist Practice and the World

Samak's radical scientific Buddhism thus sought not only to explain the world but also to save it. Other Buddhist intellectuals at the time also developed modernist Buddhism for ultimate aims. For the first time in Thai history, laymen made a crucial intellectual contribution to the religious discourse. The practice-oriented group that gathered around Wat Suan Mokh in Chaiya, Surat Thani province and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906-1999) is the prime example of a lay-professional project of this-worldly salvation that took Thai Buddhism in new directions. As with Samak, the Western influence is crucial. Radical Buddhism was inspired with a new zeal not only by foreign intellectual currents but foreign Buddhists as well. The high-profile travels of the Italian monk Lokanatha Bhikkhu (Salvatore Cioffi, 1889-1964) and his Thai followers is a second story in this section that will discuss Siam's globalized Buddhism of the 1930s.

Buddhadasa is arguably Siam's most famous twentieth-century monk. As his ideas have been presented clearly elsewhere there's no need to cover the same ground here.²⁰ Buddhadasa's fame rests mainly on his post-World War II career as Wat Suan Mokh grew and attracted elite patrons,

²⁰ See Peter Jackson, *Buddhadasa: Theravada Buddhism and Modernist Reform in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003); Louis Gabaude, *Une Herméneutique Bouddhique Contemporaine de Thaïlande: Buddhadasa Bhikkhu* (Paris: Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, 1988); and Tomomi Ito, "Discussions in the Buddhist public sphere in twentieth-century Thailand: Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and his world," (Ph.D. diss.: Australian National University, 2001).

including the monarchy. Instead, I would like to focus on the temple's early phase in the 1930s and the intellectual milieu of a progressive young monk from the mid-south and his entourage.

Lokanatha Bhikkhu is largely forgotten. His pre-war career however offers a window on a new dimension in Thai Buddhism. Like Buddhadasa, Lokanatha attracted young commoners to his mission and gained the attention of the new intelligentsia. Middle-class Buddhism in the 1930s sought a wide audience and public lectures, journals and magazines offered new venues for Buddhadasa and Lokanatha and their cosmopolitan Buddhism to reach audiences.

Buddhadasa was born into a middle class Thai-Chinese family in 1906 in Chaiya district. His father owned a small shop and the family's bourgeois status was acknowledged in law under the sixth reign when the government assigned it the surname Panich (commerce). The young Nguam Panich (Buddhadasa's birth name), his younger brother Yikei and sister Kimsoi grew up in a cosmopolitan environment that valued learning. Buddhadasa recalled in an interview that rural education at the time was very poor and that most monks - the upcountry intelligentsia - did not study the Dhamma, opting instead for chants and sermons on merit making. Nguam and Yikei browsed the books sold in the Panich family store. In addition to the usual tales of battles and dynasties, the boys read the religion, philosophy and literature sent by one of Nguam's uncles who ordained as a monk in Bangkok.²¹ Thianwan, K.S.R. Kulap and

²¹ Aside from enhancing the kammic accumulation of their parishioners, most monks spend their time woodworking and laboring on temple projects. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Lao wai meua wai*

Prince Wachirayan, and later Luang Wichit, Phra Pityalongkorn (No. Mo. So.), Thammasakmontri and Prince Wan all inspired the young men in their pursuit of knowledge. Buddhadasa recalled: "I read everything I could at that time, because I wanted to be modern."²² Yikei - who studied medicine briefly at Chulalongkorn University in the 1920s - was crucial to his elder brother's reception of foreign ideas in part because of his much better command of English.²³ When Yikei returned home from Bangkok in 1927 he brought boxes of books and magazines with him. Dharmapala's Maha Bodhi Society's Maha Bodhi journal, published in India from 1892, the Buddhist Annual of Ceylon (commencing publication in 1920), the British Buddhist (published by the British Maha Bodhi Society from 1926) and The Young East (issued by the International Buddhist Society in Japan from 1925) were all read by the young men. Yikei remained a layman but adopted the religious name Thammathas (Slave to the Dhamma) and in September 1929 founded the Khana Thammathan to encourage lay practice.

Meanwhile, Nguam had ordained in his home district in July 1926 and was given the name Phra Inthapannyo. He traveled twice to Bangkok thereafter seeking knowledge and inspiration. Phra Inthapannyo however was disillusioned with the low learning, status-consciousness and poor

Sonthaya, Attachiwaprawat khong Than Phutthathat (Recalling Life at Twilight, the Autobiography of Buddhadasa) (Phra Pracha Phasanuthammano, Interviewer) (Bangkok: Komol Thong Foundation, 1985), 26-27, 42-43.

²² Ibid, 114.

²³ Buddhadasa recalled years later "I couldn't understand most of it. I didn't have the patience to read (English books) because I had to open the dictionary so often. Mostly I just read the news," he recalled with a chuckle. Lao wai, 127.

discipline of urban monks. During his second stint in 1930, he wrote home to his brother:

"My situation has changed very quickly. My hatred of alachi (immoral monks) and Bangkok has spanned out from one person to two to three ... I ask only to conduct myself in a pure way ... I know that the way I have lived up to now is not the way to find the Buddha."²⁴

Phra Inthapannyo returned home and with some colleagues and the support of the Khana Thammathan established a new monastery dedicated to strict meditative practice in May 1932. One month after founding his temple, the People's Party overthrew the absolute monarchy. Buddhadasa declared the events a fitting coincidence:

"The history (patithin) of Suan Mokh is a thing that is easy to remember, encapsulated as it is in the short sentence: '(Founded) the same year as the change of regime.' We took this as an auspicious omen of the changes in a new era, as a chance to make (the world) better as much as we could."²⁵

In May 1933, the Khana Thammathan began publishing *Phutthasasana* (Buddhism), a monthly journal with a print run of 1,000 copies.²⁶ The Panich brothers' literary endeavor was the first non-royal Buddhist journal in the

²⁴ Quoted in Chit Phibanthen, *Chiwit lae Ngan khong Phutthathat* (Life and Works of Buddhadasa) (Bangkok: Silapanbannakhan, 1977), 41.

²⁵ Ibid, 48.

²⁶ Circulation grew to 2,500 after the war. Ito, "Discussions in the Buddhist Public Sphere," 70.

kingdom.²⁷ While popular inter-war magazines carried Buddhist articles periodically (especially around the Visahka Puja holidays in May), the only exclusively Buddhist periodical available was the royal Mahamakut Academy's *Thammajaksu* (Eye of the Dhamma). *Thammajaksu* began publishing in 1894 under princely direction but lost popularity gradually and ceased in 1911. In October 1933, Mahamakut revived the magazine. The academy and the journal originally were intended to popularize Buddhist teaching and create better religious scholars. Over time, however, both became exclusivist and attracted mainly palace writers and monks.²⁸

Thammajaksu featured transcripts of sermons given by senior Bangkok monks and Thai translations of Pali texts. In contrast to its parian scholars and elite bhikkhus, the Khana Thammathan's *Phutthasasana* was written by and for young monks and lay intellectuals. The magazine tapped into

²⁷ Which isn't the same as claiming it as the first non-royal religious journal. Since the mid-nineteenth century Christian missionaries had published religious documents in Thai. The Christian community had their own journal, *Krisanjak* (The Empire of Christianity). Kenneth Landon played the key role in the magazine as its editor.

²⁸ As discussed in chapter four, King Chulalongkorn sought an administratively and philosophically rational Sangha as part of the modern state. He deplored the low learning of monks and their self-interest. While Ganthathura (scholarly) monks were criticized, the main targets were vipassana practitioners and especially those monks pre-occupied with spells and incantations (*lao suat mon*). Mahamakut Rajawithayalai 100 Pi (100 Years of Mahamakut College), 83.

a growing middle class lay movement seeking philosophic and scholarly guidance.²⁹

²⁹ Naktham exams, established early in the century by Wachirayan as preliminary curricula for young monks, were introduced for laypeople in 1929. Ito, 20, referencing Phra Maha Thongsup in *Thammajaksu* 20 no. 3, (December 1934): 259-274. Phra Thongsup was a parian nine scholar and a committed rationalist. Landon identified lay criticism of the order and engagement with Buddhist philosophy as important new trends in Thai religion. *Siam in Transition*, 217-224.

The layman Narin Phasit, whom Buddhadasa described as "half-crazy, half-drunk," was the most famous pre-war critic of the Sangha. For years Narin attempted to revive the order of bhikkunis, female religious professionals that had existed in the Buddha's day. In 1929, Narin on his own authority ordained his two daughters at his self-established Wat Nariwong (Temple of the Female Lineage). The Sangha and the government condemned Narin's actions, and the police forcibly disrobed the girls and dragged them kicking and screaming off to jail.

Narin was a one-man crusader for a series of doomed causes. He had few friends and made many enemies. At the time of the Wat Nariwong controversy, Thai Mai newspaper opined that he should be assassinated for his attack on the establishment. His many self-published manifestos spared no one. He attacked the council of elders for their alleged stupidity and misunderstanding of Buddhism, as well as the Sangha generally for venality and corruption. During the crisis over Pridi's economic plan in 1933, he criticized the king for wading into politics (arguing it tarnished the monarchy) and also the People's Party government for censoring the king's speech. He claimed (accurately) that the People's Party censored old regime princes because they were afraid of them and unsure of their own power. Also in 1933 he went on a hunger strike to protest the poll tax, which he condemned as modern slavery. After Phibun became Prime Minister, Narin attacked him as an immature bully who should give power to him (Narin), until such time as Narin decided Phibun mature enough to govern! Surprisingly (and perhaps because people thought he was insane), he was not sent to prison as happened to so many of Phibun's opponents. Ever willing to make the news, Narin at one point shaved half his head and took to keeping a pictures of Jesus Christ and Taksin on his person.

Narin asked the Khana Thammathan to support his nunnery but Thammathas refused. While fascinating in his inimitable way, Narin is omitted from the discussion of Buddhism because he is an odd product of pre-war intellectual ferment. Like Thianwan and K.S.R. Kulap at the turn of the century, he stands outside (or maybe ahead of) the main intellectual currents and social networks of his day. The Khana Thammathan and the lay

Overseas Buddhism featured prominently. Thammathas translated articles from the major foreign Buddhist publications. Most translated articles were taken from Dharmapala's publications and related British or German sources, such as Christmas Humphreys and Paul Dahlke. The Italian-American monk Lokanatha Bhikkhu's spiritual pilgrimage to Europe, intended to save Western civilization from itself, was chronicled closely.

This man has been forgotten but his pre-war career generated considerable public interest. Born in Naples in 1887 to a well-off family that later moved to New York, Salvatore Cioffi developed a keen interest in Buddhism, which like many other sympathetic foreigners he regarded as scientific. After getting a chemistry degree from Cooper Union and working at Procter and Gamble, he briefly attended Columbia medical school before traveling in Buddhist countries seeking spiritual insight. Cioffi ordained in Burma in 1925.³⁰ In the early 1930s, he was a monk at Wat Bowonniwet. Lokanatha advocated a global Buddhist movement that would lead the world into an era of

intellectual movement did not challenge the Sangha. Like the Mahanikai movement described in chapter four, the young Buddhists worked within the institutional structure to advance their causes. Again, without a radical decapitation of the traditional order as happened in neighboring countries, there was little social basis for radical politics. Buddhism was not a platform for drastic social change. Narin Phasit, *Wat Nariwong* (Nariwong Temple, 1929) (Bangkok: Thai Club of Japan, 2001); NA, R.7 letters of 1929-1930 between Narin and the royal office, and privy council, king and queen on Narin, state-religion relations and use of criminal law in religious cases; and NA, SR.0201.8/52 for Narin's letters and pamphlets on his causes in the 1930s. The press covered Narin extensively. Also see Sakdina Chatrakun na Ayutthaya, *Narin Kleung: Khon Khwang Lok* (Narin: Person who Blocked the World) (Bangkok: Matichon, 1993).

³⁰ William Peiris, *The Western Contribution to Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), 222-224.

peace. Headstrong, outspoken and ignorant of the Thai language, Lokanatha took it upon himself to lead the revolution. He planned to take a group of Thai monks (as well as Burmese, Indians and others he may pick up along the way) on a pilgrimage to Rome, which he saw as the heart of a decadent Christianity that had lost its spiritual bearings.

Lokanatha's romantic-cum-scientific spirituality was not unusual among foreign Buddhists. Neither was his missionary zeal. The theosophists' heterodox spirituality typified the first generations of Westerners who sought solace in a perceived tolerant, Oriental otherworldliness as a counter to the materialist and religiously dogmatic West. Allan Bennett (1872-1923), the first English bhikkhu and a colleague of the occultist Aleister Crowley, was "an early example of a type of spiritual seeker that was relatively common at the turn of the century: the esotericist who turned to Eastern religion (in his case, Buddhism)."³¹ After experimenting with the occult, drugs and Druidism, Bennett traveled to Ceylon in 1898 where he experienced Theravada Buddhism. He became a monk in Burma in 1902 under the name Ananda Metteya. At his ordination he delivered a long speech, his mission being "to carry to the lands of the West the Law of Love and Truth declared by our Master, to establish in those countries the Sangha of his Priests."³² The German Anton Gueth (1878-1957) is arguably

³¹ Andrew Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters, Western Teachers in Eastern Traditions* (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 159.

³² Quoted in Christmas Humphreys, *Sixty Years of Buddhism in England (1907-1967)* (London: The Buddhist Society, 1968), 2. Crowley, perhaps not the most reliable chronicler, visited him in Ceylon and gave accounts of Ananda's amazing spiritual powers

the most influential Western bhikkhu. Like Bennett and others, from an early age his contemplative, socially averse personality led him to an engagement with Christian and then Eastern mysticism. Gueth became a vegetarian at age 21 on ethical grounds. Also like Bennett he ordained in Burma, where in 1905 he assumed the religious name Nyanatiloka Thera. The following year he wrote *Das Wort des Buddha*, which was translated into many languages and became a classic. Nyanatiloka established the Island Hermitage in Ceylon in 1911, destined to become one of the intellectual and practice centers of the Theravada world.³³

Lokanatha joined the cadre of enthusiastic foreign Theravadins. In the language of a religious crusade, he wrote to King Prajadhipok requesting material support and passports for his group to undertake their holy work.³⁴ To a packed hall at the Teacher's Association in Bangkok in October 1933 on the eve of his departure, the shoeless Lokanatha declared that Buddhism was the religion of love and the cure for a sick world. "Every page of the Traipitok has mercy on it," he stated, with kindness to all living things the core of Buddhism.³⁵ The Italian monk was fixated

(using psychic energy to travel through the air, for example). Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters*, 159.

³³ Ibid, 459-462. On the hermitage and Nyanatiloka's life also see Michael Carrithers, *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka: An Anthropological and Historical Study* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), chapter two. Nyanatiloka's pupil and fellow German Nyaponika Thera ordained at the hermitage in 1937. He is the premier foreign interpreter in the Theravada world.

³⁴ NA, SR.0201.16, Lokanatha's letter to King Prajadhipok, October 1933.

³⁵ *Phutthasasana* 2, no. 2 (August 1934): 240. The vagaries of historical evidence! I've used a Thai translation of an English lecture, and translated it back into English. The full discussion is on 236-251. *Phutthasasana* reprinted an article from *Prachachat*, October 15, 1933.

on vegetarianism, a long-standing aspect of Indian spiritual training and used by generations of Theravada meditation masters for moral reasons as well as for health and to enhance psychic power and self-mastery.³⁶ Like oceans,

³⁶ We saw in chapter four that the Lanna holy man Khruba Srivichai became a vegetarian when he decided on the vipassana path. Lokanatha was probably influenced as much by the popularity of vegetarianism in interwar Europe and among the Western spiritualists as by Indian religion. He was the first monk in Siam to speak at such length of the need for vegetarianism and influenced Buddhadasa, whose temple became vegetarian.

Lokanatha argued that most people cling to meat eating because they believe the Buddha allowed it. He declared at a public lecture that eating meat is an "evil (that) knows no limits." He pronounced that our stomachs are like graves; we are walking cemeteries. Lokanatha calculated the terrible sum that in 60 years of a human life, 20,000 chickens, 6,000 eggs, 120,000 fish and 3,000 cows and lambs are killed. His total death count is 200,000 animals per person. "Khati mai samrap Puttaborisat chao Syam" (New Rules for the Buddhists of Siam), *Phutthasasana* 2, no. 1 (May 1934): 181, 187. The journal reprinted Lokanatha's speech at Chulalongkorn University Hospital from *Prachachat*, November 1933.

If all of this wasn't bleak enough, Lokanatha added that because of reincarnation we are eating our ancestors. The monk contended that the viciousness of Siamese, Burmese and Ceylonese life - all Theravada countries - stemmed from meat eating. Cows and lambs eat grass and are peaceful animals. Lions, tigers and humans are vicious because they eat meat.

Lokanatha elaborated an appealing vision of the future of vegetarian humanity, and developed a progressive scheme of meatless paradises. In the Age of Ariya, people would first lose their dependence on animal flesh. They would live only on fruits and vegetables. Eventually people would attain such a level of spiritual refinement that air or heavenly ambrosia would be enough to sustain them.

While Lokanatha's activism generated considerable excitement in educated society, some commentators doubted his arguments and understanding of Buddhism. Prince Wan, for example, found his vegetarian cosmology ludicrous. He contended Lokanatha's claim that Buddha was a vegetarian rested on a linguistic misunderstanding. Lokanatha's case that the Buddha died from eating mushrooms (sukon mangsa, which the Italian monk claimed meant 'food of the pig') was wrong; sukon mangsa is pork, the Prince averred. The prince viewed the Italian's scheme as unscientific and impossible for worldly beings trapped in samsara.

health was a common metaphor. Buddha, the great doctor of men's ills, had provided the ultimate medicine. Lokanatha argued that the healing of India was among his goals in the pending trip. Sharing the outlook of the Anagarika and theosophists, he felt the great country had turned away from the Buddha. India was content to lie sick, but would

Lokanatha said he was motivated to pursue Buddhism by his interest in science, but Wan found his metaphysical understanding very shaky. Like Samak, Wan argued that Einstein's theories provided a much firmer basis for Buddhist truths on impermanence and not-self than Lokanatha's metaphysics. "Than Wan apiphrai ruang Lokanath" (Prince Wan discusses Lokanatha), *Prachachat*, April 18, 1934. Even worse was the prince's opinion that while the Italian presented himself as being beyond anger, greed, ignorance (and may have believed this to be true), Wan said he knew that Lokanatha was often ill-tempered and impatient.

Buddhadasa defended Lokanatha's vegetarianism on ethical and spiritual grounds. He wrote in his journal that the linguistic tangle about whether or not the Buddha ate meat didn't lead anywhere. Lokanatha's heart was in the right place, he countered, since he aimed to promote virtue. Moreover, vegetarianism had both worldly and dhammic benefits. It was easier to provide for vegetarian monks, since the laity put less work into raising vegetables than animals. For spiritual training, refraining from meat was a way to control the appetites, and was especially good because of eating's regularity. It was also a way to be content with what one has. Buddhadasa wrote that he knew monks who wouldn't take food from poor people because it was of poor quality. Tasty meat was a distraction; with vegetables, he argued, one had to go looking for the taste. It was easier to cultivate wisdom with blander food. Thus, food could be a field of spiritual battle. Buddhadasa further argued that with a growing world population, animal husbandry posed an environmental strain. A field of vegetables could feed more people than a similarly sized area devoted to grazing animals. "Kho khit samrap sin kho nueng" (Thoughts on one aspect of morality), *Phutthasasana* 2, no. 4: 431- 440. Written at Suan Mokh December 1, 1934.

Intellectuals of the period appropriated vegetarianism, like Buddhist meditation, to very different ends than Lokanatha and Buddhadasa. Members of Phibun's military-intellectual clique argued that asceticism's self control and psychic power could be used to conquer the world. Luang Saranuprapan for example made the case that Hitler's power stemmed from his vegetarianism.

soon seek its healer.³⁷ Presumably, Lokanatha was the messenger, and would play a self-appointed role similar to Dharmapala in his ongoing attempt to rescue Bodh Gaya from the Hindus.

Although accompanied by considerable publicity, Lokanatha's pilgrimage wasn't very successful and personal conflicts plagued the group at an early stage. Lokanatha set out in late January 1934 with 42 monks and novices.³⁸ People joined as the group traveled north from Bangkok through the central plains and headed to the mountain passes into British territory. Lokanatha and 120 disciples crossed into Burma in early May 1934.³⁹ At the end of April and in early May *Thai Mai* published mixed reports about Lokanatha's group. Some said there was a rebellion against Lokanatha in northern Thailand. The Thai monks who wavered were dealt with harshly and expelled for their "mistakes." Defectors said that Lokanatha was too dictatorial and cruel. Thirteen monks returned to Bangkok. A supporter of the monk contended that the defectors were dismissed for causing dissension, stealing and indiscipline. Lokanatha accused the monks who left of weakness. They were "puppies," compared to the "loyal lions" still with him. Only a fraction of the 120 who entered Burma remained with the Western monk in late 1934. One Burmese monk joined the group in Rangoon in May, prior to going to Rajagaha in

³⁷ "Khati mai samrap Puttaborisat chao Syam," 181-188.

³⁸ "The Great Pilgrimage," *The Bangkok Times*, January 20, 1934.

³⁹ *Thai Mai*, May 23, 1934. Lokanatha's domineering personality had alienated people on prior pilgrimages. Earlier in 1933, Lokanatha led a Burmese group towards India. *Thai Mai* reported that they suffered considerably, and one wealthy layman died, under his authoritarian leadership. Lokanatha reportedly refused medical care to the sick.

India.⁴⁰ Other reports said young monks and novices couldn't handle the difficult conditions.

The petering out of Lokanatha's crusade didn't dissuade young Buddhists from their aspiration. Fueled partly by the activist faith of Dharmapala and Lokanatha, in *Phutthasasana* there is a palpable intellectual excitement about Buddhism's global role. In the journal's first issue, Thammathas waxes eloquently about the new spirit of Buddhism, including Westerners ditching Christianity for Eastern spirituality. The inaugural issue calls for people to dedicate their lives for revitalization of the faith. "There are animals here with but little dust in their eyes, they will fall away from happiness because they haven't heard the dhamma." Bhikkhus thus "should demonstrate the pure dhamma, in its beginning, middle and end." These passages, taken from the Mahavagga Vinaya Pitaka on the occasion of the newly enlightened Buddha explaining his insights to the first followers, form a fitting opening to the brothers' mission. The faithful should act "like men" as sons of the Tathagata and are exhorted to practice vipassana as a public example.

The Chaiya group reiterated the material West/spiritual East bifurcation. While continuing to extol Buddhism as a science, they often presented modern Western science's most important aspect as sophisticated technological destruction. For the young Buddhists, its accomplishments always lagged behind the generation of new defilements (kilesa). Moreover, science had created new

⁴⁰ "Phra Thai and Phra Phama Pranam Phra Lokanath, Phra Thai dern thang klap" (Thai and Burmese Monks Censure Lokanatha, Thai Monks Return to Siam), *Phutthasasana*, August 1934: 290-294; *Bangkok Times*, "The Pilgrimage to Rome," June 26, 1934.

ways to fulfill the lust for power and conquest, exacerbated international enmity and facilitated mutual destruction. Anticipating later post-colonial critics of the interconnection of Western knowledge and power, the Suan Mokh group argued that scientists and their learning were inseparable from the powerful. They oppress those who lag behind technologically and breed envy and a desire to destroy the oppressors. Arahantship, the old science, alone treats the sick soul and its internal fire. It addresses the meaning of life, which like Samak explained is hidden but real; "the ideal is more important than the concrete!"⁴¹

While ostensibly anti-mythology and concerned exclusively with immediate experience, the group imagined a glorious past and dreamt of a heavenly future. The time of Phra Sri Ariya - the future Buddhist golden age - would mark the triumph of the spiritual over the material, so that the infatuation with material progress that leads "into the demon's mouth, that is, ignorance and craving" is controlled by the spiritual science.

The Khana Thammathan had a religious view of the past. The East, they argue, used to be the world's leading spiritual power, but now can only learn of this superiority from old books. Perhaps criticizing the European scholars and colonial officers who created Orientalism, *Phutthasasana* remarked that the West would give the East respect only so long as it mined Asia for its religious sources. Once it had enough texts, it no longer needed the East for anything (17).

⁴¹ "Ruang kan tamroi phra arahant," dhamma practice section, 14.

The Khana Thammathan subsumed two additional binaries under the West-East division: majority opinion vs. individual realization and the mundane vs. the transcendental. Most people were taught to adjust themselves to worldly needs, to "turn as the world desires" (*tam khwamyak wisai lok*). This includes the influence of all modern learning that serves a practical end. As a result, we turn within it unendingly in the samsaric wheel. One arahant, however, can with his practice prevent his returning. If there were many such figures humans could stop the world from re-turning, which would be peace. Arahants are the only hope for a world consumed with desire: "What a great boon for the world when a Buddha or arahant is born into it!" (4).

To Thai Buddhists progress and capitalism were delusions about how to alleviate human suffering, not actual solutions. Buddhadasa wrote:

"When we see a country that is congested, packed with buildings for example, we say that "progress" is growing there, instead of saying that these things are a symbol. They are the ashes of the fire of mental craving, the fire that is smoldering away and finds an outlet to emerge into the world. The fire has obtained new fuel to burn, but we feel it only when the ashes alone remain."⁴²

Self-control leads the mind to triumph over external hindrances even while the physical "us" remains under the hegemony of the external world, and much of our psyche is

⁴² Phutthasasana 3, no. 4 (February 1936): 710.

conditioned by majority opinion.⁴³ The fruits of psychic development are no less real than physical growth, although they are not immediately apparent and are difficult to explain (9). Samak asserted that the findings of modern psychiatry are not as detailed as ancient Buddhist psychology. For the Khana Thammathan, modern psychiatry cannot offer a remedy for unhappiness equal to the Dhamma, since it does not deal with the roots of the problem. Instead as this new science develops it covers mental anguish by deflecting attention to new symptoms (10).

The Khana Thammathan advocated a new spiritual pursuit that would make a better world. But the reformist possibilities of their agenda remained undeveloped or vague. Buddhadasa continued as a monk for the rest of his life and did not challenge the Sangha or social hierarchy. While *Phutthasasana* served as a meeting ground for young men idealistic about Buddhism's potential in world affairs, their religion did not translate easily into a social gospel of reform. We can look here at some examples of the young intellectuals who while intervening in Thai culture from a new internationalist perspective asserted an unexplained link between individual morality and social equality or international peace.

Anatta or non-self, a core concept, would feature centrally in Buddhadasa's philosophy and practice⁴⁴ and as

⁴³ "Ruang kan tamroi phra arahant," dhamma practice section, *Phutthasasana* 1, no. 1 (May 1933), 6.

⁴⁴ To break down selfishness, Buddhadasa attacked the language that structures our social outlook and self-regard. In an interesting article in his journal in 1935, Buddhadasa criticizes monks' use of the pronoun *attama* (I, me) when addressing superiors. He argues that the word encouraged selfishness and set a bad example for the laity. Instead, monks should use *rup* (form,

we saw formed a key part of Samak's Einsteinian Buddhism. Anatta and its opposite also figured prominently in polemics at the time that linked individual behavior with the state of the world. Sot Kuramarohit began a productive career in journalism and social commentary during our period and was a frequent contributor to *Phutthasasana* as well as Prince Wan's *Prachachat* and other newspapers. He lived in China until 1936 but closely followed intellectual affairs in Siam.⁴⁵ Like other young men Sot was attracted to the Khana Thammathan's called for a revolution in consciousness.

Sot, among others, frequently framed world affairs and the future of Buddhism in terms of letting go of the false

hence people as constellations of physical and mental phenomena, not egos). "It is better if we can use other words that are slightly farther away from self-ism (*lathi atta*). Better still is the time when we can clearly say anatta, for example via rup. It is a teaching that proclaims anatta! anatta! resounding all over the country at every moment." Intapanyo Bhikkhu, "Kho Khit samrap kanchai sappanam" (Thoughts on the use of Pronouns), *Phutthasasana* 3, no. 1 (May 1935): 601-605.

⁴⁵ Born in 1908, Sot studied at Thepsirin to mathayom eight around the same time as Sarit Charoenrat, Kulap Saipradit, Akatdamkerng Rapihat and other young writers. His father was a high-ranking civil servant. During the latter's governorship of the central plains province of Saraburi, Sot was introduced to Prince Dhani, then the Minister of Public Instruction. Concerned about the administration of Chinese schools in Siam and needing better-informed supervisors, Dhani had offered him the chance to study in China on a government scholarship. After a year at the law school, Sot went north in April 1928. His travels took Sot initially to St. Stephens College in Stanley, Hong Kong and then in 1930 he began studying at Peking University. Sot returned to Siam in 1936 and worked in the ministry until 1946. After taking power, the People's Party informed Sot that royal scholarships were too expensive for the new government. He could continue his Chinese studies by borrowing money from them, which he would later pay back by serving in the education ministry. Kusun Nakajata, "Chiwaprawat le Phon Ngan Wannakam khong Sot Kuramarohit" (Life and Literary Works of Sod Kurmarohita) (M.A. thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1976), 17-50.

notion of the self, and its necessary triumph over ego if the world were to survive the current crisis. "Atta or selfishness is extolled, flown from flags and wrapped in iron and blood," Sot contended in a 1936 article for *Phutthasasana*.⁴⁶ Communism and fascism, the two great world-shaping systems of the twentieth century, he saw as equally selfish and destructive. Communism, a collective slavery, "shackles the world and turns it into a gargantuan factory in which workers labor under absolute laws" of economic

⁴⁶ "Anatta kap Atta" (Not self and Self), *Phutthasasana* 3, no. 4 (February 1936): 701. Sot's outspoken anti-militarism was unpopular with his employer. While in China, Sot criticized dictatorship in articles sent to Thai newspapers. After his return to Siam in 1936, Prayun Phamonmontri, then education minister and an ardent Nazi supporter, cautioned Sot to watch himself. Like Kulap and other anti-military journalists, Sot's writing career was frustrated and Prince Wan's Prachachat stopped using his articles by wartime. Kusun, *Chiwaprawat Sot*, 42-50.

While Sot decried communist tyranny, he became interested in socialism as a possible model for Thai politics. After the war, he wrote *Khokhit jak Rai Phaendin Thai* (Thoughts from the Thai Countryside), a left-wing critique of the People's Party that was serialized in a newspaper and then published as a book. He identified the sham democracy of the People's Party as stemming from their class background:

"Most of our revolutionaries were not poor people, they came from middle class families and they revolted because of resentment of a few lords ... the real suffering of the people was not a cause for revolutionary action ... the goal of the action was thus the concerns of the middle class ... we can see this in the economic and educational policies they took."

Sot decried the government's lack of interest in rural development and education. In the two-plus decades between the change and his writings, Sot observed no improvement in the lives of farmers, while politicians became very rich:

"Thai farmers and politicians walk on different paths. Most farmers travel from hunger to greater hunger, while politicians search for more to stuff themselves full of."

Khokhit jak Rai (Bangkok: Phrae Phittaya, 1956), 483-484 and 2.

determinism (703). Fascism is the triumph of individual selfishness. It is a system that worships war; weak nations are viewed as losing their right to exist. Sot says his explanation is "proven" in Abyssinia, the "Manchuria of Africa" (705). "What should we the meek, the seekers of peace and freedom, do amidst the pressure of attack that oppresses the world?" (701-702).

Sermons warning against the delusion that material things bring happiness go back to original Buddhism. The anti-material progress rhetoric of the 1930s was deployed in a context of pending war and technological advancement on a scale unimaginable until then. As a result of their spiritual poverty, Sot argued that people didn't understand why greater destruction always accompanied progress.⁴⁷ In a spiritual desert, politicians did evil. Leaders didn't worry about welfare, but how to make the most destructive weapons; scientists tried to invent the most lethal gas and doctors aimed to develop the most horrible germs for germ warfare (574). A "national delusion" pulled the wool over people's eyes, they were led to believe that governments protected them, but in fact governed their interests.

The idealism of the group around Wat Suan Mokh was tempered by skepticism over the religion's ability to rescue most people from their self-imposed mental servitude. "Nai Hetphon" (Mr. Logic) wrote a long letter to the Khan Thammathan in 1936 that Buddhism encouraged passivity and couldn't make a difference in the modern world. He also contended that it was unproductive telling people life is

⁴⁷ "Jot Mai Naksuksa Num" (Letter from a Young Student), *Phutthasasana* 3, no. 1 (May 1935): 573. Writing from a country wracked by war and political turmoil, Sot states that most Chinese people had no connection at all to religion.

suffering. Bhikkhu Bunchuan Khemapirat responded at length. While, he writes, it would be wonderful if the Thai people were spiritually advanced enough to live in complete contentment (sandot), this was not the reality of their society. Dispelling the view of the self as a lasting, durable entity would result in the supra-national and supra-class perspective that could bring universal peace.⁴⁸ But, short of this lofty goal, "we can't help people if they are filled with kamma and diverse (erroneous) views, beyond calling for them to practice loving kindness (metta karuna) with each other" (310).

Bunchuan expressed the crux of the dilemma facing the emancipatory social potential of Buddhism. He argued that every problem couldn't be tackled at once, but everyone could work for the alleviation of suffering and learn to live within their means based on their age, sex, occupation and status.⁴⁹ Between social injustice and individual ignorance, people must choose to rectify their personal shortcomings. Nai Hetphon claimed that collective metta karuna would make Siam weaker, and lead it like a lamb to

⁴⁸ In such a state:

"The Thai people are the happiest in the world, with no need for faction or class or nation or government...they could be a great boon to the world, (as we would work for the world's benefit) without thinking of ourselves or of rewards. They would not suffer under any government, because they would be free of any anxiety that would hold them to any false views of factions, classes or nations."

"Sonthana kap Nai Het Phon" (Conversation with Mr. Logic), *Phutthasasana* 4, no.3 (November 1936): 304-305.

⁴⁹ In any case, "the king's crown or the poor man's palm leaf hat were not accurate signs of happiness or pain," 306. Category-specific teachings are of course a part of original Buddhism and the Buddha was frequently praised for his ability to tailor sermons to specific audiences.

the slaughter of international power politics. Bunchuan responded that there was no need to worry about a wave of metta karuna swamping a violent and prejudiced world; absolute love and non-violence were far beyond most people's capability. Bunchuan argues that so long as most people are chained in sakayaditthi (self-regard), at least they shouldn't fight and should try to be kind.

The Dhamma and the World: Whose Justice?

Social welfare was a constant current in the apologetics and one never reconciled with the politics of the time. Constitutional discourse surrendered to dictatorship. The two are intertwined because a common class of people discussed both secular law and the Dhamma as aspects of the same universal justice. The Khana Thammathan attracted young bureaucrats, and especially lawyers, to its modernist Buddhism. While public ignorance and a social preoccupation with status depressed them, their loyalty to the state and the social order was not challenged. Among Buddhadasa's lay entourage Sanya Dharmasakdi and Phraya Wonglatphli were important justice ministry officials who as young men sought to integrate the Dhamma and constitutional law in an ethic of honest public service. Upholding the rule of law and remaining morally pure were difficult challenges; reforming society along Buddhadasa's rejuvenated Buddhist principles was even harder.

Sanya was among the first generation of law students of Prince Rabi, Akatdamkerng's father, in the justice school. He worked a translator in the justice ministry in 1927. By 1934, Sanya had become a judge, and was sent

upcountry to learn provincial affairs under the direction of Phraya Wonglatphli, like Sanya a UK-trained lawyer, judge and friend of Buddhadasa.⁵⁰

Sanya met Buddhadasa at one of Lokanatha's public lectures in Bangkok. The two formed a lifelong friendship. In 1934, Sanya established the Samakhom Phutthasasana (Buddhist Association) with some other laymen to propagandize rational Buddhism. Eventually the association would play a key role in public Buddhism, gaining royal patronage and international recognition. In the 1930s, however, it had a hard time attracting good people, at least as Sanya saw the situation. Writing to Buddhadasa in 1937, Sanya complained that the Samakhom was mainly viewed as a merit-making (bamphen kusol) venue. Well-off Bangkok people didn't appreciate talks that were too intellectual,

⁵⁰ Born in 1907, Sanya grew up in a middle class family that fell on hard times when his father, a phraya-rank judge, died in 1917. Sanya's elder brother, on whom the family pinned their livelihood, died at age 25 of TB during his study of railway engineering in Philadelphia. Both sons attended Assumption. Sanya went on to study at the Middle Temple and became an English barrister in 1932. He played a central role in the development and instruction of legal studies at Thammasat University during the People's Party era and beyond. Sanya's triumph and tragedy occurred in the 1973-1976 democratic interlude when he served as Prime Minister. Failing to stem the tide of right wing reaction, he resigned the position in 1975. 7 *Rop Achan Sanya* (Seven Cycles of Dr. Sanya) (Bangkok: Thammasat University, 1991).

Wong Latphli was born in 1894 and attended secondary school at Bangkok Christian College and King's College. He later attended City of London College and Gray's Inn, and became an English barrister in 1916. In 1933, Wong Latphli was director of the criminal court as well as the foreign cases court. He attained the directorship of the Supreme Court in 1941. *Anuson nai Ngan Sadet Phraratchadamnern Phraratchathan Plerngsop Phraya Latphli Thammaphrakhan* (Wong Latphli) (Royal Cremation Volume for Wong Latphli) (Bangkok, 1968).

and the light fare that the association offered put off people who might contribute to intelligent conversation.⁵¹

Sanya wanted to establish new institutions to encourage lay scholarly and meditative Buddhism as was happening in other countries. It was a difficult task. In the same 1937 letter to Buddhadasa, Sanya described that his plans to create a new Buddhist university hadn't gotten very far. Most monks, he thought, were too poorly educated and idle to be much use. Buddhadasa agreed that Thai Buddhism was not engaged enough with modern learning and especially foreign languages, which he described as "the key to comprehensive knowledge."⁵² He also framed the problem as not only institutional but perhaps a fundamental problem with Thai religion. He argued that Buddhism lacked the rousing examples of public commitment that the Christian mission schools offered. Many leading Siamese families were products of Western education (and often overseas education) Buddhadasa argued, and Western (i.e., Christian) self-fashioning that focused on discipline, knowledge and energetic work governed their careers and accounted for their success.⁵³ Thai Buddhist leaders, by contrast, had largely failed in his opinion to foster these positive characteristics in young people. Modern Siam had lost touch with the old Buddhist ethics that pre-dated all that Thais admired in (or projected onto) farangs,

⁵¹ Sanya to Buddhadasa, January 13, 1939, in *100 Pi Roi Chotmai Phutthathat-Sanya* (100 Years, the Letters of Buddhadasa and Sanya Thammak) (Bangkok: Plain Readers, 2007), 57-61.

⁵² Buddhadasa to Sanya, February 23, 1939 in *ibid*, 73. He lamented that Siam lacked connections to Theravada education, such as the great Indian Buddhist universities of the past offered with many languages and a world open to those eager to learn.

⁵³ Buddhadasa to Sanya, January 29, 1939 in *ibid*, 63.

including patience and fortitude, punctuality, hard work, a sense of social responsibility and honesty with oneself.⁵⁴ Moreover, lacking a tradition of lay meditative Buddhism (as well as good public education), Buddhadasa thought that the Buddhist university wouldn't reach far enough into society.⁵⁵

Perhaps rationalizing the limits of their social work as Bunchuan had outlined to Mr. Logic, the educated laity focused their efforts on cultivating a new Buddhist self. If society at large couldn't be rescued all at once, state officials could (or must) present an inspiring example. By Buddhadasa's admission Phraya Wonglatphli, Sanya's superior in the justice ministry, was a crucial contributor to the Khana Thammathan's public education mission and also to Buddhadasa's own spiritual growth.⁵⁶ He praised Latphli as

⁵⁴ Buddhadasa to Sanya, February 23, 1939, in *ibid*, 76.

⁵⁵ Buddhadasa to Sanya, January 29, 1939 in *ibid*, 62-69.

Buddhadasa argued that Sanya's association should reach out to young people in the capital as a way to make practice a public issue. He admitted that as a religious professional he had little understanding of lay affairs and that he wasn't sure how to reach the masses.

Sanya later wrote dispiritedly that young people he spoke with were happy to trash the mission schoolmasters' assertions of Christianity's superiority, but were unable to give any counterarguments. When pressed on what made Buddhism better, they were stumped. Sanya concluded that they didn't understand their own faith. Sanya to Buddhadasa, April 23, 1939 in *ibid*, 87-88.

⁵⁶ Phraya Latphli and Sanya for example visited Suan Mokh together in 1938. Latphli brought new books for Buddhadasa, including works by Krishnamurti and Swami Vivekananda, and introduced his spiritual guide to Swami Satyananda Puri, one of Vivekananda's disciples who lived in Bangkok. Because of his wide learning in Asian religions, Buddhadasa praised Latphli as being focused on the Dhamma, not strictly Buddhism.

Satyananda Puri was an important intellectual in the 1930s and is now forgotten. He wrote widely on Indian religions and philosophy. Like the Khana Thammathan he argued that customary religion had been ruined by scientific discoveries and that only

"someone who looks at things rationally ... he didn't form beliefs according to popular fads or customs ... he reasoned things for himself and didn't defer to others' opinions."⁵⁷

Given the bureaucratic career's high esteem, senior officials were meant to embody ideals of proper behavior. (They often failed, which gave especially pre-1932 newspaper cartoonists a rich field for mockery.) Senior judges often gave lectures to young justice ministry bureaucrats that combined Dhamma and constitutionalism in a metaphysical explanation of the basis for self-cultivation and as a way to be a good citizen, which meant primarily a free thinking and dutiful individual. Sanya, Latphli, Pridi and others frequently discoursed on the Dhamma in this vein.⁵⁸ Indeed, their government-bestowed names reflected a

reliance on religion's analytical core of self-improvement, morality and self-examination would rescue it from irrelevance. He also explained modern Western ideas to a local audience, for example writing I believe the first Thai introduction to modern psychology in his *Phomdoi* (Inferiority Complex) (Bangkok, 1937).

Swami Satyananda's ideas were not always popular. Writing during the time of R.C. Majumdar and others' Greater India nationalism, he was criticized by Prince Wan for a 1931 speech in Bangkok that attributed Southeast Asian civilization strictly to Indian influence. George Coedes also championed the Indianized states' theory of Southeast Asian civilization around this time and was a friend to the royalist intelligentsia. His views were never criticized. Perhaps people thought that Satyananda argued that Southeast Asia was a political unit of Indian empires or, more likely, white Europeans were thought better informed.

⁵⁷ Buddhadasa to Sanya, May 14, 1939 in *ibid*, 93.

⁵⁸ See the writings in 7 *Rop Sanya* and Phraya Wong Latphli's funeral volume for examples, as well as Pridi's essays and lectures. Another good case is Nitisat Paisal, also a People's Party supporter, legal scholar and senior justice ministry official. Nitisat played a central role in Thammasat's legal curriculum and was a mentor of Sanya. Born in 1888, Nitisat served at high levels in both the old and new regime justice systems. Like Sanya, he studied law at Gray's Inn and became an English barrister in 1916. See Nitisat's "Fuekfon Tua Eng" (Training the Self) and "Issara khong Phu Phipaksa" (The

moral duty: Sanya Thammasak as Guarantor of Energy of the Dhamma, Latphli Thammaphrakhan as Religious Flourishing, Redolent of the Dhamma and Pridi as Luang Pradit Manutham, Fashioner of Righteous Men.

Doing the right thing - in lay life and as a religious professional - relied on the complimentary meanings of Dhamma. But the political reality of the 1930s contradicted the rhetoric. The rule of law was repeatedly undercut in the People's Party era by extra-legal political maneuvering.⁵⁹ When the constitution opposed or hindered executive action, different laws were enacted that bypassed the normal judicial process. The special courts set up to try political prisoners in 1933, 1935 and 1939 are the most egregious examples. Latphli presided over the special courts that tried Bowondet prisoners in late 1933 and was director of the criminal, foreign cases and appeals courts. He also upheld the legitimacy of the defense of the constitution act passed in 1933 that made it a crime to speak against the government. In 1941, he became Supreme Court president. Committed to judicial independence, Latphli nonetheless submitted to government pressure and directed the travesty of justice that condemned prisoners to death or long prison sentences outside of the legal framework that ostensibly separated the People's Party from the old regime.

Independence of Judges) in *Anuson nai Praratchathanplernsop Nitisat Paisal* (Royal Cremation Volume for Nitisat Paisal) (Bangkok, 1967).

⁵⁹ Saneh Chamarik has explained this in his classic text on Siamese constitutional history, *Kanmuang Thai kap Pathanakan rathamanun* (Thai Politics and Constitutional Development) (Bangkok: Textbooks Project, 2006).

The constitutional group's rhetoric wasn't merely a mask for the bureaucratic swindle of democracy (as anti-Party voices argued in the 1950s), nor were these men hypocrites. Still, because of their important and serious ideas, some explanation of the gap should be attempted.

Perhaps the difference can be explained by competing thin and thick interpretations of the rule of law.⁶⁰ A thin understanding denotes a checklist-type approach. How laws were passed, their level of transparency and the method of their application form some standards of evaluation. Maybe the constitutionalists approached law this way and were satisfied that Siam's legal development was successful. The absolute monarchy's drive for *siwilai* rested largely on modernizing and expanding the legal corpus to prove their commitment to a (thin) rule of law. For decades the wise men at the top drafted codes that reflected European bourgeois legal culture but didn't attempt to substantively change Thai social customs. Inculcating Western notions of justice or personal liberty was a tangential outcome of the process. The constitutionalists inherited this mentality.

But I'd argue that the young bureaucrats aspired to create a system marked by much more than the formal characteristics of a modern legal system. In a thick description, for example the liberal-democratic regime to which the Party pledged allegiance, the rule of law must substantially reflect fundamental notions of fairness, human rights and judicial independence from

⁶⁰ See Randall Peerenboom, *China's Long March toward Rule of Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Peerenboom uses Geertzian ideas of culture to develop a typology of legal systems and philosophies.

political pressure. It also arguably must form a core aspect of a cultural worldview that embodies these things. This was the People's Party belief in themselves and their social mission.

The sacralization of the constitution described in Chapter Two is an important aspect of the legitimization of the new order. Perhaps the lawyers, judges and Thammasat legal scholars really believed in the metaphysical dimension of the charter, not in the manner of a magical amulet that warded off evil but rather as the fulfillment of the moral life. However often it was undermined, the idea of an independent judiciary embodied the ideal rational-moral order advanced by both Buddhism and constitutionalists. As Buddhadasa said, the ideal was more important than the concrete. The power of the idea couldn't be weakened, however messy the reality of politics that pressed its upholders into service.

Leading new order members' view of law - and that of every regime since then - has been much more instrumental than the People's Party promised. The military's flexible attitude to law (and parliament) existed contemporaneously with the constitution's elevation to holiness and the establishment of Thammasat, the institution of moral and political sciences that trained the majority of legal experts. In the first years of constitutional democracy, the young intellectual Buddhists avoided discussing the disordered world of politics and instead focused on personal growth. Faced with political reality, they shied from challenging the state's unfair treatment of its citizens and instead submitted to its commands. Somehow,

personal moral rectitude could refashion society, but the question of how and when was deferred.

Conclusion

Is Thai Buddhism intellectually stale and politically docile? These pejoratives rest on unflattering comparisons with neighboring anti-colonial Buddhisms, in which both lay and religious thinkers challenged state despotism. In Siam, modern political and economic forces generated uneven social change. While royalist cultural continuity has been an important part of my description of these years, this chapter has explained the powerful impact of the same intellectual engagement with the West that shaped the Anagarika's vehement polemics and other religious renovations around Asia.

Building on the apologetic tradition, Samak Burawas provided a theoretical defense of Buddhism that incorporated modern physics. He used both systems to destroy our common notions of material and psychological stability and permanence. Samak elevated Buddhism above science, however, by claiming that Buddhist insights alone provided a moral basis for peace and happiness despite, or because of, the unreliability of our perceptions.

Other Buddhist thinkers focused on the practice that they contended lay at the heart of original Buddhism and its mission to save the world from suffering. Buddhadasa, Lokanatha and lay intellectuals also gained inspiration from an international discourse championing Buddhism's scientific approach to suffering and together they shaped an influential current in modern Thai Buddhism.

But practice-oriented rational Buddhism made an ambiguous platform for social change. How one progressed from a perfect moral subject outwards so to speak isn't explained. Moreover, the strong role of the Siamese state in public life hindered an independent intellectual class from fulfilling the democratic promises of the new politics. Like Plato at Syracuse the Buddhist lay intellectuals of the 1930s were committed to ideals of moral perfection and rule by the wise, independent legislator. Also like the philosopher they faced unwinnable political fights against despotism. How they rationalized the corruption of their ideals remains a difficult question. Perhaps, despite their public rhetoric, they privately resigned themselves to an unbridgeable gulf between personal growth and public affairs.

Chapter Eight, Conclusion: The Incomplete Revolution

Before 1932, politics rotated on the axis of untrammelled royal power. After 1932 the growing bureaucracy, with power vested primarily in the military, controlled state affairs. The struggle for control at the apex of the government is crucial in understanding one aspect of mid-century Thai history. But the primary focus on high politics, especially the cliques and military coups-type narratives that dominate Thai historiography, has obscured the more fundamental transformation in middle-class and working society that occurred at the same time.

The Khana Ratsadon's June 1932 takeover did not destroy the absolutist system, but instead further expanded its power. I have attempted to show that there is strong continuity between the old and new regimes, in the form of the persistence of an "insider" mentality spanning the transition from the old kingly order to the new civilian and military administration. The bureaucracy constituted the domain of state insiders, meaning those who sought a state career, which was widely regarded as the most prestigious livelihood. The bureaucracy throughout this period, and well into the latter decades of the twentieth century, offered the most attractive careers for young people. Students in law, fiscal or provincial administration, and military science committed to state careers early in their lives as a means to relative wealth and social respect. The state career moreover bred loyalty and an elitism that, in princely circles as well as the post-1932 military and civilian leadership, judged common people as incapable of thinking for themselves.

The event of 1932 was not a social revolution. Still, it grew from complex forces, and was part of something that was much more than a palace and bureaucratic tangle. The young generation in interwar Siam experienced profound social and intellectual change. The influx of new ideas, fashions and technologies, rapid economic change, and the cataclysmic European war that destroyed old empires and gave birth to new nations, all undermined loyalty to an idealized social hierarchy and the monarchy. Pressure accumulated for the introduction of a modern liberal political system amid a wide-ranging discussion of new ideologies. Anti-elitist sentiment is central in 1920s journalism. By chance, the global depression hit Siam in 1930 and for the next two years further undermined the royals by exposing inadequate government handling of the crisis. The People's Party capitalized on the rising tide of anti-absolutist sentiment to stage their takeover. The coup's aftermath, however, exposed a wide gap between public aspirations for a new society and the development of state power.

My thesis has tried to demonstrate that a profound intellectual change was occurring outside of the state apparatus. It contributed to the political revolt in 1932, but its participants, commoner "outsiders," did not aspire to public office or official ranks. Instead, holding democratic humanist principles, they were educators, journalists and Buddhist monks engaged with modern, global culture. In contrast to the bureaucratic conception of common people as naïve and child-like, these thinkers imagined a new personality for everyone, independent, cosmopolitan and knowledgeable, that should form a basis

for a new society freed of the past. Outsiders advanced progressive education as a way to develop democracy, contemporary literature as the expression of individuality, and viewed Buddhism as an expression of social democracy and individual fulfillment. As a result of the outsiders' contribution, all of these discourses became parts of Thai culture during the period of this study and they have had a long legacy.

I have suggested the contrary social types of insiders and outsiders are useful analytic categories for understanding Thai society during a pivotal period of change. Their heuristic utility however should be briefly contextualized within the politics of the Thai intellectual engagement with modernity.

Leading figures in the dynasty -- especially Kings Mongkut (r. 1851-1868), Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) and Vajiravudh (1910-1925) and their entourages -- were the first moderns who sought global knowledge and they did so for a specific reason, to maintain their power under the guise of Siamese independence from foreign imperialism. New ideas from the West ever since have been immersed in politics. Aspects of liberalism for example became central tools of royal ideology; the kingly administrations supplemented Thai tradition with rule by bourgeois law as cornerstone of their claims (made simultaneously to domestic and international audiences) to legitimacy. The royal-aristocratic class selected tools of modernity to use and enjoy as hobbies, and excluded other aspects on the grounds of social unsuitability and potential radicalism. There was no question for example and however mild it seems, of parliamentary politics, until forcibly created in the

summer of 1932. As a result of their a priori determination of which Western political ideas and practices were good or useful for the nation and which weren't, representative politics and democracy were denied their validity; arguments against popular politics showed an exercise of power over knowledge that had a long-term impact.

Vajiravudh was the best spokesman of this position; he dismissed public interest in socialism and other -isms in the 'teens that gained a wide audience but which he disliked as "imitationism" (lathi ao yang).¹ The idea implicit is intellectual maturity, and a range of leftist or progressive causes could be dismissed this way.² The monarchs' status as national saviors, and as the wise men introducing the best of the modern world while keeping out bad influences, established an iconic durability for kingship that bridged the political change in 1932.

Intellectuals in the kingly and post-absolutist states always remained close to royalist intellectual positions. Until this generation, public communication was dominated by the royal-aristocratic elite and shaped by their conceptions of individual behavior and social order. All public figures were loyal to their country, and proud of its freedom from European colonialism and maintenance of "tradition." This clearly applies to progressives as well

¹ King Vajiravudh, "Lathi ao yang," in *Royal Cremation Volume for Luang Anukan Ratchaphat* (Bangkok: 1963), 1-9.

² Prince Pithayalongkorn, another leading royal intellectual, in 1932 broadly dismissed interest in foreign ideas as faddish misunderstandings, and indirectly criticized the coup group on these grounds. See his "Phawa yangrai no thi Riak Wa Siwilai," (What are the Conditions of what is called Civilized), *Prachum Pathakata khong Krommeun Pithayalongkorn* (Collected Lectures of Prince Pithayalongkorn) (Bangkok: 1970), 429-472.

as royals and military officers. Young thinkers with excitement and ardor contributed vitally to the history of the interwar period, but in circumstances they didn't choose.

And yet, the dialectic between old and new ideas was dynamic and open. It contributed to an ever-more complex debate about governance and social and personal wellbeing. There were always new challenges, expressed most correctly at the time simply with the word "modern" (sivilai), and in the city especially were concentrated most clearly the tendencies of a new society: faster paced, money and things-oriented, and with greater diversity of lifestyle and social and political views. Post-war society, fluid and often politically volatile, paradoxically established a free public sphere and reasserted the primacy of royalism in theory and practice. The first political parties formed, progressive ideas and causes developed and new voices entered the media even as the resurrection of traditional kingship in symbols and concrete acts renewed control of public life by royalism.

Especially since the post-war restoration of kingship, the suppression of unorthodox views has robbed people of a historical sense. We can and should put common people back into pre-war history, prompted by the belief that Siam is not unique in its history. As in any country political and social modernity has generated a desire for popular sovereignty and recognition of the individual dignity that universal human rights demand.

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