

สัญญาเลขที่.....

รายงานวิจัยฉบับสมบูรณ์

โครงการ

จากอึ้งย้ง ถึง ลูกจีนรักชาติ : ภาพลักษณ์ที่ขัดแย้งในประวัติศาสตร์ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างรัฐไทยและ
ชาวจีนโพ้นทะเล

โดย

อาจารย์ ดร.วาสนา วงศ์สุรวัฒน์
ภาควิชาประวัติศาสตร์ คณะอักษรศาสตร์
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

สนับสนุนโดยสำนักงานคณะกรรมการการอุดมศึกษา สำนักงานกองทุนสนับสนุนการวิจัย
และจุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย
(ความเห็นในรายงานนี้เป็นของผู้วิจัย สกอ. และ สกว. ไม่จำเป็นต้องเห็นด้วยเสมอไป)

บทคัดย่อ

รหัสโครงการ:

ชื่อโครงการ:

จากอึ้งย้ง ถึง ลูกจีนรักชาติ: ภาพลักษณ์ที่ขัดแย้งในประวัติศาสตร์ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างรัฐไทย
และชาวจีนโพ้นทะเล

ชื่อนักวิจัย และสถาบัน

อ. ดร. วาสนา วงศ์สุรวัฒน์
ภาควิชาประวัติศาสตร์ คณะอักษรศาสตร์ จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

อีเมล:

wwongsurawat@hotmail.com

ระยะเวลาโครงการ:

2 ปี

บทคัดย่อ:

โครงการวิจัยนี้ได้รวบรวม ประมวล และวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเพื่อศึกษาและพยายามทำความเข้าใจภาพลักษณ์ที่ขัดแย้งในประวัติศาสตร์ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างรัฐชาติไทยกับชาวจีนโพ้นทะเลในความเข้าใจของคนทั่วไปทั้งในสังคมโดยรวมและในวงวิชาการนานาชาติที่ศึกษาเรื่องประวัติศาสตร์จีนโพ้นทะเลมีภาพลักษณ์ของพื้นฐานความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับความสัมพันธ์นี้ในสองลักษณะซึ่งดูจะขัดแย้งกันโดยสิ้นเชิง กล่าวคือ ด้านหนึ่งมองว่าประเทศไทยเป็นประเทศที่ประสบความสำเร็จสูงสุดในการกลมกลืน/กลืนกลาย [assimilate] ประชากรจีนโพ้นทะเลเข้าเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของสังคมส่วนใหญ่ได้โดยสมบูรณ์และปราศจากความขัดแย้งรุนแรงดังเช่นที่เคยปรากฏเป็นปัญหาในประเทศเพื่อนบ้านอื่นๆ ในภูมิภาคเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้แทบทุกประเทศ อีกด้านหนึ่ง สมาชิกชนชั้นนำไทยในยุคสมัยใหม่หลายท่านก็เป็นที่ยุติอย่างกว้างขวางในวงวิชาการนานาชาติในฐานะผู้นำในการเหยียดชาติพันธุ์จีนหรือต่อต้านอิทธิพลของชาวจีนโพ้นทะเลในภูมิภาคนี้ ไม่ว่าจะเป็นนโยบายกีดกันชาวจีนของรัฐบาลจอมพล ป. พิบูลสงคราม ในยุคสงครามโลกครั้งที่ 2 หรือบทความ *พวกยิวแห่งบูรพทิศ* โดย อิศวพาหุ ซึ่งตีพิมพ์ออกมาเป็นครั้งแรกตั้งแต่ปี ค.ศ. 1914 ทำให้อดสงสัยไม่ได้ว่าหากชนชั้นนำของสยามประเทศหรือประเทศไทยในปัจจุบันนั้นมีทัศนคติต่อชาวจีนโพ้นทะเลในแง่ลบมาขนาดนั้นแล้ว ประเทศของเราจะกลายมาเป็นประเทศที่ประสบความสำเร็จสูงสุดในด้านความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างชนกลุ่มน้อยชาติพันธุ์จีนกับคนส่วนใหญ่ในสังคมได้อย่างไร?

ภาพสรุปที่ได้จากบทความทั้ง 4 บทความคือ ชาวจีนโพ้นทะเลที่มีอิทธิพลด้านเศรษฐกิจอย่างสูงในสังคมไทยมาตั้งแต่ก่อนยุครัตนโกสินทร์เรื่อยมาจนถึงยุคสมัยใหม่นั้นเป็นกลุ่มที่มี

ความสัมพันธ์อันดีกับชนชั้นนำ โดยเฉพาะกับราชสำนักและราชวงศ์จักรี และขบวนการชาตินิยมไทยตั้งแต่สมัยรัชกาลที่ 6 นั้นแม้จะมีข้อเขียนต่างๆ ออกมาที่ดูเหมือนว่าต่อต้านรังเกียจชาวจีนแต่ในความเป็นจริงแล้วก็ไม่ได้มีเจตนาในการเหยียดหรือกีดกันทางชาติพันธุ์แต่อย่างใด สิ่งสำคัญที่งานเขียนของ อิศวพาหุ ต่อต้านน่าจะเป็นการฉวยโอกาสขึ้นทะเบียนเป็นบุคคลในบังคับต่างชาติเพื่ออาศัยหาประโยชน์จากข้อตกลงสิทธิสภาพนอกอาณาเขตที่สยามมีกับมหาอำนาจตะวันตกมากกว่า โดยเนื้อแท้ของวาทกรรมราชาชาตินิยมตามแบบฉบับของพระบาทสมเด็จพระมงกุฎเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว รัชกาลที่ 6 นั้นมิได้รังเกียจความเป็นจีนหรือชาติพันธุ์จีนแต่ประการใด ขอเพียงแค่แสดงความจงรักภักดีต่อสถาบันกษัตริย์อันเป็นสัญลักษณ์ที่สำคัญที่สุดของความเป็นชาติตามพระราชวินิจฉัยของพระองค์ก็สามารถนับเป็นคนไทยและได้รับความยอมรับในฐานะเป็นผู้รักชาติไทยได้โดยไม่จำกัดว่าจะมีบรรพบุรุษมาจากที่ใดหรือพูดภาษาใดมาแต่กำเนิด ส่วนการกีดกันชาวจีนโพ้นทะเลในช่วงสงครามโลกครั้งที่ 2 นั้นส่วนหนึ่งมาจากอิทธิพลของญี่ปุ่นซึ่งเป็นคู่สงครามสำคัญของจีนและเป็นพันธมิตรกับรัฐบาลของจอมพล ป. พิบูลสงคราม แต่ที่สำคัญอีกส่วนหนึ่งมาจากความขัดแย้งของกลุ่มชนชั้นนำใหม่ (สายคณะราษฎร) กับชนชั้นนำเดิม (ราชสำนักและกลุ่มนิยมเจ้า) และความพยายามของจอมพล ป. ที่จะสถาปนาแนวคิดชาตินิยมใหม่ที่ตัดขาดจากสถาบันกษัตริย์หรือ ‘ราชาชาตินิยม’ แบบสมัยรัชกาลที่ 6 แต่แนวคิดชาตินิยมใหม่นี้เมื่อประกอบกับความกดดันจากพันธมิตรหลักในสงครามอย่างญี่ปุ่นแล้วทำให้ไม่มีที่ทางสำหรับให้ชาวจีนโพ้นทะเลสามารถคงความเป็นจีนได้ในขณะเดียวกับที่แสดงความรักชาติไทยออกมาได้ (ดังเช่นที่เคยทำได้บริบทของ ราชาชาตินิยม) ท้ายที่สุดเมื่อสิ้นสุดสงครามด้วยความพ่ายแพ้ของฝ่ายอักษะ และแนวทางชาตินิยมใหม่ของจอมพล ป. หดสั้นความชอบธรรมไปพร้อมกับการกลับเข้ามาเถลิงอำนาจของฝ่ายอนุรักษนิยม (นำโดย มรว. เสนีย์ ปราโมช และพรรคประชาธิปัตย์) แนวทางราชาชาตินิยมแบบเดิมจึงกลับมา ชาวจีนโพ้นทะเลจึงมีสิทธิที่จะเลือกคงความเป็นจีนไว้ได้ตราบเท่าที่แสดงความจงรักภักดีต่อสถาบันกษัตริย์และการเมืองอนุรักษนิยมอย่างชัดเจน ส่วนจีนโพ้นทะเลอื่นๆ ที่ไม่ปฏิบัติตามแนวทางนี้ ไม่ว่าจะเป็นกลุ่มที่แสดงความสนับสนุนแนวทางสังคมนิยม หรือกลุ่มที่ต่อต้านอำนาจรัฐในรูปแบบอื่นๆ (เช่น กลุ่มโจรจีนคอมมิวนิสต์ กลุ่มจลาจลที่พลับพลาไชย อังยี่ กุมารจีน ฯลฯ) ก็จะถูกปราบปรามอย่างรุนแรงและลบล้างออกไปจากประวัติศาสตร์กระแสหลักโดยสิ้นเชิง จึงไม่แปลกที่ ณ ปัจจุบันนี้ เขตป้อมปราบศัตรูพ่าย สัมพันธวงศ์ และบางรัก จึงเป็นฐานเสียงอันมั่นคงของพรรคประชาธิปัตย์ และจะปรากฏกลุ่ม ‘ลูกจีนรักชาติ’ ขึ้นเป็นกำลังสำคัญส่วนหนึ่งของกลุ่มพันธมิตรประชาชนเพื่อประชาธิปไตย (พธม.)

คำหลัก : จำนวน 3-5 คำ

จีนโพ้นทะเล, ชาตินิยม, การกลมกลืน/กลืนกลาย, จักรวรรดินิยม

Abstract

Project Code :

Project Title :

From Secret Societies to Patriotic Overseas Chinese: The Paradox of the Thai State's Relationship with the Overseas Chinese

Investigator :

Wasana WONGSURAWAT Ph.D.
Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University

E-mail Address :

wwongsurawat@hotmail.com

Project Period :

2 years

Abstract:

This project has gathered arranged and analyzed historical data in order to investigate and achieve a better understanding of the paradox of the Thai state's relationship with the overseas Chinese. In the superficial understanding of the Thai general public as well as scholars internationally, there appears to be two drastically conflicting images concerning this bizarre relationship between the Thai state and the overseas Chinese. On the one hand, Thailand is often cited as the success story of overseas Chinese assimilation into the non-Chinese general public without incidents of violent ethnic conflicts that had marred the modern history of most Southeast Asian countries. On the other hand, many leading members of the Thai ruling class are widely recognized among scholars in international academia as leading anti-Chinese figures of the Southeast Asian region. From the flagrant anti-Chinese policies of Phibunsongkhram's wartime government to Atsawaphahu's *Jews of the Orient*, first published in 1914, it is difficult not to wonder how Thailand could have become the success story of ethnic relations and assimilation if leading figures of its nationalist movement had such negative attitudes towards the overseas Chinese.

The general conclusion from the 4 articles, which is submitted as the output of this research, is as follows. The overseas Chinese who have been highly influential in the Thai economy since before the Rattanakosin Era up to the present day have

continuously maintained very good relations with the ruling class—especially with the court and the Chakri Dynasty. Even though it appeared that the early nationalist movement of King Vajiravudh Rama VI involved some rhetoric that appeared to be anti-Chinese, in reality and in practice, racial discrimination was never the primary intention of the movement. The most dangerous enemy that Atsawaphahu's writings attempt to expose and oppose were those overseas Chinese who took advantage of the system by having themselves registered as subjects of leading European powers so as to enjoy extraterritorial rights according to the unfair treaties. The true essence of Vajiravudh's royalist nationalist rhetoric was not anti-Chinese or against Chinese-ness in any way. Anyone who would be willing to sincerely express their loyalty to the crown, which Vajiravudh considered to be the ultimate symbol of the Thai nation, could be counted as Thai and accepted as a patriot regardless of where his/her ancestors came from or what his/her mother tongue might have been. As for the anti-Chinese policies during the Second World War, this was partly due to the influence of Japan, which was at war with China while being the most important ally of Phibunsongkhram's regime while occupying Thailand for most of the war years. However, perhaps more importantly, this was due to the conflict between the new revolutionary ruling class (the People's Party) and the old regime (the royalists) and Phibunsongkhram's attempt to establish a new nationalist movement that was completely severed from royalist influence. Nonetheless, this new non-royalist nationalism, coupled with the pressure from occupying Japanese forces, allowed no space for the overseas Chinese to retain their Chinese-ness while expressing their patriotism (as was once possible within the context of royalist nationalism). Finally, when the war concluded with the defeat of the Axis Powers and the discredit of Phibunsongkhram's nationalist ideology, the conservatives (namely, M.R. Seni Pramoj and the Democrat Party) returned to power, bringing back the old royalist mode of Thai nationalism. This allowed the overseas Chinese to retain their ethnic/cultural identity as Chinese while expressing their patriotism through expressions of loyalty towards the crown and support for conservative politicians. Overseas Chinese who fail to follow this formula, be it communist sympathizers or any other dissident group, however, were violently suppressed and completely wiped out of mainstream nationalist history. Hence, it should not come as a surprise that Bangkok Chinatown has become a major powerbase for the Democrat party and the 'Patriotic Ethnic Chinese' would be among the leading forces of the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD).

Keywords : 3-5 words

Overseas Chinese, Nationalism, Assimilation, Imperialism

Executive Summary

ในระยะ 2 ปีที่ได้ดำเนินการโครงการวิจัย “จากอ้งยี่ ถึง ลูกจีนรักชาติ: ภาพลักษณ์ที่ขัดแย้งในประวัติศาสตร์ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างรัฐไทยและชาวจีนโพ้นทะเล” นั้นนับว่าบรรลุผลเกินกว่าที่ตั้งเป้าหมายไว้เดิมว่าจะเขียนบทความวิจัยเพื่อนำเสนอในที่ประชุมวิชาการระดับนานาชาติ และตีพิมพ์ในวารสารวิชาการหรือหนังสือรวมบทความที่มีบทบรรณาธิการและ peer review (ระดับนานาชาติ) อย่างน้อย 2 ชิ้น ผลปรากฏว่าสามารถผลิตบทความวิจัยได้ถึง 4 ชิ้น ได้นำเสนอในที่ประชุมวิชาการระดับนานาชาติ 4 ครั้ง จากจำนวนนี้ได้รับการพิจารณาให้อนุมัติให้ตีพิมพ์ในวารสารวิชาการหรือหนังสือรวมบทความที่มีบทบรรณาธิการและ peer review (ระดับนานาชาติ) ออกมาแล้ว 2 ชิ้น และอยู่ระหว่างการพิจารณาอีก 2 ชิ้น ดังมีรายละเอียดต่อไปนี้

การนำเสนอบทความวิจัยในที่ประชุมวิชาการระดับนานาชาติ

1. บทความ “Heroes or Villains: A Comparative Study of the Overseas Chinese Contribution to the Free Thai Movement and Their Role in the Yaowaraj Uprising of 1945”
นำเสนอ ณ Association of Asian Studies Annual Meeting 2010 ณ นครฟิลาเดลเฟีย มลรัฐเพนซิลวาเนีย ประเทศสหรัฐอเมริกา ในวันที่ 25-28 มีนาคม 2553
2. บทความ “Thailand and the Xinhai Revolution: Expectation, Reality, and Inspiration”
นำเสนอ ณ Conference on Sun Yat-sen, Nanyang, and the 1911 Chinese Revolution จัดโดย Institute of Southeast Asian Studies ประเทศสิงคโปร์ เมื่อวันที่ 25-26 ตุลาคม 2553
3. บทความ “Successfully Misunderstood: The Untold Realities of the Thai-Chinese Assimilation ‘Success Story’”
นำเสนอ ณ International Symposium on Multicultural Coexistence in Southeast Asia จัดขึ้นที่ Korea University ณ นครโซล ประเทศสาธารณรัฐเกาหลี (เกาหลีใต้) ในวันที่ 11 มีนาคม 2554

4. บทความ “Repatriation, Deportation, Political Asylum: Implications of being Ethnic Chinese in Thailand during the Second World War and the Cold War Era”

นำเสนอ ณ Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference ณ นครโฮโนลูลู มลรัฐฮาวาย ประเทศสหรัฐอเมริกา เมื่อวันที่ 31 มีนาคม - 3 เมษายน 2554

บทความที่ได้รับอนุมัติให้ตีพิมพ์ในวารสารวิชาการหรือหนังสือรวมบทความที่มีบทบรรณาธิการ (นานาชาติ)

1. บทความ “Thailand and the Xinhai Revolution: Expectation, Reality, and Inspiration”

ตีพิมพ์ใน Lee Lai To and Lee Hock Guan (eds.) *Sun Yat-sen, Nanyang, and the 1911 Revolution*. Singapore: ISEAS, 2011.

2. บทความ “Successfully Misunderstood: The Untold Realities of the Thai-Chinese Assimilation ‘Success Story’”

ตีพิมพ์ใน Kim Namkook. ed. *Multicultural Challenges and Redefining Identity in East Asia*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2013.

บทความที่อยู่ในระหว่างพิจารณาตีพิมพ์ในวารสารวิชาการ (นานาชาติ)

1. บทความ “Heroes or Villains: A Comparative Study of the Overseas Chinese Contribution to the Free Thai Movement and Their Role in the Yaowaraj Uprising of 1945”

อยู่ในระหว่างพิจารณาเพื่อตีพิมพ์ใน *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies (JSEAS)*

2. บทความ “Beyond ‘Jews of the Orient’: A New Interpretation of the Problematic Relationship between the Thai State and Its Ethnic Chinese Community”

อยู่ในระหว่างพิจารณาเพื่อตีพิมพ์ใน *Positions: Asia Critique*

เนื้อหาของวิจัยประกอบด้วย

1. บทคัดย่อภาษาไทย และภาษาอังกฤษ
2. Executive summary
3. วัตถุประสงค์
4. วิธีทดลอง
5. ผลการทดลอง
6. สรุปและวิจารณ์ผลการทดลอง และข้อเสนอแนะสำหรับงานวิจัยในอนาคต
7. ภาคผนวก

Output จากโครงการวิจัยที่ได้รับทุนจาก สกว.

1. ผลงานตีพิมพ์ในวารสารวิชาการนานาชาติ (ระบุชื่อผู้แต่ง ชื่อเรื่อง ชื่อวารสาร ปี เล่มที่ เลขที่ และหน้า) หรือผลงานตามที่คาดไว้ในสัญญาโครงการ
2. การนำผลงานวิจัยไปใช้ประโยชน์
 - เชิงพาณิชย์ (มีการนำไปผลิต/ขาย/ก่อให้เกิดรายได้ หรือมีการนำไปประยุกต์ใช้โดยภาคธุรกิจ/บุคคลทั่วไป)
 - เชิงนโยบาย (มีการกำหนดนโยบายอิงงานวิจัย/เกิดมาตรการใหม่/เปลี่ยนแปลงระเบียบข้อบังคับหรือวิธีทำงาน)
 - เชิงสาธารณะ (มีเครือข่ายความร่วมมือ/สร้างกระแสความสนใจในวงกว้าง)
 - เชิงวิชาการ (มีการพัฒนาการเรียนการสอน/สร้างนักวิจัยใหม่)
3. อื่นๆ (เช่น ผลงานตีพิมพ์ในวารสารวิชาการในประเทศ การเสนอผลงานในที่ประชุมวิชาการ หนังสือ การจดสิทธิบัตร)

Thailand and the Xinhai Revolution

Expectation, Reality and Inspiration

Wasana WONGSURAWAT Ph.D.
Department of History
Faculty of Arts
Chulalongkorn University

Introduction

Up through the earliest decades of the twentieth century, the Thai public generally was rarely concerned with the domestic political affairs of any foreign country beyond peninsular Southeast Asia. Events in China, however, proved a major exception. The Xinhai Revolution of 1911 was, by all accounts, among the best documented and best publicized political upheavals in the history of Thai journalism. This was, of course, partly due to the very large ethnic Chinese population in Thailand at that time. Chinese and Japanese official sources¹ agree that, at least up to the end of the Second World War, Thailand hosted the largest overseas Chinese community in the world. The last major influx of Chinese migrant workers was a major driving force behind King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910)'s modernization projects in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was the values and aspirations of these resident aliens that resulted in the momentous proliferation of Chinese newspapers and Chinese educational institutions of various sorts in Thailand.²

Another significant factor contributing to the unusually high profile of the 1911 Xinhai Revolution in the eyes many Thai people was the overt concern and obvious anxiety of the Thai ruling class about the possibility that such an anti-monarchic upheaval could break out in the Kingdom as well. In fact, the Thai court had been well aware, long before the outburst of that revolution, of the dangers of allowing the general public to be exposed to foreign political systems and ideas. Consequently, only a limited circle of high-ranking members of the royal family and young nobles destined to serve the court had been allowed to obtain higher education in Europe and America during Chulalongkorn's reign. Exposure to different political ideas and developments from the West was jealously guarded and carefully restricted

in the local educational system. As Kasian Tejapira has noted,³ no alternative political ideology or mode of government was introduced to the general public in Thailand via Western education. Instead, this information entered into public awareness, becoming vastly popular among the lowest roots of urban society, through the writings of Chinese revolutionaries like Sun Yat-sen, whose words were published in numerous Chinese newspapers of the time and translated into Thai by overseas Chinese activists and journalists.

When it became obvious in the earliest decades of the twentieth century that the proliferation of seditious ideas via the Chinese-language press was getting out of hand, King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, 1910-1925) made the dramatic decision to join the ranks of the journalists of his time in an attempt to make use of journalism and the press to support his own political agenda.⁴ He then became, without doubt, the most prolific Thai critic of the Xinhai Revolution. In the midst of the outbursts of enthusiasm among ethnic Chinese and progressive Thai journalists, King Vajiravudh, writing mostly under his pseudonym Asawaphahu, was among the very few to make sobering comments—questioning the true validity of the 1911 cataclysm and wondering if the dictatorship of Yuan Shikai could truly be the consequence of a ‘successful’ revolution.⁵ Not surprisingly, critics of Vajiravudh never hesitate to point out that the monarch felt threatened by the possibility that such a revolution might break out within his own realm, and that he therefore preferred for the sake of his own political position that, not only the Xinhai, but all revolutions, be deemed failures. This is probably not far from the actual facts. Nonetheless, one should not be too quick to dismiss the critiques of Asawaphahu as self-serving propaganda. Closer investigation reveals the intriguing image of a Thai monarch who grasps with unexpected clarity the complexity of Chinese politics in his own time. Even more noteworthy is the fact that, despite his well crafted arguments and his position as head of state, Vajiravudh’s views on the revolution appear to have carried much less weight than the outbursts of sheer enthusiasm from patriotic overseas Chinese and progressive Thai journalists of the early twentieth century.

The major difference between the skepticism of Asawaphahu and the enthusiasm of supporters of the 1911 revolution – among whom Xiao Focheng was

the prime example—is in their definition of success. Revolutionaries aspire to transform society by overthrowing the existing regime, which they view as unjust, oppressive, and ineffective. Journalist supporters therefore tended to see the success of the Xinhai Revolution in the toppling of the Qing Dynasty. On the other hand, critics of revolutions generally, especially those closely involved with a ruling regime, tend to judge the success of a revolt by the success of the regime that emerges from it. Since revolutionaries give more thought to toppling rather than building a regime, while critics (especially a contemporary ruling monarch) tend to be much more interested in maintaining a workable order, it is not surprising that the two views are hardly on the same wavelength. For advocates, revolutions are an inspiration, but for those who sit on the throne, they represent a cautionary tale. The 1911 revolution in China inspired supporters of the 1912 rebellion in Thailand, who though they failed, were the precursors of the 1932 revolution which transformed the throne of the Chakri into a constitutional monarchy.⁶ Asawaphahu's writings, however, not only accurately describe the failures of the regimes that resulted from the Xinhai Revolution, but also anticipate quite correctly the kinds of inadequacies that were to arise in the wake of the Thai revolution of 1932. This paper will investigate 'expectations' regarding the 1911 revolution, as expressed by supporting views of ethnic Chinese and progressive Thai journalists in the first decade of the twentieth century; the political realities that resulted from the revolution, as assessed in the writings of Asawaphahu; and how the Xinhai Revolution, despite all its shortcomings, has continued to inspire Thai revolutionaries since the foiled rebellion of 1912, to the regime-toppling coup of 1932, and up to the present day.

Expectations

The first decade of the twentieth century must have been quite an exciting time for the overseas Chinese of Nanyang. After centuries of neglect by the Qing court and suffering the fiercely menacing attitudes of officials in their own ancestral homeland, the overseas Chinese finally came into their own in the modern history of China. In 1900, just two years after he was ousted from his position of influence in the Qing court with the abrupt and miserable end of his 'Hundred-Days Reform,' Kang Youwei went on a tour of Southeast Asia to recruit support for his 'Association for

the Protection of the Emperor' [保皇会-*baohuanghui*], propagating his 'Three Protection Doctrine'— i.e. protect the nation, protect the race and protect education [保国-*baoguo*, 保种-*baozhong*, 保教-*baojiao*].⁷ The basic idea behind the campaign was quite simple. The Qing court had been usurped by ultra-conservative and corrupt forces of the Empress Dowager who had dangerously undermined China's modernizing process by putting an end to Kang's reform movement. Kang had barely escaped with his life and had lost most of his influence on the Mainland. His only hope of putting the Middle Kingdom back on the modernization track was to gain support from the overseas Chinese. To achieve this, Kang had to stir up their nationalist fervor [保国-*baoguo*], remind them of racial and blood ties with their ancestral homeland [保种-*baozhong*], and encourage their nationalist consciousness. These values would be the heritage of their children and grandchildren via a well-established Chinese educational system [保教-*baojiao*] throughout Southeast Asia. Living in a region widely colonized by European imperialist powers, and having experienced many aspects of Western modernity, these overseas Chinese well understood the urgent need for modernization in China. The crucial point, however, in Kang's decision to seek their support was that the Nanyang Chinese were not only in a position to help the Qing court, but that they were now an essential factor in China's salvation.

It was not long after Kang Youwei's momentous visit that the Qing court awoke to the contemporary importance of overseas Chinese. After the disastrous consequences of the Boxer Rebellion at the turn of the century, even the Empress Dowager and her cohorts realized that swift moves towards modernization would be the only chance to save the Manchu ruling class from their dire political situation. Like Kang, the Qing court viewed financial support from overseas Chinese as a safer engine for their modernization projects than loans from aggressive imperialist powers. Gaining support from the overseas Chinese would also reduce the base of support for dissident factions such as Kang's reformist movement. Hence, the Manchu broke with their long tradition of disdain towards the overseas Chinese of Southeast Asia, and sent their agents to garner as much financial support as possible. They managed this by selling to the wealthy communities of sojourners what they most wanted from the Qing court, i.e. acceptance and recognition in the form of official positions and

ceremonial gowns that could be bought with hard cash. The substantial success of this ‘southern expedition’ by the Manchu rapidly improved the overseas Chinese position in relation to the Qing court. By 1903, one of Nanyang’s most successful Chinese capitalists, Zhang Bizhi, was summoned, for the second time, to an audience with the Empress Dowager who made him no less than her personal advisor in the area of modernization.⁸ Suddenly it seemed that everyone was calling upon the overseas Chinese of Southeast Asia to ‘save the nation.’

Not surprisingly, when the revolutionary movement of Sun Yat-sen eventually picked up the Southeast Asian trail, the overseas Chinese of Nanyang were already well versed in the rhetoric of modernization and nationalism. Still, Sun Yat-sen’s campaign did have something more to offer. That revolutionary went far beyond Qing court politics of acceptance and recognition, calling instead for full-scale revolution. The Nanyang Chinese were called upon to assist in the overthrow of the oppressive, ineffectual, and corrupt Manchu regime, and to help establish a new, modern, righteous, and capable regime governed by the Han people themselves. The overseas Chinese in this grand design were to be no less than the mother of the revolution! They were no longer treated as mere appendages of the empire, called upon only in times of crisis. They were instead being hailed as the architects of a new China. Sun appealed to the age-old anti-Manchu ideology of the Chinese secret societies, which were still alive and well in the overseas Chinese communities of Southeast Asia. He called upon them to ‘overthrow the Qing and restore the Ming,’ [翻清复明, *fan qing fu ming*], adding a modern touch of republicanism to the ancient slogan. The Qing court that had neglected them for centuries was, after all, their arch enemy. The fall of the Ming in 1644 was actually a major reason why so many of their forebears had fled the ancestral homeland in the first place. Sun Yat-sen, a well-educated overseas Chinese who had experienced modernity, growing up overseas in the United States came to lead them, the patriotic overseas Chinese who had experienced modernity during their years of toil in European colonies and the major port cities of Siam. Together, they would empower a revolution that would usher China into a golden age of modernity, equality and justice.

Sun Yat-sen visited Thailand at least four times in the years leading up to the Xinhai Revolution.⁹ For many other overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, Sun's visit to Thailand was the cause of much excitement. Sun received much support from Xiao Focheng [萧佛成, 1864-1939], a leading personality in Thailand's Chinese community in the early twentieth century. By 1907, a branch of Sun's Revolutionary Alliance [同盟会-*tong meng hui*] had been established in Bangkok. In the country which at that time boasted the largest overseas Chinese community in the world,¹⁰ Xiao was a local leader, responsible for dispensing revolutionary propaganda and for rallying support for Sun's activities on the Mainland. Xiao was a Hokkien Chinese born in the Strait Settlements. Xiao's father, relocating his family to Thailand while Xiao was still very young, had made a fortune in the rice and shipping business. Xiao was well educated in both the Thai and Chinese languages and a perfect local candidate to carry out Sun's grand designs. Descended from a loyal Ming official, Xiao's family had deep connections within the anti-Manchu secret societies in Nanyang. Upon completing his education, Xiao chose the journalist profession and became editor of the first bilingual (Thai/Chinese) newspaper in Thailand. His knowledge of classical Chinese was extensive enough to gain respect within the Chinese community, while his Thai language skills enabled him to communicate with local officialdom and to convey his ideas to the Thai general public as well. Perhaps even more significantly, Xiao was born in British Malaya and registered as a British subject. This allowed him to enjoy extraterritorial rights in Thailand, and granted him much more freedom and security in his politically risky profession as a newspaperman.¹¹

Xiao Focheng led the journalistic efforts on behalf of Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary Alliance through the publication of a series of newspapers established precisely to serve as mouthpieces for the movement. The first of this series was the *Zhongguo Ribao* [中国日报], which was first published in Hong Kong in 1905. Xiao made a couple of attempts to establish a voice for the Tongmenghui in Thailand, but did not have much success until he began publishing the *Huaxian Xinbao* [华暹新报] in 1907.¹² *Huaxian Xinbao* supported the revolutionary cause by propagating two major themes related to current developments in Chinese politics. His ideas gained

some notoriety, attracting a wide range of readers in the Chinese community and among progressive Thai thinkers, as well. His writing also made him some enemies in high places both within the Chinese community and among the highest ranks of the Thai ruling class.

The first of the two themes regularly espoused by Xiao was couched in anti-Manchu rhetoric. This approach was aimed at more traditional and conservative readers sympathetic to secret societies, and at old established families with a long tradition of anti-Manchu ideology. News articles and editorial pieces espousing this theme tend to emphasize the oppression, corruption and ineffectiveness of Manchu rule. They lament the great shame and sufferings endured by the Han people since the Manchu conquest, mocking the Qing court and its failures - from the Taiping Rebellion to the Opium War - to safeguard the empire from enemies both domestic and foreign. The conclusion is inevitably that China could return to her former glory only by the revolutionary overthrow of the Qing Dynasty. The following are typical examples of some of the writing in this anti-Manchu vein:

“That the Manchu government has announced that a constitution is about to be promulgated is simply a lie to pacify the people. The Manchu have caused tremendous harm to the Chinese people. The Manchu always want to have power over the Chinese. Just look at the government, all important offices such as the Ministers of Defense and Finance. They are all Manchu...Now the Manchu worry that the Chinese will try to reclaim wealth and power from their hands. Nor do they want the Chinese to attain the same rights as the Manchu currently possess. Why then would they allow a constitution? If there were really a constitution, the Chinese would seize all power and positions from them. They only say such things to trick the Chinese into stopping their rioting for a short while.”¹³

“The revolutionary aim to overthrow the Manchu government is actually the duty of all who were born in China; it is not simply the mission of one or two people. The Manchu government has no substantial means of governing. They are only capable of selling land and giving up power or benefits to foreigners...Those who have had to suffer from their unjust oppression are not limited only to the Chinese people. The Mongols, the Hui, the Tibetans, as well as Manchu who are common citizens are also fellow sufferers. Hence, all these nationals should join forces with the Chinese nation in destroying the Manchu government.”¹⁴

Articles such as the above excerpts were not aimed only at rallying support from readers in the Chinese community in Thailand. Xiao also sought to discredit Kang Youwei's reformist movement and to counter the work of agents of the Qing court who were also actively rallying support for their own nationalist and modernization projects throughout Nanyang during the first decade of the twentieth century. These anti-Manchu diatribes emphasize that no reform could truly occur in China if the Qing Dynasty remained in power. All reform policies, whether propagated by Kang Youwei or by the Qing Court itself, were nothing more than lies conjured up to pacify the Chinese people and to delay revolution indefinitely.

The second and perhaps more problematic theme put forward by the Chinese revolutionary voice in Thailand criticized the political system to which the Qing Empire subscribed as oppressive, ineffectual and obsolete. Articles representing this theme often raise questions concerning the justification of absolute monarchy, making veiled suggestions that republicanism appears to be a more modern and logical system of government. In the excerpt cited below, Xiao invokes a vague explanation of Rousseau's theory to support Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary ideology,

“Human beings in the world should all equally enjoy freedom. No one should accept being a prisoner under the power of others...The French sage named Rousseau...said that each citizen is a part of the power of the sovereign. The sovereign power is the freedom of a country. Each citizen is already a part of the country and therefore enjoys a part of its freedom as well. The power of the sovereign is also a part of the country. Establishing a country requires territory, citizens, and freedom. These three factors are most important. Hence, freedom is a crucial part of having a country. He also said that the power of the sovereign does not belong to him personally, but is appointed to him by the people...The sovereign power is the freedom of a country, which is the congregation of all individual affairs. Each individual is a part of the sovereign power. Therefore, each citizen is the sovereign and the sovereign is a citizen. The two may not be differentiated.”¹⁵

Not surprisingly, this latter theme, widely propagated in Xiao's newspapers towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, was highly problematic in the political context of his country of residence. Xiao later repeatedly denied that he harbored any ill intentions towards the Thai absolute monarchy. He insisted that his republicanism was strictly limited to the Chinese context. Nonetheless, many of the highest echelons of the Thai ruling class were doubtful that such a fervent supporter

of Chinese republican revolution could give wholehearted allegiance to the absolute monarchy in Thailand. Furthermore, regardless of what Xiao's true intentions towards the Thai absolute monarchy were, much of his writing had already started to influence some sectors of the Chinese community in Thailand in a more subversive direction.

By the time Sun Yat-sen made his last visit to Thailand in 1908, the Revolutionary Alliance was already well known among Thai authorities for its notorious anti-monarchist tendencies. Xiao's publications succeeded in bringing a much larger crowd to hear Sun talk at the Chinese Club in Bangkok on December 1st of that year. Sun actually included some fiery criticism of the absolute monarchy in his speech, inciting hundreds of people in the audience to support dynastic overthrow. Thai authorities promptly ordered him to leave the Kingdom for good. A little over three full years passed from the day of Sun's final expulsion from Thailand to the establishment of the Republic of China and his brief moments of power in the early months of 1912. In the same period in Thailand, tides of change also appeared to be gathering momentum quite rapidly. The organization of political factions within the Chinese community in Thailand toward the end of King Chulalongkorn's reign was significantly influenced by Sun's visit, by the establishment of the Tongmenghui branch and the Chinese Club in Bangkok, and by the proliferation of local Chinese-language newspapers and Chinese schools.

Toward the end of the 1900s, passive aggressive methods of protest such as strikes and boycotts of imported goods had been introduced with some degree of success among working classes and business circles in Bangkok's Chinatown. By 1910, the biggest and most severe labor strike in the history of modern Thailand occurred with far-reaching effects and long-term consequences. This was the Chinese Strike of 1910, which was organized mostly by leaders of secret societies in protest against the last series of tax reforms under King Chulalongkorn's administration. The reforms included an increase in the capitation tax rate for Chinese nationals, making them responsible for paying the same amount as native Thai nationals. The strike included almost all Chinese workers, employees, and entrepreneurs in nearly every sector of every kind of business. The strike brought Bangkok and every major city in the country to a virtual stand-still for three full days. Ultimately, however, the strike was unsuccessful in attaining its stated goal. The series of tax reforms in question was

not revised in any way, and by the end of Chulalongkorn's reign, Chinese nationals were required to pay the same rate of capitation tax as the Thai. However, the strike served as an important historical marker of the true influence of the overseas Chinese in the Thai economy and of their ability to organize and express their collective demands in a strong and powerful way never before experienced in Thailand. Barely two years after the Chinese strike of 1910, a plot was foiled which aimed to bring about a revolution, assassinate the monarch, and possibly establish a republic. Investigations revealed close connections between the plotters and leading members of the Tongmenghui in Bangkok. Some of the ringleaders had been heavily influenced by Xiao Focheng's articles on republicanism and the Chinese revolutionary movement.¹⁶ All things considered, Sun Yat-sen's four visits to Thailand, and Xiao Focheng's journalistic propaganda appear to have succeeded more in provoking political unrest in Thailand than in furthering the revolution in China.

Reality

With all the excitement of Sun Yat-sen's visits and the great expectations associated with the seemingly successful Chinese revolution, it would be fair to say that King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) ascended the throne at a volatile moment in Thai political history. The King had been well aware, since the turn of the century, of the escalating levels of nationalist excitement among his ethnic Chinese subjects, but he had been deeply disturbed, as well, in the last year of his father's reign, by their three day strike's brazen display of economic might. The young king's impression doubtless became more vivid when, within months of his ascension to the throne, a republican plot involving his own assassination, with close connections to Chinese political activists, was foiled. For Vajiravudh, it was clear that rather than influencing the situation in China, rising nationalist sentiment among ethnic Chinese in Siam was a serious threat to the stability of the political system in Thailand, and to his own political position. Thai government propaganda therefore turned substantially toward discrediting Sun Yat-sen and the Xinhai Revolution, not for the purpose of weakening or destroying a distant newborn republic, but for the sake of the survival of Vajiravudh's own realm as he knew it.

A fundamental policy of King Vajiravudh's reign was the promotion of Thai nationalism in campaigns which included more than a fair share of anti-Sinicism. Probably one of the most widely publicized of his writings in international academia today is *Jews of the Orient*, a case-in-point statement of the king's own anti-Chinese brand of nationalism. The piece is heavily influenced by anti-Semitic ideas popular in Europe during the period of his studies in Oxford in the late nineteenth century. In *The Jews of the Orient*, Vajiravudh basically compares what he perceives as negative similarities between the Jewish and Chinese Diasporas. The article concludes that the Chinese are worse than the Jews, because the Chinese tend to return a great portion of their wealth to China, rather than doing as the Jews did, which was to reinvest their earnings in their host country.¹⁷ His nationalist strategy was, on the one hand, to use the ethnic Chinese as the convenient and appropriate *Other* against which native Thai could differentiate, and therefore better identify themselves. This process of cultivating a strong national identity would become a crucial foundation for the Thai nationalist sentiment which Vajiravudh desperately needed to support his political position. At the same time, *The Jews of the Orient* also attempted to encourage cultural assimilation of later generations of local ethnic Chinese. In discrediting 'Chinese-ness' and the Chinese race, Vajiravudh suggested that assuming a Thai cultural identity and subscribing to Thai nationalism would be a 'civilizing' move, and perhaps the only way to be saved from perishing along with the rapidly deteriorating Chinese nation. Vajiravudh repeatedly employed this same logic and reasoning in many of his writings. Another obvious example is the article *Comparison of Surnames and Clan Names*,¹⁸ in which he emphasizes that his decision to promulgate the Surname Act in Thailand was in accordance with civilized tradition, doing as the English do. In explaining the differences between surnames and the clan names favored by the Chinese, Vajiravudh insists that clan names were used in pre-modern and less civilized societies plagued with war and barbarity—China and Scotland being two major examples. Surnames, he argued, are used in more civilized societies that have achieved unity and harmony, such as in a modern nation like England. The Surname Act of Thailand must definitely be a civilized development in the direction of the English, avoiding degeneration into barbarism like the Chinese.

Aside from his ongoing attempts to discredit ‘Chinese-ness’ and Chinese culture as underdeveloped and obsolete, King Vajiravudh also wrote many articles directly attacking the character and moral standards of the leaders of both major political movements in China, as well as political leaders of the Chinese community in Thailand who appeared too enthusiastic about China’s national salvation and not nearly excited enough about Thailand’s nationalist movement. In this respect, Xiao Focheng was often criticized for his dubious loyalty—presenting himself as a leader of the Chinese community while publishing his ideas in Thai-language newspapers and claiming to be a Thai journalist, but enjoying extraterritorial rights as a subject of the British crown,

“As for people who advertise themselves as Thai, but socialize only with their Chinese friends and relatives, and are always pro-China in their sentiments, concerning these people I remain doubtful of their intentions. A person could only be either Thai or Chinese. One could not be both at the same time. People who act as if they were both at the same time are usually both Thai and Chinese. These people are like chameleons that change their colors to suit their surroundings. When they are among Thai people, they become Thai. Then when they meet a group of Chinese people, they become Chinese. Many of this sort are subjects of foreign powers. They are the ones who present themselves as the speakers and politicians of the half-Thai, half-Chinese. They set themselves up as the leaders of modern ideas. They are speakers and journalists in Bangkok newspapers. I used to be amazed and hurt upon hearing that some of my Thai compatriots admire the viewpoints of these people. They should know better and realize that these people are only Thai when they talk. Don’t they know that these people could be whatever suits them? How could my compatriots trust someone who could have two or even three nationalities at the same time? For example, someone who claims to be Thai, but boasts about being a leader in the Chinese community, and also is a subject of a European empire as well, what sort of person is he?”¹⁹

In discrediting ethnic Chinese leaders as untrustworthy, Vajiravudh also attempted to discredit the political movements which those leaders claimed to represent. If the leader could not be trusted, how could his political agenda be worth supporting? Vajiravudh employed this line of reasoning repeatedly in many of his writings concerning political developments in China. Later, with the rise of the May Fourth Movement in 1919, the King commented on the patriotic activities of the students of Chinese schools in Thailand as follows,

“This is the nature of the Chinese, which could not be easily cured. No matter what kind of association is established, it will always become a secret society, specializing in embezzling money more than anything else. The Association of Chinese Students is no exception. Despite elegant words in their manifesto, ultimately they are simply an instrument of a certain person or a certain group in embezzling money from their compatriots.”²⁰

Ultimately, in Vajiravudh’s view, political development in China had very little to do with what was happening in Thailand during the same period, and vice versa. A political movement within the Chinese community in Thailand could hardly have any concrete influence on what was happening in China. The King believed that there was a vast, unbridgeable gap between the reality of China and that of the overseas Chinese in Thailand—an ocean separated them by vast distances. The overseas Chinese had not exerted any real influence in Chinese politics since time immemorial. Leaders like Xiao Focheng and the secret society masters only created the illusion of connectivity by bringing in famous personalities in exile like Kang Youwei and Sun Yat-sen in order to enrich themselves through make-believe support for the ‘national salvation’ of China.

Vajiravudh’s version of reality-check for the Chinese community in Thailand as regards the Xinhai Revolution may seem harsh and self-serving. Even so, it remains a solid possibility that Xiao Focheng’s journalistic propaganda on behalf of republicanism may have been more of a catalyst to instigate the foiled 1912 rebellion in Thailand than the toppling of the Qing Dynasty in 1911. Vajiravudh demonstrated this possibility by pointing out a number of illogical points in the Chinese nationalist propaganda of Xiao and other leaders of the Chinese community in Thailand. The king showed how these leaders themselves were mistaken about quite a few key matters concerning Sun Yat-sen’s revolutionary movement. First and foremost, Vajiravudh questioned whether Yuan Shikai really believed in Sun Yat-sen’s revolutionary ideology. Would he actually deliver the sort of ‘New China’ promised by Sun Yat-sen’s Three Principles of the People and by much of Xiao Focheng’s republican propaganda? As early as 1912, Vajiravudh translated and published E. J. Dillon’s article, “The Disintegration of China,” from the British magazine, *Nineteenth Century and After* (no.428, October, 1912). In this article, Dillon questions Yuan’s true political intentions, expressing doubts about the latter’s commitment to Sun Yat-

sen's brand of republicanism. He predicts that Yuan's regime will be a military dictatorship and that China under Yuan will be even worse off than under the Manchu, since the newly established Republic of China lacked all the crucial institutions, and its bureaucracy remained very weak and incomplete. Like Vajiravudh, Dillon did not believe in the Chinese Revolution. The English writer pointed out that the entire dynastic system was being wiped out with no well-planned, well-executed, political system to replace it. China was being ushered toward further disintegration and a future in which the ascendancy of warlords would be virtually unavoidable.²¹

Later in 1915, when Yuan Shikai expressed his intentions to return China to the dynastic system and to establish himself as emperor, Vajiravudh, writing as Asawaphahu, published the article, *The New Emperor*,²² in response to Xiao Focheng's recent newspaper articles expressing outrage against what he perceived as Yuan's backward political ideology. Asawaphahu concluded that republicanism could not succeed in the orient after all, and that no matter how modern and Westernized Sun Yat-sen's ideas may have appeared to be, they all proved quite useless when put into practice in China. Despite all the civil wars, revolutions, and unrest, the orient would always return to monarchism—Yuan's regime being a case in point. Not long after the publication of *The New Emperor*, Asawaphahu published another long article, *The Cult of Following*,²³ criticizing people who like to follow examples of the West without truly understanding the logic or reasoning behind Western actions or traditions, and ending up causing more harm than good to their own society. Not surprisingly, Sun Yat-sen and his revolutionary movement were the prime example of the 'Cult of Following.' Asawaphahu ended this article with a stern warning to so-called 'progressive' thinkers in Thailand at the time that might be considering following in Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary track,

“My fellow compatriots! Please think carefully about this. Emulating your ancestors would benefit you truly. It is better than allowing yourself to follow in the path of those mindless people who ape everything the Westerners do and claim to be political experts. These people have already delayed China's prosperity for a whole century. Now that we see the example of how the Cult of Following has harmed China, we should all try to be mindful and do our best to bring development and prosperity to our country in ways that suit our culture and history best. This would be better than striving towards

something that our people remain unready to embrace. We may all help our country by fulfilling our duties to the best of our abilities and refraining from indiscriminately following the ways of the West.”²⁴

The underlying message is quite obvious. If anyone attempted to overthrow the Chakri Dynasty or remove Vajiravudh from the throne, Thailand, not unlike China, would face a very difficult period of disintegration, at the end of which the country would probably return to the dynastic system anyway, making all efforts of the revolutionaries completely futile.

Inspiration

A rather long and elaborate debate concerning various political ideas and government systems took place between King Vajiravudh, writing as Asawaphahu, and Xiao Focheng through a series of newspaper articles published continuously in the King's mouthpiece, *Nangsuepimthai*, and in Xiao's *Chinosiamwarasap* for nearly the entire reign of Rama VI (1910-1925). However, it seems as if, on the subject of revolution, the two were describing and discussing two completely different concepts. Xiao awaited 'the Revolution' with the keenest expectation. He wrote and published with absolute confidence that the world, especially China, would become a better place if and when the revolutionaries succeeded. What this long aspired-to 'success' would actually look like, however, was never clearly defined. Before 1912, it was described roughly as the overthrow of the Qing regime and the establishment of the Republic of China. Nonetheless, once those two goals were achieved, Yuan Shikai's ascension to power did not seem right, or in accord with Sun Yat-sen's ideology. Xiao realized that the true success of the revolution might not have been attained after all, since the position of power had been hijacked by a military dictator. Sun, who was supposed to be the 'father of the revolution,' was once again forced into exile. Xiao continued to support the revolution with great expectation for the grand day that Sun Yat-sen's righteous regime would finally take control and establish a truly democratic Republic of China. Even after Sun passed away in 1925, Xiao continued to believe in the revolution of the Three Principles of the People and supported Hu Hanmin's faction, which Xiao trusted would eventually achieve the revolutionary success that he had been awaiting with great expectation throughout his life.

Vajiravudh, on the other hand, understood revolution as the transformation of a government system, and judged revolutionary achievement according to the success of the regime which was supposed to be the outcome of the revolution. Such was the perspective of one who was already in a position to wield governing power, a position quite opposite to both Xiao Focheng and Sun Yat-sen during most of their political careers and before 1911. Vajiravudh envisioned a successful revolution as well-planned, well-executed, and resulting in a smooth transition of power. The new governing system would allow development to go forward efficiently and effectively. Hence, when Yuan Shikai took over and reverted to authoritarian rule, eventually attempting to re-establish the dynastic system, the failure of the Xinhai Revolution was complete in Vajiravudh's view. At the same time, by reading all that led up to the Revolution of 1911 as false expectation and political illusion, Vajiravudh failed to see another important long-term aspect of the revolution. Although Xiao Focheng's life-long great expectations may not have been answered by the actual outcome of the revolution, the awesome expectation that drives individuals like him and Sun Yat-sen to devote their lives to a revolutionary cause is a powerful inspiration which gives rise to later generations of revolutionaries.

The Xinhai Revolution inspired the 1912 Rebellion in Thailand which, though it failed, inspired the People's Party, who led the 1932 Revolution, ending absolute monarchy in Thailand and transforming the Kingdom into a constitutional monarchy. Of course, the regime that followed the 1932 Revolution was far from perfect, and was not nearly as democratic as the leaders of the People's Party had boasted at the dawning of 24 June, 1932, when they first seized power. In fact, nearly eighty years later, Thailand is still struggling with the democratic system—most definitely a complete failure according to Vajiravudh's standards. Whether or not the 1932 Revolution was a premature transformation remains a crucial subject for debate that continues to split the history field in Thailand right down the middle to this day. But all agree that that revolution also continues to be a significant inspiration for every single major political upheaval in Thailand since the end of the Second World War. This is probably not too different from the fact that Sun Yat-sen and the Xinhai Revolution continue to be a fundamental part of the political ideology of both the People's Republic of China and Taiwan, even though nobody is quite sure whose side the 'Father of the Revolution' was actually on.

Conclusion

Every major revolution is like a big splash in the middle of the small pond of world history. It causes big circular ripples that expand all the way to the furthest edges of the pond. These sudden ripples might cause excitement among creatures at the far edges of the pond, and encourage them to join in the commotion and make their own splashes as well. However, as could be expected, splashes made at the edge of the pond would tend to affect the edge of the pond much more than the middle where the first inspirational splash occurred. Sun Yat-sen came to Thailand at least four times during the first decade of the twentieth century to rally support for his revolutionary movement. The revolution then broke out in China in a military camp at a time when Sun himself was not even in the country. Overseas Chinese patriots like Xiao Focheng and his cohorts in Thailand would like to have played a more significant role in toppling the dynastic regime in China. Despite repeated denials of any ill intentions towards the existing political system in Siam during Vajiravudh's reign, they actually contributed much more to undermining the absolute monarchy in Thailand. Similarly, Vajiravudh's seemingly menacing nationalist propaganda like *The Jews of the Orient* was probably less intended as an attack on the Xinhai Revolution or the Republic of China than a strategic move to curb the enthusiasm of Siam's very large, resident overseas Chinese community. The king hoped – but ultimately failed – to discourage another revolutionary splash whose effects would continue to ripple through Thai society and Thai politics even to this day.

¹ AH: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0703(4)012, *DSTP*, June 1942 – October 1943. (See also, Hicks, George. ed. *Overseas Chinese Remittances from Southeast Asia 1910-1940*. Singapore: Select Books, 1993.)

² Skinner, G. William. *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957.

³ Tejapira, Kasian. *Commodifying Marxism: The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927-1958*. Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2001.

⁴ Vella, Walter F. *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1978.

⁵ National Archives: Rama VI; r.6 n.20.13/23. *Newspaper Article "The New Emperor" by Asawaphahu*. [bothkwam "wangti ong mai" doy asawaphahu] 18 September 1915.

⁶ Thaemsuk Noomnandha. *The First Young Turks: Rebels of 1912* [young turk run raek: kabot ro so nueng roi samsip] Bangkok: Saitan, 2002.

- 7 Qiu Jianzhang, 'Lun wan qing zhengfu de huaqiao jiaoyü zhengce,' in *Henan Daxue Xuebao* (vol. 42, no. 4, 2002), p.59.
- 8 Michael R. Godley, *The Mandarin Capitalists of Nanyang: Overseas Chinese enterprises in the modernization of China, 1893-1911*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p.93.
- 9 Xie Guang, *Political Activities of the Overseas Chinese in Thailand, 1906-1939* [taiguo huaqiao de zhengzhi huodong, 1906-1939]. Bangkok: Center for Chinese Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 2003, p.16.
- 10 Penpisut Intharabhirom. *Seow Hudseng Sriboonruang*. Bangkok: Department of History, Chulalongkorn University, 2004, p.22.
- 11 Murashima Eiji. *Politics of the Chinese in Siam* [kanmuan chin siam]. Bangkok: Center for Chinese Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1996, pp.1-2.
- 12 *Huaxian Xinbao* was published together with a Thai-language newspaper, *Chino-Siam Warasap*, making it the first bilingual newspaper in the history of Thai journalism. (See, Penpisut Intharabhirom. *Seow Hudseng Sriboonruang*. Bangkok: Department of History, Chulalongkorn University, 2004, pp.12-13.)
- 13 *Huaxian Xinbao*, 12 January 1909.
- 14 *Huaxian Xinbao*, 3 February 1909.
- 15 *Huaxian Xinbao*, 4 February 1909.
- 16 Thaemsuk Noomnanda. *The First Young Turks: The Rebellion of 1912* [young turk run raek: kabot ro so roy sam sip]. Bangkok: Saithan, 2002.
- 17 Asawaphahu. 'The Jews of the Orient' and 'Wake Up Siam!' Bangkok: Chuanphim, 1985.
- 18 Asawaphahu. "Comparison of Surnames and Clan Names," in *Collection of King Vajiravudh's Writings* [pramuan botphrarachanipon nai phrabatsomdetphramongkutklaochaoyuhua]. Bangkok: Sirisarn, 1961, pp.45-54.
- 19 Vajiravudh, King. *Pakinakhadi*. Bangkok: Barnnakarn, 1972, pp.18-19.
- 20 National Archives: Rama VI; r.6 n.20/11 *Memorandum to Chaophraya Yommarat*. 4 June 1919.
- 21 Dillon, Emile Joseph. Asawaphahu (trans.) *The Disintegration of China* [khwam krachai krachai haeng muang chin]. Bangkok: Nangsuepimthai, 1912.
- 22 National Archives: Rama VI; r.6 n.20.13/23. *Newspaper Article "The New Emperor" by Asawaphahu*. [botkhwam "wangti ong mai" doy asawaphahu] 18 September 1915.
- 23 Asawaphahu. *The Cult of Following* [Latthi ao yang]. Bangkok: Tharmbarnnakarn, 1976.
- 24 Ibid.

Successfully Misunderstood

The Untold Realities of the Thai-Chinese Assimilation ‘Success Story’¹

Wasana WONGSURAWAT Ph.D.
Department of History, Faculty of Arts
Chulalongkorn University

The Secret of (mis)Understanding

Southeast Asia has always been the region to host the greatest number of ethnic Chinese outside of Mainland China.² At least up to the conclusion of the Second World War, Thailand (or Siam as it was known before 1939) was the country with the largest overseas Chinese population in the world.³ Fortunately, it seems, the nation-state with the largest Chinese ethnic minority appears to be among the most successful in assimilating this Diaspora into the native socio-cultural environment.⁴ The ethnic Chinese assimilation into Thai society has become the ‘success story’ of overseas Chinese communities throughout the world. Yet, research and scholarship in areas related to the Thai-Chinese assimilation ‘success story’ are few and far in between when compared to those investigating ethnic-relation problems involving the overseas Chinese in other areas of Southeast Asia. Perhaps it is because it is actually far more difficult to identify why a particular case of assimilation is ‘successful’ than to identify where other cases have failed to succeed. It may be related to simple pragmatic wisdom, ‘if it ain’t broken, don’t fix it,’ the seemingly irrational fear that trying to understand the true causes of this ‘success story’ may undermine the idyllic image of success. Or perhaps it is precisely because we know and understand so little of the situation with the ethnic Chinese in Thailand that the assimilation process in that country became such a success story? The third and last possibility, as outlandish as it appears, is what this paper sets out to thoroughly investigate—the Thai-Chinese assimilation ‘success story’ is the result of a series of gross misunderstandings between the Thai and Chinese states and between those two states and the ethnic Chinese community in Thailand.

While there is little serious scholarship concerning the history of Thai-Chinese assimilation, there appears to be a wealth of offhand hypotheses. The most popular among nationalist historians is the general understanding that because Siam had never been fully colonized by European powers, she had the rare opportunity to establish a

more ethnically-coherent nationalist movement, which was willing to accept acculturated ethnic Chinese more promptly than other areas of Southeast Asia where natives have been pitched against the overseas Chinese under the classic ‘divide and rule’ method of their European colonial masters. This is probably correct at a fundamental level. That is, Siam had indeed never been fully colonized by European powers. Though the court was forced to grant extra-territorial rights and a series of trade privileges to the colonial powers, it managed to retain a degree of sovereignty and self-determination, especially in domestic affairs related to ethnic relations. However, much of the Siamese court’s policies towards ethnic minorities were clearly adopted from methods employed by the Europeans in their Southeast Asian colonies. A few examples include, the appointment of Phraya Choduekrachasetthi (the Chinese headman in the tradition of the *Kapitan Cina* in the Dutch East Indies), the employment of Chinese entrepreneurs as tax farmers (for the most lucrative goods such as, opium, liquor, and bird’s nest),⁵ and the exemption of the ethnic Chinese from the *corvée* labor system resulting in their placement, by default, as the Kingdom’s merchant class. Not unlike what happened in the European colonies, the Siamese court’s earlier policies towards the ethnic Chinese became the cause of deep-rooted resentment of the native masses—especially among the peasant class—allowing the Chinese to become the most convenient socio-cultural *other* against whom the ruling class used to rally nationalist support in the early 20th century.

Another popular suggestion is that Theravada Buddhism which is supposedly the declared religion of up to 95% of the Thai population is more tolerant of non-believers than the monotheist religions of Insular Southeast Asia. Hence, migrants of alien religious cultures like the ethnic Chinese tend to fair better integrating into Thai society than in her neighboring countries to the south. This rather blatantly self-congratulatory suggestion is not only politically incorrect, but also grossly misinformed. First of all, Islam was introduced to Southeast Asia largely through maritime trade networks through cosmopolitan port cities and a rather sophisticated urban population. Consequently, this religious movement, from its first introduction to the region was already well aware of the great variety of cultural practices already in existence in Southeast Asia and much more willing to adapt to local traditions than its predecessors and counterparts in the Arab world. Secondly, and perhaps more

importantly, Theravada Buddhism as practiced in Thai society does not seem to have the same efficacy with other ethnic minorities such as, the Malay Muslims in the far south or even fellow Buddhist Vietnamese and Khmer refugees in the Eastern and Northeastern regions of the country. As the religion of the majority, Theravada Buddhism has always been crucial to the establishment of Thai nationalism. Buddhist monks figure prominently in all major state ceremonies and Buddhist holidays are the only religious holidays to enjoy the public holiday status. The Theravada Buddhist Sangha is among the most crucial source of legitimacy for the political ruling classes. Monks have long proven to be among the most effective propagators of the state's soft power. Propaganda as pronounced through Buddhist clergy is not always as peaceful and calming as one might expect. After all it was Phra Kittiwuttho, famous preacher and abbot of Chittabhawan Temple, who brought about the classic anti-Communist slogan of the Cold War era in Thailand, "It is not a sin to kill communists,"⁶ and among the prime targets of the Thai state's anti-communist policies were none other than the overseas Chinese.

As false reasons that tend to make Thailand appear more politically mature or morally superior to her neighbors are eliminated, one is forced to look into more mundane causes such as, chronic misunderstandings between the Thai state and the ethnic Chinese and what seems to be an above-average aptitude of the Thai populous to forget whatever does not appear to be politically beneficial. This study proposes that there are three levels of misunderstanding that together constitute the foundation of the Thai-Chinese assimilation success story—the cosmological misunderstanding, the state/majority to minority misunderstanding between the populous Thai and the ethnic Chinese community, and the state-to-state misunderstanding between the Chinese and Thai states. These misunderstandings are not only time-honored, but also have very deep cultural and emotional roots and are so profoundly engrained into the Thai way of life that, despite their ancient origins, many aspects of these three misunderstandings continue to be propagated through popular media up to the present.

Cosmology

At the cosmological level, Thai culture is much more heavily influenced by Hindu-Buddhist traditions from the west than by the Confucian-Daoist traditions of its

northeastern neighbors. Consequently, this puts much of the religious and cultural perspectives of the Chinese and Thais in different universes. The Chinese tradition perceives China as central, the heartland of all under heaven which is civilized. The Confucian value system provides for a highly hierarchical social structure with the Chinese Emperor—the Son of Heaven—situated at the apex, closest to the gods in both cultural and moral position. The global hierarchy is then perceived in terms of distance from the Chinese Emperor—high ranking nobility and mandarins closest to the top, followed by the various gentry and learned classes, then the ranks of commoners, then servants, slaves, and migrants, with foreigners not yet accustomed to the civilized Chinese way of life and branded ‘barbarians’ close to the bottom of the big picture.⁷ Traditional Thai perceptions, on the other hand, had long been very aware of greater powers in the neighborhood, both China to the east and India to the west. The worldview from peninsula Southeast Asia is, therefore, either periphery or one from the crossroads of civilizations. Cosmologically—from the Hindu perspective—the center of the universe was somewhere to the west, probably somewhere in the Himalayas, intimately related to the major rivers of the Subcontinent. The great popularity of Theravada Buddhism, too, puts Siam at the periphery as the religion originated in South Asia and was then introduced to Southeast Asia at a much later period. With Buddhism, instead of Confucianism, as the main cultural foundation, the Thai social structure is also much more fluid than that of the Chinese. Theravada Buddhism allowed more room for mobility within the class structure since every human being is believed to have the potential to attain enlightenment within them. Buddhist Sangha hierarchy is arranged by knowledge and seniority irrespective of caste or class. Moreover, as Confucian ethics tend to focus on human relations and the harmony within the here and now, the Buddhist world view places much importance upon the after life—striving to be reincarnated in a better position within the circle of life or to be completely liberated through enlightenment.

In other words, while China perceived herself as central, Siam was conscious of her peripheral position, but did not consider China as the ultimate center in any way. It is, thus, not difficult to understand why and how this fundamental misunderstanding of worldviews could come to have such a profound influence in the Sino-Siamese perception of each other as well as the Thai state’s views towards its

ethnic Chinese minority and vice versa. What is even more impressive is, however, the fact that the two states, with its totally different cosmological outlook and its people almost completely ignorant of each other's worldviews, have managed to be so closely intertwined both politically and economically for most of the past millennium. Most of the credit for successfully creating a complete misunderstanding that served as the foundation for a rather cordial relationship between the Chinese and Siamese states from antiquity up to at least the end of the 18th century should be accorded to the overseas Chinese community, which had established itself quite firmly in Siam almost as long as the Kingdom's own history and enjoys the largest membership among all overseas communities of the world. The ethnic Chinese community in Siam had been very well aware of the different perspectives between their homeland and the host country. However, being highly pragmatic as the Chinese always are, the ethnic Chinese in Siam chose not to attempt at persuading either court to understand or adopt the other's perspective. Instead, they adjusted their worldview and way of life to match the two different sets of cosmological understanding and established themselves as the crucial middle ground that absorbed the differences so effectively that both states could continue to operate according to its precious illusions while becoming increasingly connected and interdependent through the services of the overseas Chinese community.

China and the Overseas Chinese

In pre-modern times, overseas Chinese had never been regarded with much fondness by the Chinese state. With the establishment of the Qing Dynasty from the mid-17th century onwards, these sojourning communities—especially those who had chose to resettle in Southeast Asia—had become the object of much hostility from the governing powers of Mainland China. There are two major reasons for the longstanding tradition of hostility between the Chinese state and its overseas subjects. The first and perhaps the more deeply engrained arose from the Confucian moral standing, which perceived abandoners of the ancestors' tombs to be among the basest and most despised of all bad elements. This is largely due to the cult of ancestral worship, which had a crucial role to play in preserving the unity and harmony within the family structure—the smallest social unit with paramount importance in the Confucian social-cultural value system. Note that three of the five fundamental relations in Confucianism are within the family structure and even the remaining two,

which are outside, are often compared to or elaborated through familial terms—the lord-subject relationship described through the father-son metaphor or the relationship between friends of different ages expressed through the older brother-younger brother moral framework. The unity of and harmony within the family is perceived to be crucial to the wellbeing of the state both in terms of politics and economics. As the family is the most fundamental socio-political unit, if the hierarchic relations within the family were appropriately conducted and maintained, that should provide for a solid foundation for the larger hierarchic system of relations in society, upon which the state's governing power is established. According to the Confucian perspective, a well-grounded extended family with a large number of members also holds greater potential of accumulating family assets and expanding the family enterprise. Geographically limited families are also more conducive to state rule since it allows feudal rulers to levy taxes as well as recruit manpower for effectively. The cult of ancestral worship within the Confucian system of teachings is key to the preservation of such unity and stability of the social system based on the family unit. Every male member of the family has a part in the family asset and a responsibility to care for younger members of the family and worship the older ones. This unbroken chain of responsibility between male members of the family is known as 'filial piety' and extends beyond the world of the living to include also memories of the deceased members of the family.⁸ For all reasons noted, one who breaks away from his family and relocates faraway from the tombs of his ancestors—the overseas Chinese being the prime example—are naturally considered as dangerous elements that threaten the wellbeing of the state and ruin the potential for developing and expanding the family's assets. This is precisely why Chinese folk wisdom advised against trusting one without extensive family connections and why the overseas Chinese throughout the world insisted, at least through most of the 19th and 20th centuries, to be known as 'sojourners'—travelers who intend to return home—as opposed to 'migrants'—people who permanently relocate away from the land of their ancestors.⁹

The second reason for the Chinese state's open animosity towards the overseas Chinese has much to do with the history of the establishment of the Qing Dynasty in the mid-17th century. With the fall of the Ming in 1644, many among the gentry and literati who were unwilling to serve under Manchu rule escaped overseas. The

working class, especially among the peasants of the southern provinces, formed underground anti-Manchu organizations in the form of sworn brotherhoods and secret societies, which later became even more popular among Chinese laborers in foreign lands. Not surprisingly, Southeast Asia, as the closest region and with its long and elaborate history of tributary and trade relations with China, was where these seditious movements flourished the most. The menace of these sojourning patriots were threatening to the establishment of the Qing Dynasty that the earlier emperors of the dynasty have been known, not only to make private journeys overseas a capital crime punishable by death, but also to send requests to the rulers China's vassal states in Nanyang to round up all the overseas Chinese and return them to the Mainland to be executed.¹⁰ Manchu emperors of the latter day were not nearly as obsessed about annihilating the Chinese overseas than their predecessors, but neither did they express any concern or compassion when large amounts of ethnic Chinese were slaughtered periodically by either over-anxious colonial officers or mobs of disgruntled natives in Southeast Asia. The Qianlong Emperor was famous for sangfroid comment to the effect that the Chinese of the Dutch East Indies were detested abandoners of their ancestral tombs, and therefore, their being slaughtered in the Dutch colonies by the hundreds should not be of any concern to him at all. The overseas Chinese of Siam only started to regain marginal acceptance from the Qing court towards the end of the 18th century when they returned as agents of Siamese tribute missions to China. After all, their presence within the tribute missions was not only an obvious expression of their loyalty and adoration for the Qing Dynasty, but also suggested that they had done well in representing the Chinese empire and had helped to maintain China's status as the center of the civilized world by bringing more tribute missions to the empire.

Thailand and the Overseas Chinese

Prior to the dawn of the 20th century, Chinese sojourners were quite welcomed in Siam. They came with their extended trade network across all major port cities in East and Southeast Asia together with a kind of business know-how that was often lacking among the Siamese ruling classes. More importantly, they came to make up most of the merchant class, which was conspicuously absent from the Siamese socio-economic structure under the corvée labor system that prevailed through much of the

pre-modern history of the kingdom. In reality, the Siamese state did not know how exactly to deal with this curious race of sojourning people. They knew for certain that the Chinese were not natives of Siam, and therefore, did not belong within the corvée labor system. However, they were also very different from European merchants, some of whom had been trading with the Siamese court since as early as the 16th century. Somehow the overseas Chinese merchants seemed more familiar. They had been trading in Southeast Asian ports for much longer than the Europeans and many of them had settled down in Siam, married Siamese women, and become quite well accustomed to the Siamese language and culture. Consequently, the overseas Chinese enjoyed the in-between-status, which was the best of both worlds. As non-natives, on the one hand, they were not required to provide labor for public service up to six months of the year nor were they drafted in times of war. On the other hand, they were not considered as complete foreigners like their European counterparts, and therefore, were not subjected to the same sorts of taxes neither were they limited to the geographical boundaries of the port cities or designated to live only within the confines of their respective ethnic villages. Hence, the Chinese were the only people who were free to travel throughout the kingdom, trading, transporting goods, and providing services that native surfs being tied to the land or Europeans limited to the confines of the capital were not in the position to do.¹¹

The ethnic Chinese in Siam came to enjoy a highly influential position in the kingdom's economy not only due to their near monopoly of Siam's domestic markets, but also because they were employed as agents of the state in international trade and acted as crucial middlemen in Siam's most lucrative tribute trade with China. The tribute trade system itself is a prime example of one of the most significant misunderstandings that provided a splendid foundation for the long and fruitful history of Sino-Siamese relations up to the 19th century. The title of Sarasin Viraphol's monumental research, *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652-1853*¹² sums up the gist of this monumental misunderstanding quite eloquently. From the earliest decades of the establishment of the Qing Dynasty, through the apex of China's age of commerce in the 18th century, up to at least the mid-19th century, the whole world wanted to trade with China for she possessed within her boundaries the best quality of all sorts, from consumer products like silk and porcelain to everyday

necessities such as tea. Yet, with the Qing court's traditional ethnocentric outlook, it was impossible to have any kind of diplomatic or trade relations with foreign countries on equal bases. Perceiving China as the center of world civilization and the Emperor as lord of all under heaven that is civilized, China could only understand and receive foreign visitors as barbaric vassal states coming to pay tribute to the Chinese Emperor. In order to be allowed to into the highly lucrative trade relations with China all states, up to the mid-19th century, had to submit to the tribute system and present their trade agents as envoys of tribute missions from humble barbaric vassal states to the civilized and enlighten Chinese Empire. Siam was of course no exception in this historical charade of international relations and the major driving force behind Siamese trade in the Chinese tribute system were none other than the overseas Chinese merchants in service of the Siamese court.¹³

Overseas Chinese trade agents of the Siamese court were most aware of the problematic nature of Sino-Siamese trade through most of the Qing era. That is, while the Chinese state viewed the Siamese envoys as tribute missions, the rulers of Siam were clearly in it for the profit. Consequently, the overseas Chinese agents acted accordingly in order to assure that the precious illusions remain and both regimes continue to be satisfied according to their own perception of the world. To the Chinese authorities, they present themselves as agents of the Siamese tribute mission to China, expressing admiration and adoration for the Chinese Emperor as the Son of Heaven and supreme governor of all under heaven that was civilized. In this way, they not only secure a place for Siam in the highly coveted China trade, but also manage to overcome centuries of cultural and political hostility from Chinese state by proving themselves as loyal subjects of the Emperor and filial descendants of the land of their ancestors by returning regularly with tribute missions from overseas barbarian lands. To the Thai state, on the other hand, the overseas Chinese trade agents express a clear understanding that the tribute trade was strictly business. They humbly accept their inferior position within the Siamese socio-cultural value system. While they had various privileges over other foreign entrepreneurs, as mentioned earlier, the ethnic Chinese were never considered to be in any way culturally superior to the Thais. Most of the time they were, in fact, looked down upon and ridiculed for what the upper class Siamese view as crass and uncouth. They humbly accepted that they were barred

from most paths of social advancement outside of trade and tax collecting and were tolerated mostly due to their exceptional entrepreneurial skills. The most well known expression of the Chinese experience in Siam clearly demonstrates this humble attitude presented to Thai authorities by the overseas Chinese. They would always describe their journey to Siam as, “coming to take refuge within the realm of His Majesty’s great benevolence,” [pheung phra barom phothisomphan], suggesting that China plagued with political unrest and starvation and they would not have had a chance to survive and prosper if it were not for the unbounded mercy of the Siamese King, allowing them to resettle in his realm. In other words, clearly expressing Siam’s superiority to China and vowing undivided loyalty towards the Siamese crown.¹⁴

Consequently, the ethnic Chinese in Siam enjoyed the peculiar position of the highly misunderstood middlemen of Sino-Siamese relations for most of the Era of Manchu Rule, receiving a marginal degree of respect and acceptance from the Chinese state as the civilized advisors of the barbarian tribute missions, and regarded highly by the Siamese populous for their extraordinary entrepreneurial skills and their seemingly unending abundance of material success. Both the Chinese and Thai ruling class were also quite content with these arrangements, which allowed them to continue to immerse themselves in the illusion of superiority towards the other, until the force entrance of the fourth party into this delicate equation of misunderstanding. Fully responsible for the end of the Sino-Siamese tribute/trade relations in the mid-19th century the same individual who led the British to victory in the Second Opium War and forced Siamese court to end its monopoly on international trade, Sir John Bowring, 4th Governor of Hong Kong and personal advisor of King Mongkut (Rama IV, 1851-1868) of Siam. Through his efforts to break the Siamese court monopoly in international trade, which was largely represented by the overseas Chinese, and assure British domination in the opium trade, Bowring forced the Siamese court to face the reality of China’s decline and the expansion of imperialist threats that would soon become even more detrimental for Siam as well. He advised King Mongkut that posing as a vassal state in the Chinese tribute system in order to profit from trade with China was not worth the risk of being colonized by default once China was completely divided up among European powers. Besides, with the British force opening so many free ports as results of the Opium Wars, there was really no need to

carry on the charade that was the Chinese tribute trade. Siam could just easily trade with China on an equal base through British ports. This, however, also meant allowing the British to challenge the overseas Chinese merchants' near monopoly of Siamese domestic trade.¹⁵ The conclusion of the Bowring Treaty in 1855 was a major turning point for the overseas Chinese decline in prestige and influence in the Thai economy for much of the following century. King Mongkut regarded them as a weak empire of opium addicts and once remarked that should any of his subjects wish to indulge in opium and other such 'Chinese vices',¹⁶ should wear a queue and become Chinese. His son, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910) took full advantage of the British colonial enterprise in China and imported Chinese coolies by the tens of thousands to be the main labor force behind his megaprojects of modernization. While tens of thousands of Chinese coolies were dying off with Malaria while constructing railways through the jungle in the north, and the British were expanding its influence in the Thai ruling class by receiving Siamese princes of the highest ranks, including the future King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, 1910-1925), into their schools and colleges, Chulalongkorn's native subjects were being liberated from the ancient system of slavery and corvée labor. Modern education was being established according to European models and the educated Thais were becoming more and more aware of the great number of differences between them and their ethnic Chinese neighbors.

State-to-State (mis)Understanding

It seems that whenever the Thai and Chinese states start trying to understand the true nature of each other's relationship with the overseas Chinese, they run into conflict, Sino-Thai relations is damaged, and the ethnic Chinese in Thailand suffer the consequences. The same was true at the dawn of the era of the nation-state, with the Chinese Revolutionaries toppling the Qing Dynasty, King Vajiravudh being paranoid of ethnic Chinese republican tendencies,¹⁷ and the overseas Chinese community in Siam being overly excited about the political transformations in the land of their ancestors. By the earliest decades of the 20th century, both the Chinese and Siamese elite had become much better informed of each other's policies and political connections. The overseas Chinese themselves, with their extended trade connections across the continent and having arduously maintaining ties with their home country, were more aware of the monumental changes that were taking place in China than

ever before. This becomes a major problem when the leaders of both states attempt to establish a modern nation-state almost around the exact same time. King Vajiravudh, the father of Thai nationalism, came to the throne in 1910, barely a year before the Chinese Revolution overthrew the Qing Dynasty, and less than two years before Sun Yat-sen became the provisional president of the Republic of China in 1912. All of a sudden both the Siamese and Chinese state demanded the complete and undivided loyalty of the overseas Chinese in Siam—the sojourning community that had been ‘trans-national’ even before the nation-state came into being. Vajiravudh resented the fact that Siam’s economy was nearly monopolized by the ethnic Chinese merchant class, that too much money was being remitted to China, and that the Chinese community’s enthusiastic support for the revolution in China might spark dangerous ideas of revolution and republicanism among the Siamese masses.¹⁸ Chinese Nationalist leaders resented the fact that the ethnic Chinese in Siam had been burdened with so many taxes and yet treated as second-class citizens. Not recognizing that it was precisely the trans-national nature of the overseas Chinese that made them so successful in business and hold such great influence in international trade, both Chinese and Thai states attempted to nationalize the ethnic Chinese in Siam through the system of public and Chinese education while increasing pressure, both socially and culturally, for the overseas Chinese community to completely sever ties with ‘the other’ nation. The ethnic Chinese, on the other hand, preferred to remain trans-national, happy enough to oblige to the self-image of the grateful refugee in the realm of His Majesty’s unbounded benevolence while maintaining ties with their extended family in China and exercising their sense of patriotism by supporting the revolutionary government in the land of their ancestors. Fortunately, the early nationalist movement in Siam was not much more than hot air, Vajiravudh penned several anti-Chinese articles and published them in a royally sponsored newspaper. The articles, though titled with quite racially offensive terms, such as, *Jews of the Orient*, were aimed more towards discouraging the Thai masses from taking after the Chinese in toppling their monarch than to really do any serious harm towards the Chinese community in Siam.¹⁹ Aside from the Primary School Act, which made primary education compulsory and cause some inconvenience to the Chinese school system in Siam, no laws or regulations that could be considered as anti-Chinese were promulgated throughout the reign of Rama VI. The fledgling Republic of China itself

remained rather wobbly up to the late 1920s. Hence, the overseas Chinese in Siam managed to tiptoe through the first wave of political turbulence that was the nationalist movements in both states in the early 20th century.

The situation became much more complicated when the Second World War broke out in the Far East. The Thai state under the leadership of Premier Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram entered in an alliance with Japan in December 1941, making the Kingdom an official enemy of the Republic of China, which had declared war against Japan since 1937. Consequently, the wartime Thai government exerted tremendous pressure upon the overseas Chinese community, attempting in every possible way to stop them from engaging in underground activities to support the Chinese war efforts and undermine Japan's strategic positions in Southeast Asia. At the same time, there were elements within the Phibun government that were against Japanese alliance from the start and secretly supported the various underground anti-Japanese movements, including the Free Thai Movement and the Patriotic Overseas Chinese, throughout the war. The Chinese state was also caught in a major dilemma, having to be at war with the host country of the largest overseas Chinese community that had continuously supported Chinese nationalist causes since the earliest Japanese Invasion of Manchuria in September 1931 through to the day Japan surrendered in 1945. Most unenviable of all were the overseas Chinese in Thailand who were constantly persecuted by both sides. If the Thai government or the Japanese military authorities found out that they were involved in anti-Japanese activities, dire consequences would befall themselves, their family and business enterprise in Thailand. They could be imprisoned, deported, or even executed. Should they choose to be a law abiding citizen of wartime Thailand, they could be assaulted or assassinated by underground Patriotic Overseas Chinese agents who went around terrorizing ethnic Chinese merchants who dared to sell Japanese goods in their shops or engage in any business transaction that might support the Japanese war efforts in one way or the other.²⁰

Upon the conclusion of the Second World War, it was confusion and misunderstanding that seemed to have saved the day for both Thailand and China once again. Japan was defeated and Phibunsongkhram's dream of making Thailand a

superpower of Southeast Asia was shattered. The calamity of being categorized as a defeated nation would have befallen Thailand had it not been for the Thai Minister to Washington DC., M.R. Seni Pramoj, and a group of overseas students in the US and Great Britain who declared almost as soon as the war arrived in Southeast Asia that Phibun was not representing the Thai people's true intentions, and therefore, established the Free Thai Movement as seemingly more righteous alternative. Nonetheless, the Free Thai Movement would have been totally disregarded had they failed to gain acknowledgement and approval from the leading nations among the Allied Powers. In fact, the American leader, President Roosevelt did not formally acknowledge, approve, and support the FTM until mid-1943 after a formal statement to that effect was broadcast to the world by another leading personality within the Allied Powers. Winston Churchill of Great Britain never pronounced such a statement at all throughout the entire war. Most surprisingly, it was Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, President of the Republic of China and Supreme Commander of the China War Zone, who first broadcasted to the world that he believed that Thailand was, like China, a victim of Japanese Imperialism and that entering into an alliance with Japan was not the true intention of the people and, perhaps most importantly, that he would support the full independence and sovereignty of the Thai state once Japanese domination had been driven out and the war came to a final conclusion. Considering all the anti-Chinese policies, laws, and regulations promulgated by Phibun's wartime government, it may appear quite incredible that Chiang Kai-shek would be the one to take the initiative in supporting Thailand's position after the war.²¹ However, if one also take into consideration the amount of continuous support of the overseas Chinese community in Thailand for the anti-Japanese cause from the first invasion of Manchuria in 1931 through to the conclusion of the war, together with clear indications from KMT wartime documents that the Generalissimo intended to rely on the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia as the main source of financial support for the postwar reconstruction of the Republic of China, his strangely forgiving attitude in the broadcasting of February 1943 would make much more sense.

The postwar misunderstanding of the Thai state towards both China and the overseas Chinese was partly a conspiracy of the Thai ruling class and US influence. It is also, in part, contrived and maintained by the ethnic Chinese themselves.

Mainstream nationalist history²² in Thailand does not mention the overseas Chinese as having any part in saving the nation from the postwar fate of a defeated nation. National salvation was credited in full to the Free Thai Movement, which is described loosely as consisting of three major branches—the British and American branches, consisting mostly of diplomats, members of the royal family in exile, and overseas students, and the domestic branch, which was made up of government bureaucrats, military officers, part of the police force and academics under the lead of wartime Finance Minister and Regent, Pridi Phanomyong. Not surprisingly, members of this small group of anti-Japanese elite figured disproportionately in the postwar Thai government for at least the next three decades. They were members of the ruling class to begin with and had been trained to rule through the course of their education or while they were serving as diplomats in the US and Europe.²³ What would be more convenient than to propagate a version of history that presented them as war heroes, justifying their rather undemocratic domination of national politics for the following three decades. Not only were the overseas Chinese never allowed to be part of the anti-Japanese war heroes, according to mainstream history in Thailand, China itself, despite bearing the brunt of Japanese military invasion for a full decade before the war spread to Southeast Asia, appeared to have close to no role at all in the Second World War. It was the Americans who liberated Asia from Japan's imperialist menace after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. This way of describing the Second World War is highly politically correct when considering the fact that the first postwar Thai Prime Minister was none other than the wartime Minister of Washington DC, M.R. Seni Pramoj, and that Thailand quickly became a very faithful supporter of the US anti-Communist efforts in Southeast Asia during the Cold War Era.

Much of the popular memories related to China and the overseas Chinese in postwar Thailand are heavily influenced by the fear of communism during the Cold War years. Wartime Prime Minister Phibunsongkhram not only managed to survive war criminal trials unscathed, but also returned to office in 1948 with full support from US. The second Phibun administration operated under the anti-Communist banner, which was basically a thinly veiled version of his wartime anti-Chinese policies.²⁴ Only this time, the same group of people who were persecuted during the Second World War for their support of Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Nationalist

regime were being suspected as communist sympathizers. There was really no way to possibly reason with the government's propaganda machine. The Republic of China was too weak to give up a good fight for her overseas constituents. The newly established People's Republic of China was not only openly hostile towards Chinese capitalists overseas, but had also positioned herself as the arch enemy of American Imperialism. This made the ethnic Chinese in Thailand, the best kind of victim of extortion and exploitation by state agents—rich and politically vulnerable. The Cold War Era saw the overseas Chinese community in Thailand radicalize in two major directions. Part of the working class and the liberal intellectuals among the ethnic Chinese chose to turn against the state and joined the ranks of urban militant protesters and communist insurgents at the fringes of the rural areas both in the South and Northeastern regions of the country. This group was violently suppressed throughout the 1960s and 1970s. State records that remain from that era left hardly any trace of the movement's fight against the state's injustice and discrimination. Riotous protests against police extortion was recorded in the mainstream state-sanctioned version of history as riots instigated by disgruntled drug dealers and secret society mafias. Those who joined anti-government militant groups in the northeast were deemed treasonous fifth-columns of the People's Republic of China.²⁵ The middle-class intellectuals and entrepreneurial ethnic Chinese, on the other hand, learned from the violent lessons suffered by the radicals that the only way to survive under such circumstances was to seek protection from highly reliable patrons. Hence the 1960s-1970s was also the era of having powerful generals on the company payroll. This was a highly reliable system where political and economic stability could be bought with hard cash. Field Marshals and Generals with close connections to the military government auctioned their names out to the highest bidder, receiving regular hefty paychecks in return for steady streams of government contracts and a firm assurance that business would not suffer from harassment and extortion from the police. Aside from the military big shots, another highly reliable patron was the patron of patrons, the source of justification for military rule and all things legitimate beyond the constitution in this country, the monarch and the royal family. As mentioned earlier, the overseas Chinese in Thailand have long been very familiar with the use of the ultimate royalist rhetoric, "coming to take refuge within the realm of His Majesty's great benevolence," [pheung phra barom phothisomphan]. With the

monarchy gaining in influence through the almighty powers of the royalist military dictatorship that started with Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat's regime in 1958 and carried on quite solidly up to, at least, 1973 (though some would argue that the crown continued to rise in power and influence all the way up to the early 1980s), adapting to the changing political scene in Cold War Thailand was only a matter of returning to the traditional rhetoric for the ethnic Chinese. As the entrepreneur class learned to tap into this massive source of political power and economic influence that was the firm alliance between the military and the monarch, the seemingly humble and grateful Chinese returned quite steadily to the prominent position of political and business influence.²⁶

The Ultimate Assimilation: Internalizing the *National Other*

By the time the Cold War had drawn to a close, with the end of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1976 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the fear of ethnic Chinese communist spies in Thailand had evaporated almost completely. With the fast rise of the People's Republic of China as the new economic super power of the 21st century, Chinese-ness becomes a quality worth celebrating. Now that Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn herself, second in line to the throne, has come to represent Sino-Thai relations at the highest level, it seems that there is no longer any conflict between maintaining one's ties with the ancestral homeland and expressing absolute and undivided loyalty towards the monarchy. It is not surprising at all that one of the founders and key leader of the ultra-royalist People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD),²⁷ Sondhi Limthongkul, has always been very outspoken about his Chinese ancestry. In fact, the ethnic Chinese are the majority of the well educated urban middle-class that forms the main driving force behind PAD's activities. One of the biggest and most influential subgroups within PAD is quite interestingly named, "The Patriotic Ethnic Chinese" [luk jin rak chat]. Within this outlandish name lies the culmination of all misunderstandings that have contributed to the seemingly great success of the Thai-Chinese assimilation story.

It makes perfect sense that "The Patriotic Ethnic Chinese" are the spearhead of the ultra-royalist People's Alliance for Democracy. After all, since the height of the Cold War, few groups had invested so much in advertising their loyalty and devotion

to the Thai monarch as the ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs.²⁸ As mentioned above, securing firm royalist/anti-Communist credentials was a matter of survival for the ethnic Chinese in Thailand during the Cold War Era. The Thai version of the group's name, "luk jin rak chat" [lit. Chinese sons who love the nation], is concise and has a nice ring of familiarity to it. This is because it was a term that had been widely used among underground anti-Japanese activists during the Second World War. The only problem with the history of this name is the fact that the "chat" [nation] when it was employed in the name "luk jin rak chat" in World War II, meant the Chinese nation not the Thai nation. This becomes more clearly problematic when one observes the Chinese version of this PAD subgroup, 泰国华裔爱泰国团 [taiguo huayi ai taiguo tuan], which means literally, the ethnic Chinese in Thailand who love Thailand. This is, of course, not the same as the Chinese version of the "luk jin rak chat" used during the Second World War, 泰国华侨爱国团 [taiguo huaqiao ai guo tuan], which means, the overseas Chinese of Thailand who love the nation [China]. Note that the "luk jin rak chat" of World War II operated underground and were considered as a criminal gang by the Phibun government, which had entered in formal alliance with Japan during the war. It is quite ludicrous indeed that the name of a group once deemed to be an enemy of the state and the name of one that claimed to be most patriotic should be one and the same. What is even more telling is the fact that only the Chinese version of the name is transformed so as to be distinguishable from the one employed during the Second World War.

Misrepresenting oneself according to the political rhetoric favored by the state has become a sort of survival tactic from the ethnic Chinese community in Thailand. So much so that the PAD-originated 'Patriotic Ethnic Chinese' have come to adopt the same *national other* according to the most original version of Thai nationalism, which could be none other than King Vajiravudh's royalist anti-Chinese version. The 'luk jin rak chat,' being most patriotic of all ethnic Chinese, chose as their *national other*, their political nemesis, the rebellious overseas Chinese [jek kabot] that have caused trouble and unrest in the benevolent realm of His Majesty all through the history of the Modern Era in Thailand. Not surprisingly, according to the 'Patriotic Ethnic Chinese, all the vileness of the 'jek kabot' could, of course, be observed through the personality and actions of Thaksin Shinawatra and his supporters.

Thaksin's ancestors are Hakka Chinese from Guangdong—similar ethnic background as the Chinese revolutionary, Sun Yat-sen, who took more than his fair share of credit for toppling the Qing Dynasty in the 1911 Xinhai Revolution. PAD claims the ousted Prime Minister fancies himself as the reincarnation of an ethnic Chinese who appointed himself King of Siam after driving invading Burmese out of the fallen capital of Ayutthaya and establishing his own capital in Thonburi in the mid-18th century. Not only does this King happen to have a very similar name—King Taksin—he was also said to have gone insane towards the end of his reign and was ordered to be executed by his first lieutenant, Phraya Chakri, none other than the following King Rama I, founder of the Chakri Dynasty. Understandably, King Taksin has become a rather controversial figure in Thai history do to his great merit of regaining independence from Burmese rule, the problematic end of his reign, and the morally questionable origins of the current dynasty. So much so that anyone who sought to discuss or glorify Taksin too much would automatically be viewed as a threat to the monarchy. Thaksin's PAD-designated position as the arch-jek kabot is further elaborated by the claim that most of the key leaders of the opposite movement, the red-shirt, the United front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), were affiliated with the defunct Communist Party of Thailand. All things considered, PAD suggests that Thaksin and UDD fit the 'jek kabot' profile perfectly. They are not grateful for His Majesty's boundless mercy, allowing their ancestors to take refuge in his peaceful and plentiful realm. They harbor seditious ideas of challenging his authority and transforming the Kingdom's political system, and they do not have a good relationship with the King's top generals.²⁹

The emergence of PAD's 'Patriotic Ethnic Chinese' represents the ultimate level of the Thai-Chinese assimilation success story. The political misunderstandings that had served as the key foundation of Thai-Chinese assimilation for so long has been thoroughly transformed as it transcended through generations. The generation of well-educated urban middle-class that are the driving force of PAD's 'luk jin rak chat' no longer feel that they are misrepresenting themselves according to the political rhetoric favored by the state. They have internalized that rhetoric to the level that they are able even to impersonate the most original versions of Thai nationalism. The 'Patriotic Ethnic Chinese' had succeeded in creating their own anti-Chinese rhetoric

to be used against those they choose to depict as the *national other*. Ironically, the fact that they call themselves by the same name as the outlawed Chinese nationalist group during the Second World War makes the comparison all the more vivid. Precisely because there has been a long tradition of seditious overseas Chinese element in Thai history that it is possible to demonstrate a convincing version of a truly ‘Patriotic Ethnic Chinese’ in Thai society. They have succeeded in being most patriotic, most loyal to the crown, and best integrated into the Thai well educated urban middle-class because they, too, have a group of detestable ethnic Chinese to target as the shared *national other* with the rest of Thai society.

(Mis)Understanding and Its Challenges:

Multicultural Integration in Thailand and the East Asian Community

In 1966, Supha Sirisingha, better known by her pseudonym ‘Botan,’ published *Letters from Thailand* [chotmai chak muang thai],³⁰ the novel that would define her career. The novel was presented as a collection of letters from an overseas Chinese man residing and working in Thailand to his mother in southern China. Despite never receiving any response, Suang-U, the protagonist continued to write to his mother from the very first year he arrived in Thailand as a young man into his retired years after the rag-to-riches dream. The reader eventually learns that none of the letters ever reached Suang-U’s poor mother due to the sensors, the political turmoil, and quite possibly the unfortunate fate of his mother. *Letters from Thailand* is essentially a story of successful and complete assimilation of the protagonist—from an ethnocentric Confucian chauvinist who despised all things Thai, to one who understood and appreciated Thai culture and cherished the kindness and opportunities he had been granted in the country that eventually became his adopted homeland. The novel was a huge success in Thai literary circles. In 1969, it received the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO)³¹ Award and was adopted as compulsory outside reading for most high school students throughout the Cold War years.³² Not surprisingly, *Letters from Thailand* is now widely recognized as a classic of its genre—a new genre that never was before—literature of the overseas Chinese.

Letters from Thailand should not and could not be considered ‘overseas Chinese literature’ in the strictest sense of the term. This is because, Botan, despite

her Chinese ancestry, does not write for the overseas Chinese readership. She herself is a couple of generations removed from the Mainland and educated thoroughly through the Thai system, graduating from none other than the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University. She writes only in the Thai language and most of her readers consider the same language as their native tongue. Even more telling is the fact that she received the SEATO Award for *Letters from Thailand* and that the novel was soon adopted into the state's high school curriculum. One could not help but wonder whether this outstanding piece of literature reflects more of the Thai state's desired success in fully assimilating its Chinese population or could it possibly truly reflect the state of mind of a real overseas Chinese person. Nonetheless, there is no doubt in the impact *Letters from Thailand* had on the image of the overseas Chinese in Thai society as well as the self-perception of the later generations of the Thailand-born ethnic Chinese. Due to the Thai government's strict control over Chinese education throughout the Cold War years, fewer and fewer Thais of Chinese descent could learn Chinese well enough to read real 'overseas Chinese literature' written and published in the Chinese language and exclusively for overseas Chinese consumption. By the conclusion of the Cold War in the 1990s, what remains of the ethnic Chinese community in Thailand seemed to have adopted the state's perception on assimilation from *Letters from Thailand* and the numerous Thai novels on the overseas Chinese that followed Botan's first success in droves.

Works of literature like Botan's *Letters from Thailand* are clear and present examples of the power of state-propagated misunderstandings. In the postmodern era where one becomes increasingly disenfranchised with nationalist history and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*³³ nearly becomes a household name in world history and international relations, it probably should not come as a surprise that the key to successful multicultural assimilation turns out to be none other than misunderstandings and wishful imaginations. The French philosopher, Ernest Renan, famously commented, "Getting its history wrong is part of being a nation." If the nation-state and nationalism is nothing but an orchestration of a gigantic series of misunderstandings then perhaps the antidote could simply be another set of misunderstandings. As *Letters from Thailand* has so eloquently proved through its Cold War heydays, the same sort of state propaganda that was once employed to

segregate and divide people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds could very easily be used to create a make-believe reality that facilitates the successful assimilation of different groups and lay the foundations for a healthy multicultural society for future generations. Building a successfully assimilated multicultural society in Thailand is probably not very different from the process of building the nation after all. It clearly involves the same method of picking and choosing bits and pieces of history that serve the purpose of harmony and solidarity and intentionally forgetting or ignoring parts that could cause conflict or raise animosity between groups. At the end of the day, multiculturalism is probably just as much of a misunderstanding as nationalism was in the first place.

¹ The background research for this article was funded by The National Research University Project of CHE and the Ratchadaphiseksomphot Endowment Fund (HS1025A). The author would also like to thank the Department of Chinese and Bilingual Studies, Hong Kong Polytechnic University for the postdoctoral fellowship that allowed the time and financial support needed for the final revisions of this paper.

² The term 'ethnic Chinese' itself is, of course, highly problematic as recent anthropological debates would tend to suggest that the notion of one homogeneous 'Han' Chinese race is, in fact, a recent fabrication of nationalist historians. However, the term had been widely accepted and incorporated into the rhetoric of socio-political, cultural, as well economic relations within the Asian continent and in issues related to China's relations to other areas in the world as well as in understanding China's role and influence in the global arena at least since the end of the Second World War. This paper will employ the term 'ethnic Chinese' or 'overseas Chinese' to identify those who self-identify or are identified by either the Chinese state or the government of the host country as such. The highly problematic nature of this definition will be employed to highlight a major cause of misunderstanding between the Thai state, the Chinese state, and the overseas Chinese, which this paper will argue is among the most significant factors that allow the assimilation of the Chinese in Thai society to become the major 'success story' of ethnic relations in the era of the nation-state.

³ Skinner, G. William. *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957.

⁴ It is important to note, at this initial stage, that the overseas Chinese are not only the largest ethnic minority in Thailand, but also enjoy a special position vis-à-vis the state. The Thai government, from its earliest history of legal administration of ethnic groups within the Kingdom, exercise policies towards the overseas Chinese like none other ethnic group within its realms. Unlike the tribal minorities who reside along the northern and western borders, both highlanders and lowlanders, the overseas Chinese are much more numerous and considered to be, in general, better educated and possessing a much higher level of entrepreneurial skills. As is the case in much of Thailand's modern history, the overseas Chinese business and financial prowess tend to outshine even that of the Thai majority and often end up dominating the country's economy for much of the 19th and 20th centuries. Hence, unlike the tribal minorities who are deemed less civilized and in need of modern education and development as a humanitarian gesture of the Thai state, the overseas Chinese are economically influential minorities whose financial might must be honed to support the development of the Thai state and should they refuse to fully ally themselves with the Thai state's directives, the state would tend to consider them as a dangerous liability, possibly a fifth-column, that would be required to be subdued at all cost. Another important difference between the overseas Chinese and the tribal minorities is the fact that, in most cases, the overseas Chinese failure to attain Thai citizenship results from their past attempts or indication of the desire to retain their Chinese citizenship. It is mostly the case of uneasy dual citizenship rather than outright statelessness, which tends to be the case for tribal minorities without Thai citizenship. The overseas Chinese are, however, not to be confused or considered the same as some overland groups that migrated to Thailand from southern China, especially Yunnan

Province. These migrants belong to a totally different category from the overseas Chinese. Many of them descend from caravan trading groups of the 18th and 19th centuries, a large portion of which are Muslims. Another important part of this overland group are the former KMT forces who were left behind after the CCP's victory on the Mainland in 1949. These are political minorities of the Cold War era and do not belong in the same category as the overseas Chinese discussed in this study.

⁵ Phimphraphai Phisalabut. *Siamese Junks: The Legend of the Ethnic Chinese in Bangkok*. [samphao siam: tamnan jek bangkok] Bangkok: Nanmee Books, 2001.

⁶ When asked by an interviewer whether killing the leftists or communists should be considered a sin, Kittiwuttho's response was, "I think that is something that should be done. Although Thai people are Buddhists, we should still do it. It is not considered to be the same as killing a person because people who destroy nation, religion, and monarchy are not fully human beings. We must consider that we are not killing people, but māra, which is the duty of all Thais. Killing for the sake of nation, religion and monarchy is a way of making merit, like killing fish while preparing food for monks." (*Chaturas Magazine*, vol. 51, 27 June 1976)

⁷ Fairbank, John K. *China: Tradition and Transformation*. Sydney: George, Allen & Unwin, 1979.

⁸ Wolf, Arthur P. ed. *Studies in Chinese Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978.

⁹ Wang Gungwu. *China and the Chinese Overseas*. Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1991.

¹⁰ Skinner, G. William. *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957.

¹¹ Landon, K. P. *The Chinese in Thailand*. London: Oxford University Press, 1941.

¹² Sarasin Viraphol. *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652-1853*. Cambridge: Harvard University/ Council on East Asian Studies, 1977.

¹³ Shi Weiyou. "The Reasons of Overseas Chinese Having Been Employed at High Levels by Siamese Royal Family in the Monopoly Trade" [xianluo wangshi zai longduan maoyi zhong zhongyong huaqiao de yuanyin] in *Around Southeast Asia*, May 2004.

¹⁴ Phimphraphai Phisalabut. *Chinese Sons and Mon Grandsons in Siam*. Bangkok: Sarakhadi, 2004.

¹⁵ Wyatt, David K. *Thailand: A Short History*. Bangkok: Silkworm, 1984.

¹⁶ The four most lucrative tax farms of the late-18th to early-19th century in Siam, which include, opium, liquor, gambling dens, and the lottery. These four taxes made up nearly half of Siam's total annual revenue and was collected mostly from ethnic Chinese residing in urban areas, which, in the earlier reigns of the Chakri Dynasty (Rama I-III) made up only approximately 25% of the Kingdom's population. (Skinner, G. William. *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957.)

¹⁷ Vella, Walter F. *Chaiyo!: King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1978.

¹⁸ Asawaphahu. trans. Emile Joseph Dillon. *The Shattering of China* [khwaam krajaat krajai haeng muang jin]. Bangkok: Nangsuepimtai, 1912.

¹⁹ King Vajiravudh Foundation. "Jews of the East" and "Thailand, Wake Up!" by Ashvabhahu [puak yew haeng buraphatis lae muang thai chong tuen terd do y ashvabhahu], Bangkok: Chuanpim, 1985.

²⁰ Murashima Eiji. *Politics of the Overseas Chinese in Siam* [kan muang jeen siam] Bangkok: Center for Chinese Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1996.

²¹ Public Record Office: Foreign Office 371/35983, *Chiang Kai-shek's Broadcast to Siam*, 1943.

²² Direk Jayanama. *Siam and World War II*. Bangkok: Thai Wattana Phanich, 1970.

²³ Vichitvong Na Pombhejara. *The FREETHAI Legend* [tamnan seri thai] Bangkok: Saengdao Publishing House, 2003.

-
- ²⁴ Chanvit Kasetsiri. *Political History of Thailand 1932-1957*. Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 2001.
- ²⁵ Vu Tuong and Wasana Wongsurawat. eds. *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity and Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- ²⁶ Chanvit Kasetsiri. *Political History of Thailand 1932-1957*. Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 2001.
- ²⁷ The People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) was formed in 2005 under the leadership of former broadcasting taicoon, Sondhi Limthongkul, and politician Maj. Gen. Chamlong Srimuang. The movement's initial purpose was to drive Premier Thaksin Shinawatra out of office. PAD were in full support of the 2006 military coup that ousted Thaksin and has since continue to protest against all alliances of Thaksin in politics. PAD launched its own political party, The New Politics Party (NPP), in June 2009, but did not win any seats in the following election.
- ²⁸ *Nation Weekly* [Nation sudsapda] vol. 845, 8-14 August 2008.
- ²⁹ ASTV-Manager. *The Anti-Monarchist Movement* [khabuankan lom chao]. Bangkok: ASTV-Manager, 2010.
- ³⁰ Botan. *Letters from Thailand* [chotmai chak muang thai]. Bangkok: Phrae Phitthaya, 1969.
- ³¹ SEATO was the Cold War precursor of ASEAN. It was established shortly after the conclusion of the Korean War in 1954 as a counterpart of NATO in Southeast Asia with its most important objectives concerning regional security and anti-Communism. SEATO's endorsement of *Letters from Thailand* puts the novel squarely in the Free World Camp and provides a stamp of approval for the politically correct anti-Communist well-assimilated overseas Chinese that made up the core of the leading characters in Botan's classic story.
- ³² Pratheep Maeunnin. *100 Thai Authors* [roi nak praphan thai]. Bangkok: Suweriyasaan, 1999.
- ³³ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991.

Heroes or Villains

A Comparative Study of the Overseas Chinese Contribution to the Free Thai Movement and Their Role in the Yaowarat Uprising of 1945

Wasana WONGSURAWAT

The bombing of Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 7th 1941 left little to the imagination in terms of when the United States of America became embroiled in the Asia - Pacific front of the Second World War. When and why the rest of Asia was caught up in this horrendous international entanglement was and remains a much more complicated matter. The Republic of China under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek had formally declared war against the Empire of Japan in July of 1937 after a military confrontation at Marco Polo Bridge in the outskirts of Beijing. In fact, some six years earlier, in September 1931, the Mukden Incident had already triggered an invasion by Japanese troops. A Japanese puppet state had been operating in Manchuria for nearly five years before the Kuomintang government ever made a formal declaration of war.

In Thailand, textbooks of modern Thai history all date the Second World War from Monday, December 8th 1941, when Japanese troops arrived in the country demanding right-of-way to transport their armies en route to strategic battlefields in Burma and Malaya. Not unlike China, however, much had already happened in Thailand during the 1930s, prior to the arrival of Japanese troops. Most notably, Japan had been the key arbitrator in the Franco-Thai War (October 1940-May 1941) which ended with the allocation of all disputed territories to Thailand. What is more noteworthy, though perhaps generally less known, is the fact that many prominent members of the overseas Chinese community in Thailand had been involved in anti-Japanese activities and had been contributing to the Chinese war effort since the 1931 invasion of Manchuria.

In reality, much of what happened during and after the Second World War, especially regarding the Asia-Pacific front, was the outcome of events which occurred long before formal declarations of war were made by China or Thailand. To describe

this theatre of conflict as opening in 1941 leads to a rather skewed picture in the Thai case, and ignores the crucial role of the Republic of China and the overseas Chinese in the victory of the Allied Powers on the Asia-Pacific front.

A too-narrow cropping of the historical perspective also obscures the critical role of the overseas Chinese community in securing a favorable outcome for Thailand at the conclusion of the Second World War. The Free Thai Movement (FTM), which took so much credit for saving Thailand from the disastrous fate of being classified among the defeated Axis nations, was dominated by upper class Thai expatriates from Britain and the US. Their overseas Chinese comrades in the FTM were only grudgingly acknowledged as minor and insignificant players in what was and continues to be depicted as a prestigious Anglo-American-born movement. In Thailand, working class overseas Chinese who persevered in various underground anti-Japanese activities from the early 1930s, continue to be viewed in the popular imagination to this day as a secretive and malign force. Though they fought tirelessly against Japanese aggression for most of the 1930s and through the early 1940s, overseas Chinese political groups were categorized as secret societies, criminal gangs, and even communist terrorists through most of the Cold War years.

The 1945 Yaowarat Uprising in Bangkok's Chinatown occurred only months after the end of the war, even before the final peace agreement was settled. The character and timing of the riot reflects in Thai society a tenacious bias against the overseas Chinese. It showcases the highly volatile nature of Thai nationalist sentiments, the need for a convenient scapegoat, and the projection of overseas Chinese in the role of the conventional national *other*. Within a span of less than five years, patriotic overseas Chinese who had engaged in underground anti-Japanese activities in Thailand went from being enemies of the state during the period of the Phibunsongkhram – Axis alliance, to national heroes and brothers in arms of the Free Thai Movement (FTM), to fifth-column criminal hooligans to be shot dead on Yaowarat Street only days after FTM Chief, M.R. Seni Pramoj took office as Thailand's new Prime Minister. The post-war Thai government readily embraced their (new) Anglo-American allies but turned harshly against citizens of the Republic of China (the most prominent Allied Power in the Asia-Pacific region). The Yaowarat Incident raises difficult questions, not only in matters concerning the relationship

between the Thai state and its overseas Chinese minority, but also about the essential foundations of alliances within the Allied Powers, and Thailand's professed position as an active partner of the victorious nations.

Some problems with mainstream historiography concerning the Second World War in Thailand

The highly sensational nature of Japanese-American military encounters during the Second World War is not only phenomenal, but also appears to be exceptional rather than the norm. The bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 initiated formal and direct involvement by the US in the Asia-Pacific front. Spine-chilling Japanese *kamikaze* attacks marked the last ten months of the war. Finally, the atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 ended Japanese military resistance in two horrific mushroom clouds. The first and only actual use of nuclear weapons in the history of conventional warfare, the unconditional surrender by the Japanese Emperor himself, and the new world order in which the US emerged as the first nuclear superpower fixed the eye of history in the Asia-Pacific war on American involvement. The brutal naval engagements and the protracted and bloody battles for control of numbers of Pacific islands became part of Hollywood's vast lore, fully acknowledged in the mainstream of world history as well. Considering the dominant role of the US in the Cold War in Southeast Asia and its position as the most prominent ally and generous supporter of Thai military dictatorships through most of the 1960s and 1970s, it is not surprising that mainstream historiography concerning the Second World War in Thailand puts the US at center-stage during that critical period, though at the cost of ignoring other major players.

The official narrative of Thai history during the course of the Second World War focuses on the fluctuation between Thailand's two sets of alliances—the Japanese-Thai partnership, as confirmed by the Treaty of Alliance signed by Prime Minister Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram in December 1941, and the commitment to the Allied cause, represented by the legendary Free Thai Movement. Thailand's involvement in the war is often narrated as a sort of mirror image of the domestic political struggle that took place between the two major factions of the ruling People's Party. One was led by the militaristic and pro-Japanese Premier Phibunsongkhram,

the other by the civilian intellectual and pro-Allies Minister of Commerce-turned-Regent, Pridi Phanomyong. The British and American branches of the Free Thai Movement (led by Pridi Phanomyong and M.R. Seni Pramoj, respectively) were also jockeying for power toward the end of the war and afterward.

Classic works on Thailand in the Second World War—especially those published in the Thai language—accord only a marginal position for the role of China and the overseas Chinese in the impressive emergence of the Free Thai Movement to save the day at the conclusion of the war. Even within that marginal space, much is devoted to the problematic Sino-Thai state relations and the questionable position of the overseas Chinese in Thai nationalist politics—giving an overall impression that the Chinese proved to be much more of a hindrance than help to the Free Thai cause in the Second World War. Even less was mentioned of another major force among the Allied Powers. All things considered, it is almost impossible not to notice how heavily the Cold War mentality bored upon mainstream historiography in Thailand as it is nearly impossible to find any substantial mentioning of the role of the Soviet Union in the Asian front of the Second World War at all.¹

Fortunately, more recent works—also published in the Thai language—seem to display an increase awareness of China’s role in the Asia Pacific front of the Second World War. A few even managed to link that to the heroic accomplishments of the Free Thai Movement. However, the contributions of the US and Great Britain remain prominently at the centre-stage, vastly overshadowing the marginal accomplishments of Chiang Kai-shek’s forces and the magnitude of Chinese Diaspora supporting him. One most prominent mentions of this Chinese contribution was a brief—less than two full pages—summary of the four Free Thai missions to China during the last two years of the war, and even this ended with a rather feeble concluding statement,

“It is difficult to judge what exactly resulted from the four missions sent by Pridi Phanomyong [to China]. However, what is obvious is that these envoys led to the cooperation between Free Thai agents in and outside of Thailand. This was the first time Free Thai agents in Britain and America became aware that there was also a Free Thai Movement within Thailand.”²

Clearly, the author views the resistance movement in Thailand during the Second World War as a matter directly relating to Britain and the US. Even the FTM missions to China were only meaningful in that they made FTM agents outside of Thailand aware of the resistance movement within the country. China, despite being the destination of four missions sent by FTM leader Pridi Phanomyong himself, appeared to be little more than a rather limp ‘Plan B’ as regards Thailand’s fate at the conclusion of the war.

A grim reality of the Second World War is that approximately 60 million people perished during the course of it. Nearly half of those casualties (approximately 27 million) were civilians and soldiers of the Soviet Union. The second largest number of casualties was in China, where nearly 20 million died. The majority of Japanese fighting forces on the Asia-Pacific front during the Second World War were deployed in China. As mentioned earlier, Japanese troops began their invasion in 1931, when they occupied three northeastern provinces of China and soon after established the puppet state of Manchukuo. War was not officially declared until July 1937, nearly six years after the first invasion of Manchuria, but more than four years before Pearl Harbor. The total number of casualties estimated for this theatre of the war—which is also known as the Second Sino-Japanese War or the War of Resistance—represents more than half of all casualties from the Asia-Pacific front of the Second World War. No other Asian country fought longer or suffered greater losses in the war than China. Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek was the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in the China War Zone at the outbreak of the Pacific War, and China alone, out of all Asian countries, was accorded a seat in the United Nations Security Council following the conclusion of the war. Its significant contribution to this particular period in world history is acknowledged in that gesture.

The lopsided history of the Free Thai Movement

Considering the greatly enhanced role of the United States in world politics, American academia has had more than its fair share in the writing of the modern history of China and Southeast Asia. The US was also the birthplace of the postwar discipline of area studies, so it is actually not very surprising to see China’s

contribution in the Second World War overshadowed by America's story, despite the fact that China entered the war nearly a decade before the US. Nevertheless, the distorted histories of these great powers inevitably skew other perspectives of mid-20th century world history. Mainstream Thai historiography, for example, also exhibits a highly biased tradition. As mentioned earlier, the official Thai historical narrative is that, mostly because of the actions of the Free Thai Movement, Thailand was rescued from defeated nation status at the conclusion of World War II, despite having signed a treaty of alliance with Japan and having declared war on the UK. The supposedly heroic Free Thai Movement is depicted as an underground, anti-Japanese movement established, organized, and executed mostly by Thai expatriates and Thai students in Britain and the United States. This official version is predictably blind to the highly significant contributions of the Chinese government and the overseas Chinese, underground anti-Japanese movements. Overseas Chinese influence in matters relating to Thailand's position in the Second World War is virtually obliterated from mainstream historiography.

Mainstream historiography of Thailand's involvement in the Second World War tends to mark the beginning of the war on the evening of 7 December 1941 when Direk Jayanama, then the Minister of Foreign Affairs, was notified by the Japanese Ambassador of Japan's intention to transport its troops through Thai territory on military expeditions to British Malaya, Burma, and India. Premier Phibunsongkhram was away – supposedly on affairs of state - at the eastern border between Thailand and French Indochina. At two o'clock in the morning of 8 December, Japanese troops made amphibious landings at seven locations along the coast of the Gulf of Thailand. These troops encountered armed resistance from local militia and police forces at a few locations. Phibunsongkhram returned after daybreak to convene an emergency cabinet meeting. At seven o'clock in the morning, the Thai government ordered an end to all resistance and announced that Thailand would grant passage to Japanese troops. Almost immediately after the cabinet meeting was over, Pridi Phanomyong, then Minister of Finance, and the most outspoken opponent of Phibun's decision to collaborate, established a secret, anti-Japanese/pro-Allied movement with a few likeminded colleagues and close friends. At the same time, on the other side of the globe, M.R. Seni Pramoj, Thai Minister to Washington, notified the US State Department that Phibun's government no longer represented the true intentions of the

Thai people and that the Thai legation would no longer take orders from a Thai government under the control of Japanese troops. The Free Thai Movement (FTM) would, instead, represent the true intentions of the Thai people by doing its utmost to support the Allied Powers. Secret meetings following Pridi's and Seni's mutiny against Phibun's government marked the founding of the Free Thai Movement. These two individuals were the major leaders.³ A British branch of the Thai resistance soon joined the FTM with a sizable cohort of exiled members of the Thai royal family⁴ who headed small groups of Thai students overseas.

It is not difficult to see that this analysis and description of the FTM fits perfectly with the mainstream narrative of Thailand's position during the Second World War, which emphasizes the struggle between the patriotic Thai/British/American Free Thai Movement and Phibun's pro-Japanese government. In the same way that mainstream historiography tends to overemphasize the role of the US in the Asia-Pacific front of the Second World War, mainstream historiography in Thailand tends to overemphasize the role of the FTM. Despite the large number of literature devoted to this movement, the Free Thai Movement at the time of its earliest inception had very little credibility as an effective resistance movement. Even less confident were those whom the movement early on claimed as its allies. Documents from the British Foreign Office from early in 1942 reveal serious doubts and suspicion as to the purpose and practicality of the Free Thai Movement. One note describes "the small number of Siamese in the country [Britain] (they are well under 100) ... the majority (about 55) are young students, the remainder being largely made up of members of the discredited royal family."⁵ This movement was viewed hardly capable of any strategic assistance in terms of rallying support from the local populace against Phibun's pro-Japanese regime, or in mounting effective resistance against Japanese forces in Southeast Asia. The British Foreign Office appears to have been even less impressed by the American counterparts of the "young students" and "members of the discredited royal family,"

"...There are thus some slight chances of establishing a Free Thai movement. But it would be a mistake to try to hurry this on too quickly and in any event things are not going to be easy. Even the Thai Minister in Washington is not, according to what Mr. Butler tells me, a man of character, so that we are extremely short of

possible leaders. And there is not really any influential body of Thais either in this country [Britain] or in the United States.”⁶

By the end of 1942, it appeared that the Free Thai Movement had gained neither the confidence nor any substantial support from supposed backers among the Allies. Neither the British nor the Americans were willing to formally endorse the Free Thai Movement. Nor were they willing to unfreeze Thai government funds under their control to finance this fledgling resistance movement.⁷ The British Foreign Office was wary of endorsing a Thai resistance led by “members of the discredited royal family” on the one side of the Atlantic, or by an employee of the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs who had mutinied against his own government on the other. The US obviously enjoyed a closer working relationship with the Thai Minister to Washington, but Britain stood to lose much of its dominant influence in Southeast Asia if Seni led a Free Thai Movement sanctioned by the Allies. However, even the U.S. government, which stood to gain influence from Seni’s political rise in postwar Thailand, remained unsure of the practicality of granting endorsement for such an organization. Publicly expressed support might also put American noncombatants in Thailand at risk, and “might prejudice the chances of their getting the United States Minister at Bangkok out.”⁸

Having failed to gain official recognition from either Britain or the US, the Free Thai legend would have died quietly and anonymously had not it been for an historic and perhaps unexpected broadcast by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in February, 1943. The Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in the China War Zone made the following statement via a radio broadcast directed to the people of Thailand:

“I can give my solemn word that China as well as her Allies have no territorial ambitions in Siam and no intention of undermining her sovereignty and independence. The Siamese, however, should recognize the fact that the territory and freedom of Siam can only be restored to her by the victory of China and her Allies.”⁹

In its entirety, this broadcast emphasized that the Chinese state recognized Siam as being, like China, a victim of Japanese imperialism rather than the perpetrator of expansionist ideals. The Generalissimo’s broadcast was promptly endorsed and reaffirmed by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Foreign Office documents from

the British Public Record Office show that considerable pressure came from both the US State Department and from Pridi, as leader of the Free Thai Movement, for British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to also publicly endorse Chiang's policy towards Thailand, and to formally affirm support for the Free Thai Movement. However, no such declarations were forthcoming from the British side. The same documents also suggest that the Foreign Office remained concerned with various disputed territories in Burma and Malaya which were seized by Japanese troops and awarded to the Thai government throughout the course of the war.¹⁰ The British were, as a result, reluctant to commit to what seemed to be a rather generous postwar policy towards Thailand.¹¹

Only after Chiang Kai-shek's broadcast, Roosevelt's endorsement, and the cold shoulder from the British Foreign Office, did leaders of the Free Thai Movement come to seriously consider China as a sympathetic and effective ally whose helpful influence was to be actively encouraged. The first Free Thai mission to China set off on 28 February 1943.¹² They were a humble team of two individuals, the envoy and representative of Free Thai leader Pridi Phanomyong, Mr. Chamkad Balankura and his interpreter, Mr. Phaisan Trakunli. The Chamkad Mission was deployed to accomplish the following four major tasks, according to Pridi's agenda,

1. Convey Pridi's agenda to M.R. Seni Pramoj, the Thai Minister to Washington D.C. and leader of the American Branch of the Free Thai Movement, and have Seni negotiate that agenda with British and American authorities
2. Rally support from the Allied Powers for the future activities of the Free Thai Movement
3. Request intelligence and tactical support from the Allied Powers to help transport leading members of the Free Thai Movement and the pro-Allied faction in the Thai government that was to establish a government in exile in British India
4. Convince leaders of major Allied Powers (especially Britain) to allocate the then frozen funds of the Thai government to finance future activities of the Free Thai Movement¹³

Aside from managing to get in touch with Seni in a highly roundabout fashion through the authorities in Chongqing, it would be fair to say that the Chamkad Mission failed in every other objective. Documents from the KMT's Ministry of

Foreign Affairs clearly suggest that Chinese authorities, having discussed the matter with the British and other allies, did not take Chamkad Balankura seriously at all.

“From the information available, Foreign Office considers that B. [Chamkad Balankura] has gone off at half cock and has in fact no practical plan which could now profitably be put into effect.

Moreover, they do not think time is ripe to promote an active Free Thai Movement, since this would invite reprisals which would hinder action at a later date. Siamese army would probably be more of a hindrance than help at present and Japanese difficulties in running the country would probably be overcome with assistance of Siamese “Quislings”.

Foreign Office favour careful preparation of a Free Thai Movement now to be actively used at appropriate moment coupled with a go-slow political warfare offensive.

For the above reasons Foreign Office do not favour trying immediately to put into effect any scheme for getting Siamese leaders out of the country whether by air or secret exfiltration.

As regards ultimate development of a Free Siamese Movement, H. M. Government would propose to continue on their present lines. There is no present question either of the formal recognition of such a movement or unfreezing Siamese funds.”¹⁴

Consequently, no Free Thai leaders were smuggled out of Thailand; no Thai government in exile was established; and no frozen funds were reallocated to the Free Thai Movement as a result of Chamkad’s visit to Chongqing.

A second group of Free Thai envoys was sent by Pridi in August 1943 when it became obvious that the Chamkad Mission had been a complete failure. The second group was led by a former MP and influential personality in the overseas Chinese community in Thailand, Sa-nguan Tularak. Sa-nguan’s mission was to reiterate the objectives of the Chamkad mission. KMT foreign affairs documents of the Sa-nguan Mission clearly show that Sa-nguan, the lead negotiator of the mission, presented himself not so much as a Thai statesperson, but more as a leading member of the overseas Chinese community in Thailand—a group that had been in support of the Chinese war effort long before Thailand became directly involved in the Second World War. Representatives of the Chinese government seemed to favor this approach more than Chamkad’s previous attempt. Although the requests for assistance in the establishment of a Free Thai government in exile and the reallocation of frozen Thai government funds continued to be ignored, the Chinese government did agree to provide military resources for the training of Free Thai agents in Simao

and other areas in Southern China. There were also significant improvements in terms of communications and cooperation between the various branches of the FTM as a result of the Sa-nguan Mission. After the conclusion of the negotiations in Chongqing in December 1943, Sa-nguan and his chief assistant, Daeng Khunadilok, traveled to Washington to report to Seni, and continued their journey to join Allied headquarters in Kandy, Sri Lanka, as representatives of the Free Thai Movement.¹⁵

A third Free Thai mission was sent to Chongqing toward the conclusion of the war. MP Thawin Udon arrived in September 1944 to reaffirm the FTM's dedicated cooperation and support of the Allies and to assure the Chinese government in particular that the era of anti-Chinese nationalism in Thailand would most definitely come to an end, once the war ended with the victory of the Allies and the overthrow of the pro-Japanese Phibun regime. The following are the initial terms of postwar settlement put forward by the Chinese government and responded to with great respect by the Thai delegates,

“1. The Free Thai Provisional Government should be established with China's approval. After the Free Thai Movement successfully seizes power [in Thailand], it should immediately send representatives to discuss a diplomatic treaty and to make plans for the establishment of formal Sino-Thai diplomatic relations between our two nations.

2. After the establishment of formal Sino-Thai diplomatic relations, a Sino-Thai treaty of trade and commerce should be established within six months.

The treaty of trade and commerce mentioned above should include the following principles,

The principle of mutual benefit

‘Most-favored nation’ clause

Overseas subjects of both countries would be granted freedom to reside, conduct business, labor, travel, study, and practice religious faith [in both countries]

Exchange of consul personnel

3. All overseas Chinese who had been unlawfully expelled from Thai territory during the war must be allowed to return [to Thailand] and allowed the freedom of association with no interference from the Thai government.

4. The Thai government must compensate for all lost of overseas Chinese lives and property, which occurred in Thai territory during the time of [Japanese] occupation.

5. All laws, which were promulgated during the war and used to discriminate against or persecute the overseas Chinese, must be abolished. The Thai government's control of overseas Chinese education must also be modified accordingly after liberation [from Japanese occupation].¹⁶

Of all Free Thai missions to China during the Second World War, it would be fair to conclude that the Thawin Mission achieved the most practical and substantial outcome. Yet, the above mentioned Sino-Thai postwar settlement, which was the central concern of discussions between Thawin, the head of the Free Thai envoy, and Chinese authorities, is nowhere to be found in the mainstream narrative of Thailand's wartime history. It is not recorded even in publications devoted to the history and achievements of the Free Thai Movement.

Chinese Interest: a more logical explanation of Thai victory

In one of the most ironic historiographic twists, the mainstream narrative of Thai history during the Second World War credits the Free Thai Movement with saving Thailand from the fate of a defeated nation status at the conclusion of the war. In reality, the FTM did not and could not possibly have achieved anything of the kind. The most it had to offer was the outcome of the Thawin Mission, i.e. an assurance by a leading Allied Power which had already decided to support Thailand's postwar position of independence and sovereignty even before the arrival of the first Free Thai mission in Chongqing, with the expectation that the postwar Thai government would be a gracious friend of the Republic of China and the overseas Chinese. In other words, the Generalissimo is even more deserving of the heroic accolades to which the mainstream narrative in Thailand continues to assign to Pridi, Seni, and their Free Thai cohorts. However, Chiang Kai-shek did not come up with the idea of that historic, international radio broadcast in early February 1943 simply out of the goodness of his heart, or because of his rumored fondness for the sweet Chinese radish produced in Thailand. Documents from the KMT's Ministry of Foreign Affairs provide undeniable evidence that leading members of the overseas Chinese community in Thailand had been working in close connection with the Chinese government to carry out anti-Japanese activities in Thailand, supporting the war efforts of the Chinese government and making ceaseless attempts to improve Sino-

Thai relations generally and the Thai government's attitude in particular towards the overseas Chinese community in Thailand. From July 1932 (less than one year after the Japanese invasion of China's three northeastern provinces)¹⁷ to October 1943 (barely one month after the arrival of the Sa-nguan Mission) there were more or less regular monthly meetings of a body called 'the Sino-Thai problem discussion group' [中泰问题讨论会- zhong-tai wenti taolun hui].¹⁸ The discussion group consisted of representatives from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Overseas Chinese Affairs, together with representatives of the overseas Chinese community in Thailand. From this well-documented series of discussions, it is clear that as early as January 1940, overseas Chinese businesses were actively pledging support for the Chinese government through the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Thailand. The following is one of many lists of monthly donation quotas which the CCC reported to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Sino-Thai problem discussion group in January 1940,

- "1) rice merchants 50,000 baht
- 2) grain merchants 100,000 baht
- 3) medical industries 1,000 baht (at least)
- 4) overseas Chinese wholesalers 6,000 baht
- 5) slaughter houses and pig raisers 9,000 baht
- 6) general stores 3,000 baht (at least)
- 7) dyeing industries 1,000 yuan (at least)
- 8) insurance industries 1,600 baht
- 9) banking industries 500 baht
- 10) tobacco industries 1,000 baht
- 11) others (including laborers and students) will donate as much as they can afford
- 12) pawnshops 200 yuan
- 13) gold merchants 200 yuan
- 14) timber industries 5,000 baht",¹⁹

Aside from their active support of the Chinese war effort from the earliest years of the Chinese War of Resistance, the overseas Chinese community and their fertile business territory in Thailand represented a significantly wealthy resource for China's postwar reconstruction and for the Republic's future modernization projects. As far back as the early days of Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary activities, relying on overseas Chinese capital for China's development was considered a far healthier alternative to the politically dubious practice of acquiring foreign loans. Financial support from

overseas Chinese business tycoons in Thailand was similarly perceived. Hence, the political wellbeing of the Thai state was understood to help guarantee a healthy economic environment for overseas Chinese businesses. Thai sovereignty had an important role in the KMT's postwar recovery plans. The hidden agenda of the Republic of China's postwar foreign policies towards Thailand is spelled out most clearly in a report early in 1943 from the Sino-Thai problem discussion group,

“Of the four most important export products of Thailand—rice, tin, timber, and rubber—overseas Chinese are in charge of half of the rice industry, the majority of the timber industry (except teak), 5,700 Chinese are in the rubber industry and more than half of the so-called Thai people working in the Thai rubber industry are actually overseas Chinese,...half of the Thai tin industry was pioneered by the overseas Chinese. Moreover, most daily products used by Thai people are imported from China. After the war is over, Thailand could become an important market for Chinese fuel, machinery, and textile products.”²⁰

In other words, Thailand was best spared the status of a defeated nation, despite its formal alliance with Japan and its formal declaration of war against the Allies, for the sake of the wellbeing of the overseas Chinese and their massive business investments in Thailand. Chiang Kai-shek's government was counting on substantial and continuous financial support from the overseas Chinese community in Thailand for China's postwar reconstruction projects, counting on Thailand as a friendly source for raw materials and as a generous and reliable market for China's industrial goods in the postwar era. With its heroic contribution to the Allied war efforts in the Asia-Pacific theatre, China was sure to gain significant political clout in the world arena.²¹ Its generous postwar policy toward Thailand would not only assure its increasing influence in Southeast Asia, but would also contribute to a swift recovery of its war torn economy. Considering the position of the overseas Chinese in the economy of Southeast Asia at the time, and the long-term postwar reconstruction plans that had been carefully drawn out since the earliest days of the Japanese invasion, the Republic of China could have risen as an Asian superpower much sooner than the twenty-first century had it not been for the irreconcilable conflicts with the Chinese Communist Party.

The Yaowarat Incident

Denying the Overseas Chinese their place in Thai History

On the evening of 20 September 1945, a group of overseas Chinese patriots were rehearsing for the celebration of the ‘Double Tenth Anniversary,’ also known as the National Day of the Republic of China, which was due to take place on October 10th. It was indeed an occasion worth celebrating, considering that the eight-year, Second Sino-Japanese War had recently concluded with China’s victory. More importantly, as part of the larger worldwide conflict and the major arena of the Asia-Pacific front, China’s significant wartime contribution to the Allies would definitely elevate her politically in the new, postwar world order. As for the overseas Chinese in Thailand, their faithful contribution towards the Chinese war effort and to underground anti-Japanese activities from the onset of the Japanese invasion left little room for doubt that their position in Thai society was definitely set to improve. After all, the last Free Thai envoy to China had so promised, and the postwar Prime Minister of Thailand was none other than the founder and major leader of the Free Thai Movement, M.R. Seni Pramoj—the wartime Thai ambassador to Washington. Yet things did not turn out quite as planned. At seven o’clock, Thai police officers arrived to find preparations in full swing on Yaowarat Road.²² They began to close down the rehearsal, announcing that it was against Thai law to display foreign flags without the accompaniment of Thai flags. No one in the crowd had been aware of this law and there were no Thai flags ready to use in the rehearsal. As the officers were attempting to remove all Chinese flags from the scene, a vigorous scuffle erupted. Unable to subdue the increasingly hostile crowd, the police called for reinforcements. Chinatown was subsequently cordoned off, and by ten o’clock a full-scale shootout was in progress between a combined police-military force and members of the Yaowarat community.²³

The exact number of casualties varies significantly, depending on the source. Official Thai documents never admit to more than a dozen civilian deaths, while newspapers published in China, Hong Kong, and Singapore put the highest toll in the 30s or 40s.²⁴ According to the Thai authorities, the government had no choice but to

put an end to the unrest as swiftly and effectively as possible. The would-be celebrants - turned-rioters were described as armed and dangerous. They were fighting on their own turf in Chinatown and employing the upper floors of Yaowarat shop houses as pillboxes from which they fired at police and military personnel. There was considerable disruption in the area and the lives and property of the inhabitants of Bangkok's Chinatown—mostly overseas Chinese, no doubt – were being put at risk.²⁵ Despite the conciliatory tone of the government report, the damage to the overseas Chinese community in the Yaowarat area went far beyond the outburst of violence during the night of September 20th. Most businesses in the area closed down during the following week, either in protest of the heavy-handed methods of the government or out of fear of retaliation from the general public, who had been exposed throughout the period of the Second World War to anti-Chinese propaganda by Thailand's pro-Japanese government. Looting and robbery were rampant and law enforcement officers seemed to turn a blind eye. There were even reports of state officials engaging in unlawful searches and confiscation of private property in the Chinatown area.²⁶ According to official documents, as many as 9 days were required before the government managed to regain control of the situation, though life in Chinatown had yet to return to normality.²⁷

There was a vast discrepancy in the way the Thai government depicted the Yaowarat Incident for domestic and international audiences. The violence had broken out so soon after the conclusion of the war, and Thailand's status as a victorious or defeated nation was still being hotly debated among the leading Allied powers. Whether or not Thailand was to be accepted as a member of the newly created United Nations remained uncertain. Much depended on the approval of the five permanent members of the Security Council. China was one of them, and especially influential on matters concerning the Far East. China's support for Thailand's application to the United Nations was contingent upon the establishment of formal diplomatic relations. The violence in Yaowarat raised some serious questions. Bearing all this in mind, the Thai Foreign Ministry took great pains to reassure the Chinese government and the world community—especially the US and those under its influence—that the incident was nothing more than a minor conflict between the locals of Chinatown and law enforcement officers - more of a procedural misunderstanding rather than any sort of

racial discrimination. M.R. Seni had always been known as a friend of the Chinese and his government would certainly treat Chinese residents no differently from Thai citizens. Such were the general outlines of the article entitled, “Notable Achievements,” published in *Democracy* on 30 September, 1945, and “Sino-Siamese Amity Promoted Further,” published in *Liberty* on 2 November, 1945. Both newspapers were circulated locally in Washington, and both articles were submitted for publication by the Thai legation there.²⁸ Constant communication between the Thai legation and the Chinese Embassy in Washington reassured Chinese authorities that M.R. Seni’s government was being fair and thorough in investigating the Yaowarat Incident. Records of these communications reflect the eagerness of the Thai government to respond positively to any requests or suggestions from the Chinese Embassy in Washington that would help improve Sino-Thai relations and potentially lead to the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the two countries.²⁹

The apologetic tone of the Thai government’s communications with the Chinese Embassy and with other diplomats in Washington is in stark contrast to the portrayal of the Yaowarat Incident in the Thai media at the time and in later years in mainstream Thai historiography. Documents from the Department of Public Relations concerning the violence on Yaowarat Road in September 1945 indicate that the government was well aware of the anti-Chinese record of the wartime Phibun government. Official comments reflect some paranoia, a certain expectation that the overseas Chinese community would seek revenge in the form of a fifth column supporting a Chinese state and potentially gaining military control of Thailand. To be fair, suggestions had indeed been put forward by several leading Chinese academics that the Republic of China be allowed to station troops in Thailand during the first few postwar years—in the same manner as the US occupation of Japan. This would better ensure that the postwar Thai government would keep its Free Thai Movement promise to abolish all the anti-Chinese policies, laws, and regulations promulgated during the wartime Phibun regime.³⁰ Nonetheless, as the Generalissimo had clearly established in his historic broadcast to Thailand in February 1943 and reconfirmed through negotiations with the last Free Thai envoy, Thawin Udon, in September 1944, any breach of Thai independence and sovereignty was never seriously considered by the government of the Republic of China. Yet rumors were rampant and the threat

seemed so imminent that the Department of Public Relations felt the urgent need to publicize the following statement on 24 September 1945,

“...The authorities wish to stress once more, so that the Chinese people may not be deceived about the sinful rumours of Siam being defeated in the war [and] that the persons who spread such rumours have impure intentions and desire only to cause public disorder and harmful happenings.”³¹

That the Republic of China was among the victors in the Second World War was obvious from the day in August 1945 that Japan formally surrendered. At the end of September, however, it was still a matter for debate as to whether or not Thailand was now to be treated as friend or foe. The Department of Public Relations was justified in insisting that the rumor about “Siam being defeated in the war” was premature. On September 24th when this statement was published, however, the Thai government was still unable to state with full certainty that Thailand would definitely be spared the status of a defeated nation.³² The fate of the country now depended upon the decisions of the leading Allied powers, a small group of nations among which China had become a major player.

In the mainstream historiography of Thailand, the Yaowarat Incident is widely recalled as a provocation in which the overseas Chinese were incited by the prominent political position of China at the conclusion of the Second World War to take revenge against the Thai government for the anti-Chinese policies which had been enforced during the war. Thai sovereignty was insulted through the display of the Chinese national flag in the absence of the Thai national flag. Direk Jayanama states in his classic work, *Thailand and the Second World War*, that the Yaowarat incident forced Thailand to establish formal diplomatic relations with the Republic of China.³³ Direk’s treatment of the history of the overseas Chinese in Thailand is quite cursory, but with heavy emphasis on the generosity and tolerance of the Thai government, contrasted with suggestions of the increasing threat to the Thai state posed by resident overseas Chinese since the emergence of the Chinese revolutionary movement in the early 20th century. Direk makes no mention of Thawin Udon’s promise as representative of the Free Thai Movement to establish formal diplomatic relations with China once the war was over and a Free Thai leader became Prime Minister. Nor is there any mention of the crucial role played by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in

endorsing and encouraging the Free Thai Movement in his February 1943 broadcast. Nothing is said about the anti-Japanese underground activities in which the overseas Chinese risked so much long before the war officially arrived in Thailand. Chiang Kai-shek's crucial decision to back Thailand as a free and sovereign state in the postwar period hinged on the vitality and dedication of the overseas Chinese community residing there.

Looking critically from the Thai nationalist narrative, it is not difficult to see why the overseas Chinese are perhaps the most convenient group to be obliterated from the mainstream history of anti-Japanese resistance in Thailand. Considering the fact that much of the earliest foundations of Thai nationalist sentiments were established upon the anti-Chinese rhetoric of King Wachirawut (Rama VI), it would be fair to conclude that overseas Chinese participation in what eventually became the key to Thailand's national salvation is a major anomaly in the Thai nationalist narrative from the earliest decades of the 20th century to the end of the Second World War. They have long been designated as the ethnic/cultural *other* against which Thai nationality and nationhood were to be defined. Labeled *Jews of the Orient* by King Wachirawut himself—writing under the pseudonym, Atsawaphahu—the overseas Chinese continued to be ostracized and vilified as the economic colonizers and the main obstacle of Thailand's economic development and modernization throughout the prewar period of the People's Party's political dominance. During the war years, Phibunsongkhram's government actively promoted a heavily anti-Chinese brand of nationalism and promulgated a large number of anti-Chinese laws and regulations. The notion of national traitor was tagged on to the long list of insults related to the already troublesome position of the overseas Chinese vis-à-vis Thai nationalism. By the time the treaty of alliance between Thailand and the Empire of Japan was signed in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, this ethnic minority was not only obstructing Thailand's path to power and prosperity but also siding with the enemies in the greatest war the nation has ever participated in. To acknowledge the overseas Chinese wartime activities as the major driving force that brought about Thailand's postwar national salvation would pose far too many difficult questions for each and every nationalist policy maker of the prewar era—Wachirawut, Phibunsongkhram, and Luang Wichitwathakan, to name only the most prominent ones. Taking all this into consideration, one realizes that according the overseas Chinese their rightful place in

Thai history does not only dampen the vitality of the heroic Free Thai legend, but also threaten the legitimacy of the Thai nationalist narrative that has dominated mainstream historiography for most of the 20th

How dangerous is this history?

“When Japan surrendered in August 2488 B.E. (1945 C.E.) the Free Thai Movement in Thailand subsequently dissolved. The fight and resistance against the Japanese was over. But another sort of struggle continued. That is, the fight for power and the political game among members of the Free Thai Movement. Who could deny that the conflict and jealousy among Free Thai agents during the Second World War became an important cause for misunderstanding among them. This led to further conflicts that developed into irreconcilable fissures among Thai politicians.”³⁴

The dangerous history concerning the overseas Chinese contribution to the Free Thai Movement and the September 1945 tragedy of the Yaowarat Incident is not so much in the story of violent suppression. Modern Thai politics has weathered much bloodier incidents since the end of the Second World War. Compared with the ongoing violence in the South of Thailand today, a brief urban shootout with a dozen anti-government, civilian casualties might not make headlines these days. The profound danger of this history lies instead in its thorough deconstruction (demolition) of the myth of the Free Thai hero. The above quote from Thaemsuk’s *Thailand in the Era of the Second World War* begs the question of why “conflict and jealousy among Free Thai agents” should have led to “further conflicts that developed into irreconcilable fissures among Thai politicians.” The simplest answer is that many of those Free Thai agents became politicians in the postwar era. From this group – so disdainfully described by the British Foreign Office as consisting of “young students and members of the discredited royal family” – came four Prime Ministers, at least a dozen cabinet members, and a wealth of high ranking government officials, including a Governor of the Bank of Thailand and members of the Privy Council. Such a record is quite impressive, considering how little the Free Thai Movement actually managed to achieve as an underground resistance organization during the Second World War.

Considering the decisive role of the overseas Chinese in saving Thailand from the status of a defeated nation, it is understandable that the postwar ruling class would

prefer to wipe out any memory of Chiang Kai-shek's 1943 broadcast and the overseas Chinese contribution completely from mainstream historiography. Contrary to what Thaemsuk proposes in the last paragraph of her book quoted above, members of the Free Thai movement did not enter the political ruling class after their heroic contribution during the war. Rather, they were already members of the ruling class, destined to lead Thai politics and government long before the Free Thai Movement was even established. Most were educated in top universities and colleges in Britain and the United States. Considering the level and quality of the educational system in Thailand at the time, it was most certain that a group having attained such prestigious training would at least return to occupy higher administrative positions in the state bureaucracy. Seni did not become the postwar Prime Minister because he was the hero who saved Thailand from defeated nation status. His ascension to the office of Prime Minister appears to have had more to do with domestic politics and early influence of the Cold War race for world domination. Establishing Seni as the postwar Prime Minister of Thailand was a strategic move that set the stage for US dominance in Thai politics for the entire Cold War era.

Pridi's involvement in the Free Thai Movement would also appear to be motivated by a hidden agenda in domestic politics. Months prior to the outbreak of the Second World War in Southeast Asia, Pridi, the future leader of the pro-Allied Free Thai Movement and former law graduate from France, joined the rest of parliament in a standing ovation for Phibun's success in the Franco-Thai War (1940-1941). As a result of Japanese arbitration at the end of that brief conflict, Thailand gained control of the entire disputed area (24,039 [sq.km.](#)) along the Thai-French Indochina border. That moment was arguably the peak of Phibun's popularity. Despite Seni's repeated claims that Phibun's alliance with Japan did not represent the true will and intentions of the Thai people, neither Pridi nor any of the Thai people generally appeared to have any problem in receiving French territory with the support of Japanese arbitrators. Pridi's special relationship with the British government and the British branch of the Free Thai Movement had more to do with his strategic desire to counterbalance the dominance of his arch political rival, Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram and his military powerbase. What could be more predictable than that "conflict and jealousy" should arise between the British and American branches of the Free Thai Movement? In *Thailand in the Era of the Second World War*,

Thaemsuk provides a detailed description of the conflicts among several leading personalities in the Free Thai Movement. She states that there was definitely personal animosity between Seni and Pridi. To demonstrate the degree of hostility between the two Free Thai leaders, she quotes Seni's comment about the alleged cooperation between the Washington based FTM and Pridi's domestic branch,

“Most people think that my Free Thai Movement in the US worked in cooperation with Pridi's Free Thai Movement...In reality, all this is false...We've never communicated at all!”³⁵

Pridi enjoyed illustrious revolutionary credentials as a civilian leader of the People's Party, which was responsible for the 1932 Revolution that ended absolute monarchy in Thailand. Again, it is hardly surprising that Pridi would find his political position at odds with the conservative royalist, M.R. Seni Pramoj, who was also a distant member of the royal family. Their political differences were further aggravated after Seni became fully engaged in politics, helped to found the Democrat Party, and continued the rivalry with Pridi during the Cold War years.

In a place like Thailand where political influence enjoys more than its fair share in dictating mainstream history, it is not at all surprising that alternative narratives that challenge the legitimacy of the ruling powers tend to be meticulously muted and, at times, violently suppressed. Even the participation of the Free Thai Movement in the war was markedly played down once Phibun returned to power only a few years after the war and continued to be carefully muted throughout much of the era of military rule that followed up to the mid-1980s. Too much celebration of Free Thai heroism would have brought back too many suspicious memories of Phibun's fateful commitment with the Japanese and the perils that had once accompanied military rule in this country. While there is no doubt that anti-Chinese sentiments, which were provoked to feverish heights during the Second World War, most definitely played a crucial role in encouraging the violent suppression of Chinese dissent in the Yaowarat Incident of 1945, the more grievous implications of that tragic occurrence resonates with far more damaging influence upon the legitimacy of the nationalist narrative of mainstream historiography in Thailand. This is why, even at the present, despite the domineering rise of China in the world arena, the history of the Yaowarat Incident of 1945 remains muted and the overseas Chinese participation

in the Second World War in Thailand continues to be meticulously ignored. Too many of the major players in Thai politics today—the conservative royalist heirs of Seni Pramoj, the progressive leftist disciples of Pridi Phanomyong, even the military with its long and illustrious pro-American stance throughout the Cold War—rely on the myth of Free Thai heroism to allow a reevaluation of the overseas Chinese role into the mainstream narrative. Instead, a revised version of the old mainstream nationalist narrative has been in the making for quite sometime now to match the rising dominance of the People’s Republic of China in the world context. This version is not only completely unaware of the Yaowarat Incident, but has also entirely forgotten all instances of oppression and discrimination the overseas Chinese had suffered at the hands of various nationalist governments in Thailand from the early 20th century through to the end of the Cold War era. Hence, it allows the reemergence of the notion of the “patriotic overseas Chinese” [lukjin rak chat], only this time instead of meaning patriotic towards their ancestral homeland as the original meaning during the war, the term expresses singular and unwavering loyalty towards the Thai nation. Ironically, descendants of the national villains of the early 20th century have been reformed through the mainstream historical narrative to embrace the nationalism that vilified their ancestors and revere the same made-belief heroes who usurped the rightful place in Thai history from their own people.

¹ Direk Jayanama. *Thailand and the Second World War*. [Thai kap songkhram lok khrang thi song] (Bangkok: Prae Pittaya, 1966).

² Thaemsuk Numnon. *Thailand in the Era of the Second World War*. [Mueang thai samai songkhram lok khrang thi song] (Bangkok: Saitharn, 2005), pp.182-183.

³ Vichitvong Na Pombhejara. *The Free Thai Legend* [Tamnan Seri Thai]. (Bangkok: Saengdow, 2003), pp. 25-33.

⁴ This included the then recently abdicated King Prajadhipok (Rama VII), his queen Rambhai Barni, her brother HSH Prince Suphasawatwongsanit Svastivatana, and HRH Prince Chula Chakrabongse.

⁵ PRO: Foreign Office; 371/31862, “Free Siamese Movement: question of releasing Siamese funds to finance the movement,” in *Free Thai Movement*, June 1942.

⁶ PRO: Foreign Office; 371/31862, “Free Thai Movement in Great Britain and the United States,” in *Free Thai Movement*, February 1942.

⁷ PRO: Foreign Office; 371/31862, “Free Siamese Movement: question of releasing Siamese funds to finance the movement,” in *Free Thai Movement*, June 1942.

⁸ PRO: Foreign Office; 371/31862, “Free Thai Movement in Great Britain and the United States,” in *Free Thai Movement*, February 1942.

⁹ AH: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0703(4)012 “Report from the 32nd meeting of the Sino-Thai Problem discussion,” in *DSTP*, 5 April 1943. (See also, PRO: Foreign Office; 371/35983, *Chiang Kai-shek’s broadcast to Siam*, 1943.)

¹⁰ All such territories were returned to British control at the end of the Second World War (See, PRO: Foreign Office; 371/54362, *Terms of Peace Agreement*, 1946.)

¹¹ PRO: Foreign Office; 371/35983, *Chiang Kai-shek’s broadcast to Siam*, 1943. See also, PRO: Foreign Office; 371/35979, *Post-war settlement with Siam*, 1943.

¹² It was later claimed that Pridi had attempted to send a group of representatives to China since early 1942, but the group mysteriously disappeared during the course of the journey and never made it to China. Documental evidence that could substantiate this claim have been discovered neither in the British Public Record Office nor among the KMT documents in Academia Historica in Taiwan. The only record of this illusive mission is from the third-person account of Malai Chuphinit, writing with his pseudonym ‘Nai Chanthana,’ in *X.O.Group*. (See, Nai Chanthana. *X.O.Group*. (Bangkok: Kao Na, 1954).)

¹³ Sawat Sisuk. “Chamkad Balankura Mission” [Patibatkan Chamkat Phalangkun], in *Free Thai Movement: Observations on the “Chamkad Balankura Mission” and certain military operations (funerary memorial of Dr. Sawat Sisuk)* [Seri Thai: Kho Sangket “Patibatkan Chamkat Phalangkun” lae Patibatkan thang thahan bang rueang (anuson ngan phrarachatan ploeng sop Dr. Sawat Sisuk)] (Bangkok: n.p., 1995), p.38.

¹⁴ AH: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0737(1)001 “Most confidential on Balankura, from British Legation,” in *The Free Thai Movement (1)*, 13 May 1943.

¹⁵ AH: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0737(1)001 “Thailand’s anti-Japanese leader, Sa-nguan Tularak visits China,” in *The Free Thai Movement (1)*, 17 September 1943.

¹⁶ AH: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0737(2)001 “Principles of political negotiations with Thailand,” in *The Free Thai Movement (2)*, December 1944.

¹⁷ Better known as the ‘Mukden Incident’ or ‘Manchurian Incident,’ the Japanese invasion of the three northeastern province of China occurred on 18 September 1931.

¹⁸ AH: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0703(1)012, *Discussion of Sino-Thai Problem*, July – October 1932.

 AH: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0703(2)012, *Discussion of Sino-Thai Problem*, November 1939 – December 1940.

 AH: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0703(3)012, *Discussion of Sino-Thai Problem*, August 1941 – June 1942.

 AH: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0703(4)012, *Discussion of Sino-Thai Problem*, 2 June 1942 – October 1943.

¹⁹ AH: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0703(2)012, “Primary Reports and Suggestions,” in *DSTP*, 15 January 1940.

²⁰ AH: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0703(4)012, *Discussion of Sino-Thai Problem*, 2 June 1942 – October 1943.

²¹ With the establishment of the United Nations on 24 October 1945, China did indeed gained the much coveted seat as a permanent member of the UN Security Council along with the US, UK, USSR, and France.

²² One of the few main roads of Bangkok Chinatown.

²³ NA: [2] ๙.๙. 0201.77/16 *Report to the Prime Minister concerning the unrest on the night of September 20th 2488 B.E.*, 22 September 1945.

²⁴ AH: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0656. *Siam persecutes the overseas Chinese*, 1945.

²⁵ NA: [2] ศ.ร. 0201.77/16 *Report to the Prime Minister concerning the unrest on the night of September 20th 2488 B.E.*, 22 September 1945.

²⁶ NA: [2] ศ.ร. 0201.77/16 Letter from Minister of Interior to the Prime Minister concerning allegations of a robbery committed by military and police officers, 15 November 1945.

²⁷ NA: [2] ศ.ร. 0201.77/16 *Minutes of meeting on supplying and selling food to the general public due to mass closing down of Chinese food stores*, 25 September 1945.

²⁸ NA: [2] ศ.ร. 0201.77/16 *Letter from Minister of Interior to the Prime Minister concerning Sino-Thai conflict in Bangkok Chinatown*, 22 November 1945.

²⁹ NA: [2] ศ.ร. 0201.77/16 *Letter from Minister of Interior to the Prime Minister concerning Sino-Thai conflict in Bangkok Chinatown*, 30 October 1945. See also, AH: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0656. *Siam persecutes the overseas Chinese.*, 1945.

³⁰ Skinner, G. William. *Chinese Society in Thailand*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957), pp.281-282.

³¹ NA: [2] ศ.ร. 0201.77/16 *Communiqué from Department of Publicity*, 24 September 1945.

³² Thailand's postwar status was firmly established only after the *Formal agreement for the termination of the state of war between Siam and Great Britain and India* was ratified by both parties on 1 January 1946. (See, Direk Jayanama. *Thailand and the Second World War*. [Thai kap songkhram lok khrang thi song] (Bangkok: Prae Pittaya, 1966), p.509.)

³³ Direk Jayanama. *Thailand and the Second World War*. [Thai kap songkhram lok khrang thi song] (Bangkok: Prae Pittaya, 1966), pp.535-541.

³⁴ Thaemsuk Numnon. *Thailand in the Era of the Second World War*. [Mueang thai samai songkhram lok khrang thi song] Bangkok: Saitharn, 2005, p.197. [author's translation]

³⁵ Thaemsuk Numnon. *Thailand in the Era of the Second World War*. [Mueang thai samai songkhram lok khrang thi song] Bangkok: Saitharn, 2005, p. 187.

Beyond ‘Jews of the Orient’

A New Interpretation of the Problematic Relationship between the Thai State and Its Ethnic Chinese Community

Wasana WONGSURAWAT

Anecdote: unsung heroes of an unlikely nationalist narrative

Among its amazing records of diplomatic ingenuity and its incredible propensity for double talk, one of the most impressive achievements of the Kingdom of Thailand—or Siam as it was officially known up to 1939—in the international arena was its ability to side with the victors at the conclusion of the Second World War despite having entered into formal alliance with the Empire of Japan shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Permanently enshrined as national heroes of this near-impossible feat were the esteemed members of a group known as the ‘Free Thai Movement’ or the ‘XO Group.’ This was a rather fragmented pro-Allied group which consisted mainly of three branches; the American, the British, and the Thai. The Free Thai Movement (FTM) came into being almost as soon as the Thai government proclaimed its allegiance to Japan. M. R. Seni Pramoj the Thai Minister to Washington D.C. declared that the Treaty of Alliance with Japan did not represent the true intentions of the Thai people. He therefore announced the establishment of the Free Thai Movement that would lead the Thai nation in support of Allied forces and fight towards the eventual defeat of Japan and the ‘liberation’ of Thailand. Soon after, a similar declaration was made on the opposite shores of the Atlantic. A British branch of the FTM was established under the leadership of Prince Subhasavastiwongse Snith Savastivatana—brother-in-law and close confidant of King Prajadhipok Rama VII who had abdicated and was living in exile.¹ The two foreign branches of the FTM consisted mostly of Thai students overseas, non-cooperating diplomatic personnel, and exiled members of the royal family. There was a third, albeit highly secretive, branch of the movement in Bangkok, which, at times, acted as the headquarters. Leading members of the Thai branch were pro-Allied government officials, officers of the armed forces, members of parliament, and well-respected civilian socialites. The grand master of the movement in Thailand was an agent with the codename ‘Ruth.’ It was not until after the conclusion of the war that his true identity was revealed as the wartime Minister of Finance, Pridi Phanomyong.²

While the true extent of the FTM's contributions towards an Allied victory was never clearly spelled out, stories of their intrigues—FTM training camps in China and British India and nighttime parachute drops into Siam with nearly immediate arrests, only to be released soon after because the Thai police chief also happened to be an FTM agent. These were the highlights of the official narrative of Thailand's involvement in the Second World War. 'Special circumstances' allowed Thailand to stand among the victors of the war, and Seni Pramoj became the postwar Prime Minister. It is noteworthy that from this relatively small group of a few dozen leading members, there emerged three more Prime Ministers and more than a dozen ministers in Thailand's numerous cabinets of the postwar era. Western-educated, upper class members of the Free Thai Movement definitely make handsome heroes in Thai nationalist history of the postwar era. Their intimate historical ties with Britain and America made it much easier to lead Thailand firmly into the anti-Communist camp during the Cold War years. However, it was not this rather exclusive clique of handsome rebels who were the key contributors to the fortunate outcome for Thailand in the Second World War.

In fact, although the FTM was first established in the US and Britain, the first leading Allied power to officially endorse the movement was the Republic of China. In February 1943, the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in the China War Zone, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, broadcast to the world that he believed Thailand was also a victim of Japanese imperialism and that upon Japan's defeat, liberated Thailand should be allowed to remain as sovereign and independent as her fellow Allied victors.³ Only after the Generalissimo's declaration, did American Commander-in-Chief, President Roosevelt, make a similar declaration, seconding Chiang's endorsement and Thailand's position in the war. Britain, on the other hand, never officially endorsed the FTM nor did they ever confirm their support for Thailand's pro-Allied claims. Prior to Chiang's historic broadcast, neither the British nor the Americans were willing to officially endorse the FTM and communiqués between the two governments strongly suggested that both regarded the movement as "*more hindrance than help*" to Allied operations in the Far East.⁴ Chiang was willing to take the initiative in supporting a country whose government had entered into formal alliance with China's arch enemy in the war because of the postwar potential of the Chinese community in Thailand to provide financial support for the Republic's various reconstruction and modernization projects. Up to the conclusion of the Second World War, Thailand hosted the largest ethnic Chinese community in the world outside Mainland China. This

community, despite its many factions, cliques, and internal conflicts, were united in support of Chinese resistance against Japan's invasion as early as the Mukden Incident of 1931—a full decade before the US became officially involved in the war. Even though the Thai government promulgated many anti-Chinese laws from the late 1930s through most of the war years, the Republic of China, a the leading Allied power in the Far East, was able to insist that the Thai state abolish all anti-Chinese regulations and abandon all nationalist policies that were against the interests of its Chinese minority. When Thailand emerged from the war among the victors, a more stable and prosperous environment was guaranteed for the country's millions of ethnic Chinese, who would continue to dominate the Thai economy and to pass along their substantial financial support for China's postwar reconstruction. However, the mainstream official narrative of the history of Thailand in the Second World War hardly mentions the Republic of China and accords none of the credit for the favorable outcome of the war to the ethnic Chinese community in Thailand.⁵

Beyond *Jews of the Orient*: Complexity of anti-Chinese Propaganda

The scholar's household remedy for explaining the absence of any 'Chinese connection' in this story is that the Thai ruling class had selected their nation's largest and most economically influential ethnic minority as a foil, the socio-cultural *other* against whom Thai nationalism could be constructed. This theme, which has been played out over and over again to explain almost all that appears racially biased in the Thai state's policy towards its local Chinese population, is clearly wearing thin. And it cannot convincingly answer questions from the opposite direction, i.e. why the ethnic Chinese in Thailand seem to have fared better than their counterparts in neighboring countries, or how the case of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand acquired the reputation of being a 'success story' of ethnic and cultural assimilation. Before embarking on a quest for a better explanation of the high profile history of the Free Thai Movement, it is first necessary to establish a better understanding of the old standard explanation, why it is neither a correct nor a helpful line of inquiry, and why a new direction must be sought in order to fully resolve the Thai-Chinese nationalist riddle.

The Thai nation and nationalist movement was to be negatively defined by comparative differentiation from local ethnic Chinese communities. The Chinese were singled out as the

negatively contrasting *Other*, so the story goes, because they were the most substantial and influential ethnic minority in the realm. This rationale has come into being through a comfortable Eurocentric mindset and the propaganda of King Vajiravudh, taken at face-value. It is a tempting combination. The Oxford-educated monarch virtually spelled it out in one of his most controversial writings, *Jews of the Orient*.⁶ King Vajiravudh Rama VI (r. 1910-1925) has been credited by many as the father of the first Thai nationalist movement and is perhaps best known in international Thai studies circles as the most outspoken anti-Chinese leader of Thailand. *Jews of the Orient*, his most notorious publication on this matter, was first published in the Thai language as social commentary in the royally sponsored newspaper *Nangsuephim Thai* in 1914.⁷ His article compared the economic domination of the Chinese ethnic minority in Siam to that of the Jews in Europe. The king wrote under a pseudonym *Atsawaphahu*, widely known to be his favorite penname for socio-political matters, pointing out that the Chinese, like the Jews, were loyal only to their own people. The Chinese, he noted, were more than willing to register as subjects of foreign empires because of the financial and political advantages accruing to foreign subjects, for example, tax evasion, social security, and extraterritorial rights. They could not be relied upon as patriotic citizens of the modern nation because they refused to assimilate or contribute wholeheartedly to their host countries. Towards the end of the article, he further concluded that the Chinese are actually even worse than the Jews since, unlike the Jews, the Chinese had a nation-state of their own ethnic group—the Republic of China. While the Jews dominated the economy in Europe, they also spent their riches and re-invested their wealth in their host countries. The Chinese, on the contrary, would siphon as many resources and as much wealth as possible from their host country in order to remit it to the land of their ancestors. “Like vampires,” the king concluded with a horrific metaphor, the Chinese would suck the life blood and fatally drain the fledgling Thai nation-state if they were not brought under control.

To be fair, the ‘anti-Chinese’ label was not applied to Vajiravudh because of a single outrageous newspaper article written during an unguarded moment of nationalist fervor. Rama VI was a prolific author, and among his massive *oeuvre* were more than a few pieces—both fictional and non-fictional—in which an anti-Chinese theme can be easily and readily recognized. Among his non-fictional works, some of the well-known, well-loved, and frequently republished are the essays, *Mud on Wheels*, *Thailand*, *Wake Up!* and *The Cult of Imitation*.⁸ In *Huachai Nakrop* [Warrior’s Heart], perhaps the best known of his fictional writings, Vajiravudh chose to

depict as the most detested of all his villains a sly and conniving Chinese law student.⁹ Chinese characters, portrayed with hostility either as villains or fools, have an undeniably vivid role to play in much the fictional writings of the 6th King. If a Vajiravudhian story takes place in a Thai setting, the villain and/or comic character will be Chinese, in the same way that stories set in the European context by the same author frequently contain depictions of detestable Jews. The comparative theme of the Jews in Europe and the Chinese in Siam was indeed a recurring one in the king's prolific literary output. Racist generalizations that members of these two ethnic minorities were stingy, deceitful, and untrustworthy are pretty hard to ignore in close readings of Vajiravudh's works, both fictional and non-fictional.

Another good reason supporting the anti-Chinese case against Rama VI is the fact that his reign, from the earliest years, was profoundly affected by the Chinese Revolution. In 1912, barely a year after Vajiravudh ascended the throne, there was an abortive revolution attempt which included a plot to assassinate the king. Siam would then become a republic in a similar style as the Republic of China that had been founded only a few weeks earlier. Chinese influence upon the failed revolutionaries was so evident that many called the incident 'kabot kekmeng' [kekmeng rebellion], *kekmeng* being the Thai-Chinese pronunciation of *geming* [革命], which is the Chinese term for 'revolution.' The group consisted mostly of low-ranking officers in the army. The leader was Captain Khun Thuaihanphitak (Leng Sichan M.D.), an army physician of Chinese descent with close ties to supporters of Sun Yat-sen in Chinese journalist circles in Siam of the early 20th century. It was obvious that many among the 91 officers arrested in the failed plot were well informed about novel alternative modes of government and political systems from translations of Chinese political speeches and commentaries into Thai—especially those of Sun Yat-sen and his supporters. Some even suggested that Leng was selected as the leader because he had been trained in the same profession as the Chinese revolutionary and first provisional president of the Republic of China, Sun Yat-sen.¹⁰

Not surprisingly, anti-republicanism appears to be another prominent theme of Vajiravudh's writings. Non-fictional pieces such as his translation of E. J. Dillon's article on China's political disintegration in *Nineteenth Century and After*¹¹ and his own article *Wangti ong mai* [the new emperor]¹² criticized the ignorance and naïveté of Chinese revolutionaries for overthrowing the flawed yet sound and time-tested political system of the Qing Dynasty only to

replace it with a political tyrant like Yuan Shikai who had no genuine interest in democracy. Time and again, the king asserted that revolutionary movements, even the ones that claimed to be successful, could only result in destruction of time-honored traditions. Revolution tended to end up dragging the nation backwards into a state of chaos without providing any effective governing system or encouraging any degree of progress or modernity. In Vajiravudh's fictional works, China is often alluded to as the example of how the revolution does not work. One very eloquent instance of this is found in the play *Chuai Amnat* [coup d'état] when a group of army officers debate the pros and cons of revolution:

Cassio: And what could assure us that the rich would not again enter the new parliament in hordes? And if they get the majority [of seats in the parliament] would power not return to them again? If that were the case, it would be as if only the person of the monarch had been transformed into a president. Would that be enough, my friend? China has become a republic already for many years. Does it at all appear to be in a better state [than it was before the revolution]?¹³

The same sort of counter-revolutionary propaganda could also be found, albeit in more subtle forms, in many other Vajiravudhian fictions. One among this author's favorite examples is the villain, Sun Beng, in *Huachai Nakrop* [Warrior's Heart]. The play was about an imaginary battle between Siam and an encroaching European imperialist power. In the story, Thai people fight bravely against the enemy as members of the armed forces, civilian militia of the Wild Tiger Corp, and patriotic civilians providing support behind the frontlines. Sun Beng, who is of Chinese descent and a student of law, registers as a subject of the enemy empire, despite having been born and lived in Siam all his life. In time of war, he betrays his Thai compatriots in an attempt to save his own skin and garner favors from the imperialists. Nonetheless, in the end, Sun Beng's deceitfulness and treachery is too disgusting even for the enemy to stomach, and he is ordered to be executed by the imperialist general. The play has a happy ending when imperialist troops withdraw in the face of the bravery and dedication of Thai patriotism. Sun Beng is certainly a parody of Sun Yat-sen or Sun Wen or 'Sun Bun' as he was known in the Thai-Chinese/Chaozhou pronunciation. The character is a Chinese person who presents himself as a modern intellectual, well-versed in Western knowledge, and critical of the Thai ruling class. Yet, in the end, he proves to be a coward and a traitor, willing to compromise everything in order to save his own skin. The play is also critical of many in the Chinese merchant class who lived and made money in Siam all their lives while registering as European subjects so as to enjoy

extra-territorial rights and escape burdensome and unpleasant responsibilities in time of war. As convincing as such evidence may be in justifying the anti-Chinese accusations directed at King Vajiravudh, there is nonetheless considerable counter-evidence indicating that the Jewish analogy is not the key to a comprehensive understanding of the Thai state's relationship with the ethnic Chinese from the mid-19th century to the present.

Two compelling facts undermine the argument that the Chinese ethnic minority was targeted as the socio-cultural *other* against which the modern Thai nation was to be constructed, just as the Jews were used to fuel anti-Semitic nationalist movements in the West. First is the sheer magnitude and proportion of ethnic Chinese within the total population of Thailand. By some measures, persons of Chinese ethnicity comprise the largest ethnic group in the realm. A census conducted during Vajiravudh's reign showed a total population in Siam of slightly less than 10 million.¹⁴ An estimation found in Chinese Republican documents around the same period suggested that there were between 3-3.5 million ethnic Chinese residing in Siam—the largest concentration in the world outside of the Chinese Mainland.¹⁵ That is, roughly one third of the total population of Siam was Chinese enough to be considered national citizens by the government of the Republic of China at that time. One third, by definition, could be considered a minority with the remaining two thirds being the majority. However, the only information that could be verified from the above mentioned Thai census records and Republican Chinese estimation is the fact that the remaining two thirds of the population of Thailand were not considered 'Chinese' by either government. There is no concrete evidence to suggest that the remaining two thirds formed a homogenous ethnic majority. In fact, the few and fragmented anthropological studies that have been completed on this matter would tend to suggest the opposite—that the non-Chinese two thirds actually consisted of a wide range of ethnic groups; Lao, Mon, Khmer, Viet, to mention only a few prominent components. It is nearly impossible to prove absolutely at this point in time that the Chinese did make up the largest and most substantial ethnic group in Siam. Nonetheless, there are statistical data and historical records readily available at present which point to the fact that the Chinese in the late 19th to early 20th centuries in Siam were a much larger proportion of the total population than were the Jews in Britain during the same period. Severe discrimination against such a substantial group within the population risked tremendous socio-political and economic repercussions. It is very unlikely that

the Siamese ruling class would choose to emulate Victorian anti-Semitism in the Thai Chinese context.

The second and perhaps more important flaw in the Jewish analogy is the fact that the Chinese in early 20th century Siam were not only the dominating force in the Siamese economy. They were also highly influential in politics. As G. William Skinner has pointed out quite clearly in his landmark *Chinese Society in Thailand*, by Vajiravudh's reign, more than half of the Chakri dynastic bloodline was Chinese.¹⁶ This was, moreover, not a closely guarded secret. It was a well known fact that, at least up to the 19th century, the Siamese royal family was fond of garnering financial support through matrimonial links with ethnic Chinese tycoons who tended to be both the richest in the realm and only a couple of generations away from their ancestral homeland in Southern China. Chinese style ancestral worship ceremonies were, and still are carried out regularly within palace grounds. At least from the reign of Chulalongkorn Rama V onwards, every monarch and/or crown prince has made an official visit in person to Bangkok's Chinatown. Vajiravudh himself referred to the fact that the royal bloodline was also partly Chinese in many of his fictional and non-fictional writings—including the highly polemical piece in question, *Jews of the Orient*.¹⁷ This was certainly not the case for the British royal family and Jews in the British context of the late 19th to early 20th centuries. In other words, for Vajiravudh to have supported active discrimination against the ethnic Chinese could, in many ways, have undermined his own legitimacy as the ruling monarch. That would have been reckless indeed in the world of the early 20th century, when an international wave of revolution had already toppled many other royal families.

The Art of Surviving in a Shifting Universe

The Thai government's discriminatory policies and propaganda against the ethnic Chinese can be explained in a more logical, realistic and ultimately convincing fashion. The Jewish analogy has acted as a sort of red herring, distracting observers from better explanations as to why the roles of China and the ethnic Chinese in the favorable outcome of the Second World War for Thailand have been so successfully expunged. The unpacking of this story may very well extend much further back into history than the reign of King Vajiravudh or even that of his father and grandfather. For most of the early modern period up to the present day, Siam or Thailand as it is known today has almost always remained at the periphery of world power, both

in terms of politics and economic might. Through most of the early modern period the country remained relevant and preserved a modicum of sovereignty and independence thanks to the Siamese ruling class' ability to adjust and adapt to major changes at the core of Siam's socio-political and economic universe. These critical survival skills have also played a central role in guiding Thailand throughout the modern era. The state's policies and propaganda concerning its ethnic Chinese population have always been part and parcel of a fundamental and skillful reliance on adaptation. A clear pattern of synchronized motion in Siam's China and ethnic Chinese policies in the context of global power shifts is first visible in the 18th century.

China dominated the world of the 18th century, both economically and culturally. The period was the apex of Manchu influence with three consecutive reigns of visionary and highly competent emperors—Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong.¹⁸ It was without a doubt the 'Golden Age' of the Qing Dynasty. For Siam, the 18th century was a rather tumultuous period, especially towards the end. Most traumatic for early modern Siam was the second and final fall of Ayutthaya to Burmese troops in 1767. That catastrophic end of one of the grandest capitals and port cities of Southeast Asia brought to a close the Ayutthayan period that had persisted for more than four centuries. The traumatic experience of that collapse left a severe and lasting impression in the historical perception of the Thai people in a way that might be comparable to the tradition of lament that followed the 1644 fall of the Ming in the Chinese context. The degree of political dislocation is apparent in the fact that, less than a year after the fall of Ayutthaya, Siam declared independence under the leadership of a general who was neither the progeny of any Ayutthayan royalty nor a scion of any aristocratic family. In 1768, Taksin a former army commander of Chinese descent, established himself as king and founded a new capital city, Thonburi, further south on the west bank of the Chaophraya river. Taksin's Chinese ancestry was never a secret. In fact, he capitalized on his Chinese connections. Prior to his return to seize control of the central plains from Burmese troops, Taksin garnered much support in supplies and manpower from the eastern coastal ports of Rayong and Chanthaburi. Both were traditional ports of Chinese merchants and host to one of the largest Chinese communities in Siam. China and the ethnic Chinese community in Siam also played a major role in Taksin's postwar reconstruction plans. He invited his Chinese friends and relatives, not only from the eastern provinces, but also those in his ancestral hometown in Chaozhou of South China, to settle and set up shops in the new capital. Thonburi, according to Taksin's vision, was to become a prosperous port city driven by

the China trade. He also invested much time and effort in procuring the Qing court's approval of his kingship in order to enter into the lucrative tribute trade system with China. The latter attempt was, however, not as easily accomplished. It was not until the last years of his reign that Taksin finally gained approval as the legitimate monarch of Siam with full rights to dispatch tribute bearing missions to the Chinese emperor. Beijing's stamp of approval for any Southeast Asian monarch hoping to tap the lucrative Chinese tribute system of the 18th century was profoundly important. When Taksin was deposed by his chief lieutenant, Chaophraya Chakri established himself as Rama I, the first king of the current Chakri Dynasty. The new king intentionally misrepresented himself, however, as a member of Taksin's clan. Despite not having any known Chinese ancestors, Rama I adopted Taksin's Chinese clan name, 'Zheng' [郑], in order to enjoy continued access to the Chinese tribute trade as Taksin's heir.¹⁹

Well into the early decades of the 19th century, the China trade continued to play a crucial role in the reconstruction of war-torn Siam, shoring up the economic strength and stability of the newly established Chakri Dynasty. The most obvious indication of the importance of this trade is the fact that Prince Chetsadabodin, son of Rama II and one of his consorts, was able to ascend the throne as King Nangklao Rama III (r. 1824-1851) due to the great wealth and influence he had managed to amass as overseer of Siam's trade with China throughout his father's reign. Prince Mongkut, the firstborn son of Rama II's queen and the rightful heir to the throne, had to wait a quarter of a century to ascend the throne as King Mongkut, Rama IV (r. 1851-1868) when his half-brother passed away.

During the early decades of the 19th century, the ethnic Chinese played a crucial role, both from the top down and the bottom up, in driving the Siamese economy. Prominent Chinese entrepreneurs and leading personalities in the Chinese community in Siam often served as trade agents in the court's monopoly of international trade to the east of the kingdom. The China trade was by far the most significant through most of the 18th and early 19th centuries, and Chinese trade agents allowed the Siamese court to tap into the extensive network **via the** Chinese merchants who were so highly influential in the intra-Asian maritime trade of that era.

When Rama III decided to adopt the colonial practice of tax-farming in the early 19th century, prominent Chinese merchants acquired most of the contracts for extremely lucrative tax farms. Though the practice of tax farming in Southeast Asian colonies had only recently come in for

severe criticism, tax farms were fundamental to the financial stability of the Siamese court through most of the early 19th century.

At the grass roots level as well, ethnic Chinese were also a crucial driving force in the economy. This was due to the system of *corvée* labor that had been the backbone of the population control system in feudal Siam since the Ayutthayan period. The *corvée* system required all male commoners between the ages of 15 and 70 to serve the state for a period each year. Service could be in the form of manual labor in peace time, for example, constructing roads or digging canals etc. The system encompassed conscription for military service in times of war. During the heyday of the system in the 18th century, peasants were expected to serve the state in alternate months or up to six months per year. The system tied the population to the land, ensuring that they could be efficiently taxed and drafted for state service. Consequently, the majority of Siamese commoners in the age of the *corvée* system made their living by working the land as peasants while a small minority occupied the aristocratic ruling class.

In this socio-political context, however, the ethnic Chinese were positioned in a peculiar gap within the class system. They were exempted from *corvée* labor requirements as they were considered to be non-native migrants. Yet, unlike most other foreigners who were limited to clearly designated and well-policed foreign settlements in the vicinity of the capital city, the Chinese, due to their long historical relations and great familiarity with Siamese natives, were allowed the freedom to travel throughout the realm of Siam. As a result, through centuries of the strict enforcement of the *corvée* system, the ethnic Chinese came to be the majority of the middle-class of merchants and entrepreneurs in Siam. While the natives controlled most of the basic means of production—namely, land and labor—the ethnic Chinese came to control much of the service sector, as well as the various industries that transform raw materials into consumer products. By the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War in Southeast Asia, the KMT government was already claiming Chinese control of Siam's four major exports—rice, sugar, timber and tin.²⁰ This may come as a surprise to historians of Thai or European colonial archives. In the early 20th century however, most of Siam's rice and lumber mills, sugar factories, and tin mines were owned by ethnic Chinese. These entrepreneurs retained close ties with the government of the Republic of China, despite being registered as European subjects or having attained Thai citizenship. In short, the Siamese economy of the 18th and early 19th centuries, both

the crown monopoly of international trade and the merchant class driven domestic economy were almost completely controlled by ethnic Chinese. This was, at least in part, due to China's dominance in the world economy through much of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

An earth shattering transformation occurred close to the heart of the China-dominated intra-Asian maritime trade in the mid-19th century. Two Opium Wars (1839-1842, 1856-1860) allowed Britain to replace the Qing court as the overlord of the China trade. Along with her dominant presence in the Subcontinent and control of the most important trading posts along the Malacca Strait, Britain procured more than a dozen treaty ports along the Southern coast of China. The opium wars were meant to ensure British dominance over two of the three most lucrative trades of maritime Asia. This momentous tide of change profoundly affected Siam as well.

On the eve of the outbreak of the Second Opium War, Sir John Bowring, the then Governor of Hong Kong, successfully concluded the Bowring Treaty of 1855 with the ruling Siamese monarch, King Mongkut, Rama IV. The main contents of the Bowring Treaty were pretty much what might be expected from most of the unequal treaties put in place between Anglo-American imperialist powers and struggling Asian empires in decline. In the same tradition as the Opium War treaties (Treaty of Nanking 1842 and Treaty of Tientsin 1858) and the American-Japanese Treaty of Kanagawa (1854), the Bowring Treaty established extraterritorial rights for British subjects and put in place what the imperialists claimed to be essential requirements for enhancing free trade. In the case of Siam, this included the abolition of the Siamese crown monopoly on international trade and a flat-rate of fixed import tariffs at 3%. The often unspoken accomplishment of Bowring, however, was his success in convincing the Siamese court to end its tribute relationship with China, which, in turn, meant that the majority of post-Bowring treaty Siamese-China trade would be conducted through British treaty ports and, most possibly, through British agents as well. In a way, the core of the political and trade universe around which Siam had revolved on the periphery had abruptly moved from China to Britain in the mid-19th century.

It is important to note the speed with which the Siamese ruling class managed to transform their global perspective from the old China-centric view to a complete British-centered perspective within the span of 3 reigns (1851 – 1925, less than 75 years). The profitable China

trade had allowed Rama III to ascend the throne, despite the fact that he was not born of his father's queen. The reign of Rama IV had only just begun when King Mongkut signed the Bowring Treaty and embarked on the quest to gain recognition from his European counterparts as monarch of a realm civilized and modernized by Western standards. He learned the English language and several other modern arts and sciences that were well respected among the learned classes of the West. The king's grasp of science was impressively demonstrated when he correctly and exactly predicted a total solar eclipse in Siam in 1868.²¹ Of even greater significance, King Mongkut insisted on employing foreign native speakers of English to tutor his children from an early age. From the reign of the 4th king onwards, it became generally expected that top level executives of the court would know a foreign language, especially English. King Chulalongkorn, Rama V (r. 1868-1910) followed closely in his father's modernizing footsteps. He went even further in the way of re-orientating his kingdom towards a world of British dominance. The 5th King had most of his sons educated in well-respected institutions throughout Europe, and he visited many of the leading imperialist powers in person during state visits to Europe in 1897 and 1907. Chulalongkorn abolished slavery and the longstanding corvée labor system in the attempt to modernize the Siamese economy and to make it more compatible with late 19th century trends of global capitalism. By the time Siam arrived at the reign of the 6th King, barely half a century after the ratification of the Bowring Treaty, Siam had successfully re-orientated completely toward the British. King Vajiravudh, Rama VI, had been educated in Britain from childhood and conducted himself in all aspects with the cultivated grace of a polished Anglophile. The king was a champion of the free press—an aspect of British political culture that he greatly admired. He was also fond of military training for civilians, enjoyed war games, and established the Wild Tiger Corps in the tradition of the British Volunteer Force and the *Luk Suea* [tiger cubs] as the Thai version of the British Boy Scout movement. Vajiravudh's translation in verse form of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* reflects a remarkable skill and sensitivity in appreciating and savoring one of the great classics of English literature. Siam had abandoned its status as a Chinese tribute state, and the ruling classes had suddenly become enthusiastic Anglophiles.

Clifford Geertz' Dilemma and the Building the Thai Nation

The American anthropologist Clifford Geertz proposed that nationalist sentiment is fundamentally driven by two conflicting aims:

“The one aim is to be noticed: it is a search for identity, and a demand that that identity be publicly acknowledged as having import, a social assertion of self as ‘being somebody in the world.’ The other aim is practical: it is a demand for progress, for a rising standard of living, more effective political order, greater social justice, and beyond that of ‘playing a part in the larger arena of world politics,’ of ‘exerting influence among the nations.’”²²

In other words, the one aim is to be unique while the other is to be like other great nations of the world. This quandary was not uncommon among budding nations of East and Southeast Asia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the case of China, modernizing movements like the ‘Self Strengthening’ movement and Kang Youwei’s ‘Hundred Day Reform,’ are two obvious examples of this proto-nationalist struggle to learn and adapt the modern ways of the West while enhancing self-confidence in the superiority of Chinese culture at the same time. Similar traits can be seen in the rising nationalism of Meiji Japan. Siam experienced transformational tensions as well between the need to establish a national identity that was uniquely ‘Thai’ and the need to be accepted by the world community. Siam would live up to Western standards of progress and modernity, which is attained inadvertently by always siding with the winning party in history. Strange to say, the Chinese state and the ethnic Chinese community played a central role in Siam’s successful fulfillment of both nationalist aims described above.

In explaining the bizarre riddle of Thai nation building vis-à-vis Sino-Thai relations, it is important to point out that the Geertz dilemma is not always a dilemma, because one can be accepted and respected by others due to one’s uniqueness. In order for that to work, however, one would have to be stronger and more influential than the average, so that one’s uniqueness becomes the object of emulation for others and, in time, becomes the standard by which others are measured. However, this is rarely applicable to emerging nations that tend to be weak and unstable in their fledgling years, as Siam was in the early 20th century. A much more effective way of achieving both nationalist aims in the case of a weak and unstable young nation-state like Siam would be to add a touch of uniqueness—most often in cultural and/or religious practices—to a more substantial framework of modernization according to the standards of the most successful superpower of that particular era.

In the case of Siam, achieving this was quite problematic, precisely because of the tumultuous shift of the world's central power from China to Britain. From the establishment by King Taksin of a new capital of Thonburi to the earliest reigns of the Chakri Dynasty, the Siamese ruling class continually tended towards Chinese standards of civilization. By the time Siam arrived at the reign of King Nangklao Rama III, the king himself was the embodiment of a grand success in the China trade. Evidence of the 'China craze' of those days remains in the numerous temples, built and restored throughout the kingdom during Nangklao's reign. The temple architecture and design proudly displays through the test of time all aspects of late imperial Chinese devotional art. Then, quite suddenly, China was defeated in the First Opium War, and Sir John Bowring arrived in Siam to negotiate the kingdom's first full-fledged [unequal] treaty with the British Empire, the new overlord of the intra-Asian maritime trade.

During this precarious period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Siamese ruling class faced an urgent need to establish some form of national identity which would be considered modern and progressive by European standards. What they most definitely did not want to emulate at that time was China, which had become the 'Sick Man of Asia' and the embodiment of all that was backward, obsolete and impotent in the modern world. It was unfortunate that China also happened to be the former superpower that the Siamese ruling class had spent most of the previous century trying to emulate—so much so that by the 20th century, more than half of the Chakri royal bloodline and almost the entire merchant class of the kingdom were Chinese. The most important aspect of fabricating a modern national identity for Siam, therefore, called for the ruling class to work hard to negate their 'Chineseness'. This was necessary for the forging of the new identity and the building of a strong modern nation that would be able to survive imperialist aggression and the tides of revolution. Consequently, all nationalist leaders of Thailand, from King Vajiravudh in the early 20th century to Premier Field Marshall Phibunsongkhram in the years immediate preceding the Second World War years and after, would, by definition, be anti-Chinese. This does not mean that they were necessarily racists or that they indulged in severe racial discrimination against the ethnic Chinese. The key factor was the negation by the ruling class of their own 'Chineseness' even as they promised undivided and absolute loyalty to their powerful local ethnic Chinese relations, vassals and creditors.

The most effective way for the Siamese ruling class of the late 19th and early 20th centuries to negate their ‘Chineseness’ was to wholeheartedly replace it with Western practices, Britain being the most favored object of emulation. Instead of attempting the impossible task of purging their Chinese roots, Siamese monarchs of the late 19th century, learned English, sent their princes to be educated in Europe, and adopted much of the European aristocratic lifestyle as the norms of the upper-class Siamese. The Chinese merchant class, on the other hand, continued to enjoy royal patronage as long as they clearly, and at times overtly, expressed their undivided and absolute loyalty to the crown. During Vajiravudh’s reign, such expressions included working in the service of the court, adopting a Thai surname, and joining the Wild Tiger Corps.²³ The political mathematics are actually quite simple. The more Chinese one wants to be in Siam, the more one should demonstrate patriotism and loyalty towards the crown. In many ways, this fundamental equation of ‘Chineseness’ vs. royalism held true through much of the early 20th century, through the World War years, the Cold War Era, and even up to the present day. Overt expressions of loyalty towards the crown have proven to be the most effective protection against political witch hunts of nearly every sort throughout the 20th century, that is, against accusations of Bolshevism and republicanism in the earlier half; against communism during the Cold War years; and against charges of lèse majesté in the political turmoil of present day Thailand. It is not coincidental and one should not be surprised to find the ‘Patriotic Ethnic Chinese’ [lukchin rak chat] among the most active and outspoken groups within the ultra-royalist People’s Alliance for Democracy-PAD movement that actively campaigned from 2005 against the now ousted Premier Thaksin Shinawatra.

Resolving the Mystery of the Anecdote and Understanding the True Story of Success in Thai-Chinese Assimilation

Evidently, one of the crucial keys to Siam’s survival through the tumultuous political transformation of the Southeast Asian region and the world in the 19th and 20th centuries was the ability of the Siamese ruling class to always side with the winning superpower in each period. This survival tactic was the reason behind the fundamental shift of allegiance from the 18th century Chinese master of the tribute system to the British overlord of trade from the colonial period through much of the early 20th century. The same conclusion could be made of the Thai state’s decisive move into the US-dominated anti-Communist camp during the Cold War years—

despite opposite choices by most of Thailand's immediate neighbors and the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement not far away in Indonesia.

In 1941 Thailand faced imminent destruction at the hands of a powerful invader who was almost definitely going to be defeated in the near future. How to get on the winning side in such a case was a tricky and dangerous maneuver. Premier Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram made the decision to enter into a formal alliance with Japan in the Second World War. Thai, Chinese and British archival materials all point out that the Thai Premier had sought support from the British, the kingdom's traditional overpowering ally since the reign of King Mongkut Rama IV prior to the arrival of Japanese forces early in December 1941. But Britain rejected any possibility of offering aid, citing its already heavy burden in protecting its own colonies in the Far East. At that point, Thailand stood alone to face the wrath one of the world's most powerful military forces. But Phibunsongkhram was far from being forced into the corner by the circumstances at the outbreak of the war in Southeast Asia. In fact, evidence suggests that the wartime Prime Minister managed to allow his regime no little room to maneuver, even after signing the Treaty of Alliance with Japan.

Among the most enigmatic moments in Thailand's involvement in the Second World War was Phibun's absence when the telegraph arrived from Japanese authorities announcing the arrival of their troops in Thailand late on the night of December 7th. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Direk Jayanama, received the news on behalf of the Prime Minister, who was said to be visiting the newly established eastern borders after Thailand's successful campaign in the previous year in the Franco-Thai War. Despite the many channels of communication and transportation available to him as head of the government, Phibun chose not to respond to Direk's desperate calls for an executive decision on the matter and returned to the capital by van. Upon his arrival in the capital, the Prime Minister called an emergency cabinet meeting and eventually decided, despite fierce opposition from, among others, the Minister of Finance, Pridi Phanomyong, that Thailand would grant the right of passage to Japanese troops to avoid the calamity of coming under attack by the full military might of the Empire of the Sun.

By the time the cabinet's decision and subsequent orders arrived in the southern provinces where the Japanese had first disembarked, it was close to midday. Fierce opposition since the break of dawn had been thrown up by the local militia, who had already lost more than a hundred

lives fighting with full patriotic intent to safeguard their nation from foreign invaders. This initial violence was explained away as a tragic misunderstanding and miscommunication within the Thai chain of command. Shortly after, an official Treaty of Alliance between Thailand and Japan was signed by top ministers of both countries in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the holiest of the nation's sacred spaces. Yet, the battle between the local militia and Japanese troops became an important piece of evidence to back up the Free Thai Movement's claim that Phibun's alliance with Japan did not represent the true intentions of the Thai people, since more than a hundred 'Thai people' lost their lives protecting their country from Japanese invasion in the earliest phase of the war in Thailand. Moreover, both British and Japanese documents suggest that Phibun was probably aware that at least a few members of his government were involved in underground work against Japanese forces in Thailand. In other words, that Phibun also knowingly allowed the activities of the Free Thai Movement to go on despite his official position in the war.

Thailand's precarious position vis-à-vis sudden shifts among world powers became problematic again with the Republic of China's brief ascension in the international arena following the conclusion of the Second World War. Since the opium wars and the Bowring Treaty in the mid-19th century, the Siamese ruling class had been systematically distancing itself from China's sphere of influence. They had been continuously and consistently redefining themselves according to the modern and progressive standards of Europe and America through the reigns of Mongkut, Chulalongkorn, and Vajiravudh. Even the core leaders of the Peoples Party, which led the bloodless revolution that claimed to transform the nation from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy, were educated in Europe.

It would be terribly upsetting, if not impossible, to revert back to the China-centered ways of the 18th century. Despite having prevailed over Japan in the war, China continued to struggle with domestic political disintegration. Throwing in Thailand's lot with Chiang Kai-shek's republic could eventually lead to disastrous defeat at the hands of the Communists. Moreover, suddenly favoring China over Anglo-American allies would also cause a major disruption in the class hierarchy of Siamese politics.

It was much safer and less disruptive to galvanize the British and American branches of the Free Thai Movement as the national heroes of the Second World War. After all, most of them were

already part of the ruling class; diplomats, members of the royal family, state scholarship students, heirs of the political elite and business tycoons who could afford to be educated in the West. By contrast, the ethnic Chinese underground anti-Japanese movement, was full of questionable characters. Many were from the working class and some even expressed communist tendencies.

In retrospect, the decision to gloss over the contributions of China and the ethnic Chinese to Thailand's favorable post-Second World War position should be considered among the more successful strategic moves of the Thai ruling class. Despite their differences,²⁴ the Anglicized/Americanized ruling class much preferred to remain in their traditional (since the 19th century) position at the top of the power hierarchy, rather than surrendering leadership to the unfamiliar and highly unpredictable pro-Chinese working class. Perhaps even more important was the fact that this historical omission was crucial in paving the way for American dominance and for the patronage of the right-wing royalist/militarist ruling class that dominated Thailand throughout the Cold War years.

The same set of explanations could also be employed quite beautifully in understanding what has become the so-called 'success story' of Chinese assimilation in Thailand. Assimilation in Thailand would indeed appear to have gone on much more smoothly and amiably than in most other Southeast Asian nations because, in the case of Thailand, more than half of the Anglicized/Americanized ruling class is Chinese. And the economically and financially dominant Chinese middle-class has been conditioned to always and overtly express their loyalty towards the crown. The lower class working Chinese have either been assimilated or suppressed as dissidents of one sort or another and gradually eliminated from any position of influence that might allow them to challenge the existing socio-political hierarchy. The assimilation of the Chinese in Thailand was probably not so much an ethnic relations issue, but rather a matter of negotiation and collaboration between the political and economic upper and upper-middle classes in the pacification and control of the working class through periods of extreme political and economic turbulence such as the 19th and 20th centuries.

¹ Public Record Office: Foreign Office; 371/31862, "Free Siamese Movement: interview with Prince Chirasakti and Madame Rajanaprahanji," in *Free Thai Movement*, June 1942.

² Vichitvong Na Pombhejara. *The Free Thai Legend* [tamnan seri thai] Bangkok: Saengdao Publishing House, 2003.

-
- ³ Academia Historica: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0703(4)012 “Report from the 32nd meeting of the Sino-Thai problem discussion” in *Discussion of Sino-Thai Problem* [zhong-tai wenti taolun hui], 5 April 1943. (See also, Public Record Office; 371/35983, *Chiang Kai-shek’s broadcast to Siam*, 1943.)
- ⁴ Academia Historica: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0737(1)001 “Most confidential on Balankura, from British Legation” in *The Free Thai Movement(1)* [ziyou taiguo yundong], 13 May 1943.
- ⁵ Academia Historica: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0737(2)001 “Principles of political negotiations with Thailand,” in *The Free Thai Movement(2)* [ziyou taiguo yundong], December 1944.
- ⁶ King Vajiravudh Foundation. “*Puak yew haengburaphatit” lae “Muangthaichongtuenterd” doy Atsawaphahu*. Bangkok: Chuanpim, 1985.
- ⁷ KasianTejapira. *Commodifying Marxism: The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927-1958*. Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2001.
- ⁸ Vajiravudh, King. *PhrarajaniphonPhrabatsomdetphramonkutklaochaoyuhua*. Memorial volume for the centenary anniversary of Vajiravudh College. Bangkok: Vajiravudh Studies, 2010.
- ⁹ Vajiravudh, King. “Huachai Nakrop,” in *PhrarajaniphonPhrabatsomdetphramonkutklaochaoyuhua*. Memorial volume for the centenary anniversary of Vajiravudh College. Bangkok: Vajiravudh Studies, 2010.
- ¹⁰ Thaemsuk Numnandha. *The First Young Turks: Rebels of 1912* [yang toek run raek: kabot ro so nueng roi samsip] Bangkok: Saitan, 2002.
- ¹¹ Dillon, Emile Joseph. Atsawaphahu trans. *Khwam krachai krachai haeng mueang chin* [the disintegration of China]. Bangkok: Thai Newspaper Press, 1913.
- ¹² National Archives: Rama VI; R6N20.12/23 *Newspaper article, “Wangti ong mai” by Atsawaphahu*, 18 September 1915.
- ¹³ Vajiravudh, King. “Chuai Amnat,” in *PhrarajaniphonPhrabatsomdetphramonkutklaochaoyuhua*. Memorial volume for the centenary anniversary of Vajiravudh College. Bangkok: Vajiravudh Studies, 2010.
- ¹⁴ The National Census of 1919 was the second national census in the history of Siam (the first one was conducted in 1909, the last year of King Chulalongkorn’s reign) and it announced the total population at 9,207,355. (See, Committee for Children, Youths, Women, Elderly and Handicapped People of the Parliament, National Statistical Office, and the Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University. “Centenary Commemoration of the Thai National Census: The 11th National Census 2010,” presented at the national symposium on “How will the nation benefit from the National Census of 2010,” conference room 213-216, Parliament Building 2, 30 June 2009.)
- ¹⁵ Academia Historica: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0703(4)012, *Discussion of Sino-Thai Problems* [zhong-tai wenti taolun hui], June 1942-October 1943.
- ¹⁶ Skinner, G. William. *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957.
- ¹⁷ King Vajiravudh Foundation. “*Puak yio haeng buraphatit” lae “Mueang thai chong tuen toed” doy Atsawaphahu*. Bangkok: Chuanpim, 1985, and Vajiravudh, King. *Phrarachaniphon Phrabatsomdetphramongkutklaochaoyuhua*. Memorial volume for the centenary anniversary of Vajiravudh College. Bangkok: Vajiravudh Studies, 2010.
- ¹⁸ Many crucial works of the 1980s-90s would attest to this claim. Most prominent among them is *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century* by Susan Naquin and Evelyn Rawski. (See, Naquin Susan and Evelyn Rawski. *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.)
- ¹⁹ Chinese documents, however, suggest that the Qing court was aware of this discrepancy in the Chakri Dynasty’s use of the ‘Zheng’ clan name, but they justified their approval by citing that one of Chaophraya Chakri’s consorts was a daughter of Taksin and, therefore, it would be possible for King Rama I to claim to be the heir of his father-in-law.
- ²⁰ Academia Historica: Foreign Affairs; 172-1/0654 063.2 “Why not protect ourselves?” in *The Thai Government Anti-Chinese Policies* [Taiguo zhengfu paihua de zhengce], 31 July 1941.
- ²¹ Ironically, this most likely also attributed to his death of malaria, which he most probably contracted from mosquito bites at the observatory site in the seaside village of Wako.
- ²² Clifford Geertz, ‘Primordial and Civic Ties,’ in John Huntington and Anthony Smith (eds.), *Nationalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p.30.
- ²³ The Wild Tiger Corp was a paramilitary group established by King Vajiravudh in 1911. The main purpose of the unit was to train civilians in support of the military in times of war and help maintain civil order in peacetime. Joining the Wild Tiger Corp was a way in which civilians from all walks of life could profess their patriotism without

having to become a professional soldier. It was an important aspect of Vajiravudh's nationalist campaign, intended to popularize nationalist ideas among civilians. (See, Vella, Walter F. *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1978.)

²⁴ 'Differences' is perhaps an understatement as there were more than a few stark contrast between the leaders of the American branch and the British branch of the Free Thai Movement, not to mention further conflicts between former Free Thai agents and the Phibunsongkhram faction in the postwar government.