

THAI NOBILITY IN ITS CONTACT WITH EUROPEAN CULTURE AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

by Since Kamalanavin*

PART I: INTRODUCTION

Siam or Thailand nowadays has changed greatly from what she had been in the previous centuries. In studying Thai history one can see clearly that these changes started around the turn of the century when the monarches realized how important it would be for Siam to modernize herself along western lines if she wanted to preserve her independence and did not want to be under European control as other primitive Asian countries had been. Thus it is quite interesting to study that period of history carefully and find out how Thai cultures changed according to its contact with the European under the leadership of absolute and foresighted monarches of Siam—King Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh. But before coming to this point of view, it requires some knowledge of Siamese earlier relationship with the Europeans prior to the turn of the century.

Siam has had contact with the European countries since the second decade of the sixteenth century. The first Europeans who came to Siam were the Portuguese. In the year 1511, Alfonso de Albuquerque, Viceroy of Portuguese India conquered Malacca; and when he learned that Siam had claimed some rights over that part of Asia, he sent envoys to Ayudhaya, her capital to explain matters and also to open commerce with her. They were well received by King Rama Tibodi II (1491–1529), and treaties were signed. According to these, the Portuguese were allowed to trade and to open their Christian mission in the country, and they alone maintained the exclusive right to commercial and diplomatic relations with Siam through that century.

In the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Dutch, English, French, Spanish, and Japanese came and Portuguese influence declined. Siam turned her attention to the Dutch. In 1609 a Siamese embassy was sent to the Hague; this was the first recorded visit of Siamese to Europe.¹ During King Narai's reign

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¹D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press Inc., 1955), p. 297.

(1657–1688) more intimate foreign relations were formed especially with France, then under King Louis XIV. There were exchanges of embassies. For example Chevalier de Chaumont came to Ayudhaya, and Praya Kosa Pan went to Versailles. During that thirty-one years Siam was prosperous and made progress especially in commerce and arts. This was owed to the ability of King Narai himself and a remarkable Greek, Constantine Phaulkon, who was the King's chief—Minister and also his adviser especially in foreign affairs. Later he was ennobled as Chao Praya Vichayen—Lord of Cool Knowledge. At the end of King Narai's reign there was a revolution; the King died and Phaulkon was killed. Foreigners were persecuted. Only a few Dutch and Portuguese remained after this revolution. For nearly a century and a half afterwards the Siamese cut themselves off from the West because they were occupied by wars with Burma and Cambodia.

When Bangkok, the new capital, was founded and peace gradually came, Siam began her relations with Europeans again, first in the year 1826 with Great Britain, but the treaty was not signed until the year 1855. It was during King Mongkut's reign (1851–1868) when Sir John Bowring, representative of England, came and the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce was signed. This was the first treaty Siam had ever signed with the Europeans since her new dynasty—Chakkri Dynasty—was founded. Thus the year 1855 marked the new era in Siamese foreign relations. After that, similar arrangements were made with France, the United States and other European countries. As a result not only better commerce but also Westernization was introduced into Siam with the King's encouragement.

King Mongkut was "the first Asian King to be able to understand, speak, and write English",² which he had first learned with American missionaries when he was still in priesthood. King Mongkut had known before he came to the throne that the English language would be necessary in contact with the Europeans who had expanded their colonialism to Asia at that time. So he began to learn English. Besides that he also learned Latin, western science, geography, mathematics, history and astronomy—the last being his favourite subject—and became interested in many facets of western culture. When he ascended the throne, high princes and officials of the realm were also persuaded to learn foreign languages, especially English. Furthermore, in modernizing his country, the King employed many Europeans as advisers for reorganizing the government services, and as teachers for his royal family, especially his eldest son, the Crown Prince Chulalongkorn, whom he wanted to be properly taught in English. One of the most well-known teachers was Mrs. Anna Harriette Leonowens³, an English teacher who was imported from Singapore in the year 1862.

²Prince Chula Chakrabongse, *Lords of Life* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., Inc., 1960), p. 182.

³Mrs. Leonowens was the author of the books: *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* and *Romance of a Harem* or *Siamese Harem life*, on which Mrs. Margaret London's novel *Anna and the King of Siam*, and the popular musical film, *The King and I*, were based.

King Mongkut was the first king to employ Westerners. Besides advising the government and teaching, the King also had Europeans help him in substituting flat for round coinage and founding the mint; in building many buildings in European style; in constructing roads, especially the New Road, Bangkok's main street; in digging canals, and shipbuilding.

Being acquainted with Europeans, the King realized that Siam had to collaborate with the West if she wanted to preserve her independence. So when France cheatingly took Combodia under protection, King Mongkut surrendered his claims over that country, in return for France's recognition of Siam's rights over the old provinces of Battambang and Siemreap. Thus Siam safe being a French protectorate. So:

It is perhaps not too much to say that Siam owed to Mougkut more than anyone else the fact that she preserved her independence when by the end of the nineteenth century all the other states of South-East Asia had come under European control.⁴

King Mongkut died in 1868. Though he had done much to modernize Siam, there still remained an immense amount to be done. Siam was still a backward country with no clear code of laws, almost no means of communication, no real financial system, and no public education. So King Chulalongkorn, Mongkut's son, continued his father's policy of modernizing the country and also developing closed relations with foreign powers.

PART II

Chulalongkorn was only fifteen years old when his father died and he became King Rama V (1868-1910). As he was too young to rule his country alone, a regent was appointed, and Siam was under the Regency for five years. In 1873 when he was twenty and considered to have reached his majority, he took back all his power over government from Chao Praya Sri Suriyawongse, his regent.

King Chulalongkorn had begun his English lessons with Mrs. Anna Leonowens, and when she went back to England in 1867, he continued with Robert Morant until he succeeded to the throne in 1868. During the Regency the King started his English lessons again with Francis George Patterson, but, unfortunately, these did not last long because he was soon too busy, so the lessons had to stop. However, being so fond of the English language, he went on studying on his own in his spare time.

King Chulalongkorn wanted to modernize his country as well as his father, so during the Regency he took the opportunity to go abroad, in order to see and study how those countries modernized themselves. First in the year 1871 he went

⁴Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 578-579.

to Singapore and Java (Batavia), and later to India; and what he had seen in those countries had a great influence on his future policy. Hall said that:

...He returned home far more enlightened than almost any of his subjects, and at once began to put into operation a series of reforms which in the long run introduced radical changes into every department of the national life. He realized forcibly that if his country were to preserve her independence she must, willy-nilly, put her house in order according to the prevailing European nations, or at least keep up the appearance of doing so.⁵

So in 1873 on his coronation, he announced the abolition of the practice of prostration in the royal presence, so from then on men had to sit on chairs instead of reclining on the floor. This was the first step to Westernization. Their ways of dressing also changed along the European line, while the ladies of the Inside could carry on with their age-old customs. At his audience, men had to wear European-type uniforms or close-neck jackets with the traditional *panung*,⁶ and they wore also European stockings and shoes. Furthermore, he abandoned royal inaccessibility, and used to drive along the streets and had informal conversation with the public. He even disguised himself sometimes and paid visits to his people in remote villages. In this way he got the idea of how to improve his country because he heard and saw by himself the results of his benevolent rule and increasing reforms.

The abolition of slavery was another thing that King Chulalongkorn wanted to do as soon as he ascended the throne, because it was an obvious essential of the modernizing process. This idea he had had since he was young. He had often complained to his English governess, Mrs. Leonowens, of the cruelty with which the slaves were treated, and he did much to inculcate kindness toward them among his immediate attendants.⁷ So at his coronation he issued the revolutionary decree that all the people born in his reign would eventually be free. This at first was argued against by both the owners and even slaves themselves. The owners needed the service of slaves because it was cheaper than hired labour. As for slaves, their situation was not as bad as might be imagined, they had a place to live and food to eat;

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 583-584.

⁶*Panung* is the national garment of the Siamese of both sexes. It is a piece of cloth about one yard in length, wrapped round the waist and limbs, descending to the knees, and passed between the thighs, the two ends being tucked in at the waist, one in front, the other behind. J.G.D. Campbell, *Siam in the Twentieth Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1902), p. 137.

⁷Anna Harriette Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1873), p. 284.

they paid no taxes and had no responsibilities, so some were quite pleased with their situation. But as the King insisted to continue his idea no one could resist him. In the year 1874 the new law was issued, which automatically made children of slaves cease—being slaves at the age of 21, and no one over 21 could be sold into serfdom. The King himself also bought many slaves from owners and set them free. Since then the number of slaves gradually decreased, and in 1905 there were no slaves any more. Thus King Chulalongkorn's task of the abolition of slavery was achieved without any blood-stain. This made Westerners astonished because no where in the world had this task been accomplished as smoothly as King Chulalongkorn had done it. In the United States, it caused a civil war for four years and President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. Alexander II of Russia was also assassinated. So King Chulalongkorn had a great reputation for that task which made the condition of Siamese people much improved. This was one of the most important thing the King had achieved in modernizing the country.

Education of English was another thing that to which the King paid much attention. When he returned from Singapore, Java and India, he was "more than ever convinced that the way towards progress lay in education with emphasis on the knowledge of English."⁸ So another important works of King Chulalongkorn during his reign (1869–1910) was education.

King Chulalongkorn was determined that in the future the princes and nobles of Siam would be better educated than his own generation. He founded the model school for the sons of princes and high nobles which was in the Grand Palace and was called Rajkumar College. This school gave modern education, and English was widely taught. As it was successful, he founded another one called the Suan Khurab or Rose Garden School. These two schools produced a few outstanding men such as Prince Devawongse, the first Siamese Foreign Minister to speak European languages, and Prince Damrong, Minister of the Interior. Besides this the King also encouraged the establishment of private schools by Thais and by foreign missionaries. In the year 1891 Prince Damrong was sent to Europe to study the methods of education, and when he returned a Government Department of Education was established. Plans were made for a system of national primary education. Later in his reign King Chulalongkorn decreed that every temple should offer instruction to the children of its locality. During his reign also schools for girls were established. These were all the King had done for education of his people which would be the base of the development of the country.

King Chulalongkorn concentrated very much upon his sons' education as well as his people. In due course he sent all his sons to continue their studies in Europe,

⁸Prince Chula Chakrabongse, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

except the Crown Prince Vajirunhis. His desire in sending them there was shown clearly in his letter to his first four elder sons. He wrote:

It is my desire that you should regard yourselves merely as Siamese boys of good birth. The notion that you have been born princes and can be comfortable through life without doing useful work is one which does not place you above the lower animals, which just come into life, eat and die. But even such animals are useful, for they leave their hides, skins and bones... If after acquiring proficiency in foreign languages you cannot turn them into Siamese, little advantage will have been gained... What will be required of you is an ability to turn a European language into Siamese, and Siamese into a European language. You would be useful then.⁹

As the King had many monarch friends in Europe his sons were sent to study under the guiding eye of them, for example Prince Paripatra to Germany under Emperor William II and Prince Chakrabongse to Russia under Emperor Nicholas II. But most of his sons were sent to England because the King appreciated England a great deal. Between these were Prince Vajiravudh, Prince Rabi, Prince Abhakorn, and Prince Prajadhipok—the first and the last would become Rama VI and Rama VII respectively. Though those who studied in England were not under the eye of the monarch, they were invited to the palace occasionally and attended certain functions. After they finished public schools, some of them went to Universities and some were trained in the foreign Army and Navy. Ordinary Siamese students had also chances to go and study in Europe because the King's scholarship was available for everybody. This was one step King Chulalongkorn did further than King Mongkut, who only had had English teachers brought to Siam. When these European-educated people came back to Siam, they helped the King to modernize the country along the Western lines with which they had become acquainted.

Besides Education, reforming the administration was another idea that King Chulalongkorn got from Java, Singapore and India. In 1891, he formed a Cabinet of twelve Ministers which was made up of his brothers and later his sons. Methods of revenue and rural administration were changed. The kingdom was divided into *mont'on* (circle), *changwad* (province), and *amp'ur* (district), all with officials from Bangkok to govern them. The establishment of efficient Law Courts, with the help of Rolyn Jacquemins, created as Chao Praya Abbai, a Belgian, was successful, and achieved by Prince Rabi, one of the first four princes who had gone to England and had returned to Bangkok at the turn of the century. He became Minister of Justice.

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 231—232.

Prince Vajiravudh, appointed the Crown Prince after Prince Vajirunhis died, returned from England in 1902. On his return, he carried out the general duties of the Heir Apparent as well as serving in the Army. Prince Chira, returning from Europe, was appointed as Minister of Defense. Prince Paripatra returned to join him and served as Chief of the Army General Staff, but later was appointed to be the commander-in-Chief of the Navy, assisted by Prince Abhakorn who had been in the British Navy. Prince Paripatra reorganized every branch of the naval service, and was the founder of the Naval College in 1906. The King also helped to reform the Navy by ordering a steam yacht from England, and later had it equipped as a gun-boat. Besides the Navy, the King also guided the reform in the Army and the Police force which was necessary for internal security and also for defending the country. His own special creation was the Mahadlik (Royal Pages) Guards Regiment. European uniforms were used, and ranks were for sometime designated in English.

During the nineteenth century, Bangkok was known as the Venice of the East. As waterways were the main mode of transportation in Siam, when a king wanted to improve communication, he always concentrated on cutting canals to link up rivers and creeks rather than on roads.¹⁰ Because of the complaints of Europeans, King Mongkut began to construct roads in Bangkok and this task also followed by King Chulalongkorn, but as the King paid much attention to construction of railways, roads were not much improved. King Chulalongkorn first became aware of the importance of railways when British surveyed routes from Burma to China.¹¹ From then on many railways between important towns were built. The first one to be completed was between Bangkok and Paknam—the town at the mouth of the Chao Praya River. European engineers, for example the German, Belgian, Danes and English, were the first who constructed the railroads, but later Thai engineers, who had studied abroad, constructed them. The Postal and telegraphic service were other things that started during his reign.

Though the King had many reforms to accomplish, he did not forget about the welfare of his people. He encouraged the activities of public health as much as hospitals. The first Hospital—Siriraj Hospital—was built in Thonburi. But at first it met with many difficulties: no Thai doctors wanted to use western medicine; patients dared not to risk their lives to be cured modern ways. It took a long time for modern doctors, both Thais and foreign, to make hospitals popular. After the first hospital was successful, more hospitals were gradually built. A medical school was founded and produced Thai doctors of Western medicine in addition to those who began to return from their studies in Europe and America.

¹⁰Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 586.

¹¹*Ibid.*

From all of these reforms we can see that in the choice of foreign advisers King Chulalongkorn went farther than his father. He employed men from different countries, first English, then Belgians, Danes, French, Germans and Americans. Many of them were not advisers but teachers and technicians. Though most of them had greater influence in the government, they were not trusted to have any responsibility in any ministry, for Siam was afraid of losing her independence. The King always had his brothers or his sons as the head of government's departments. These Thai nobility had proficient knowledge of English. Some had gone to study in Europe. Others who had no chance to go there either because they were too old or because their health was not good, learned English with foreign teachers in Bangkok. These nobility helped the King greatly in modernizing the country in various ways.

King Chulalongkorn travelled much and almost all over his kingdom. He travelled both in the grand ceremonial manner and also in disguise, by which he learned a great deal about his people's condition and their attitudes towards his reforms. Besides travelling in his country, accompanied by many people who held important posts in the government service, he also went to Europe twice—in 1897 and 1907. There he, visited all of his monarch friends, namely, King Edward VII of England, William II of Germany, Nicholas II of Russia, and Francis Joseph of Austria. He also went to France, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium and Italy and confirmed his friendship with them. His letters, written to Queen Saowabha during his first trip¹² and to his favourite daughter, Princess Nibha, during his second trip,¹³ showed the wide knowledge he gained from these European tours, not only geographically, but historically and constitutionally. So when he came back to Bangkok he brought back many new ideas to reform the administration and Bangkok itself. During King Chulalongkorn's reign Bangkok was beautified more and more; palaces, the throne hall, streets and bridges were built along the western styles, and the country was gradually modernized.

King Chulalongkorn deserved great credit in modernizing his country along the western line and guiding her through the perilous time. This was the period of English pressure from the south and of French encroachment from the east. Siam even had disputed with France in 1893, but finally they could compromise and the treaty was signed in 1907, followed by that of Great Britain in 1909. According to these, Siam gave some provinces to both countries in return for the surrender of extraterritorial privileges to Siam. Thus Siam had passed the difficult times and

¹²The letters have been published in book form and was called *King Chulalongkorn's Letters to Queen Saowabha During His European Tour of 1897* (in Thai), Bangkok, 1919.

¹³The letters have been published in book form and was called *Klai Ban* (Far From Home), (in Thai), Bangkok, 1924.

could preserve her independence while all the other countries of South-East Asia had come under European control at the turn of the century. This task, together with all the reforms, owed to the great ability of King Chulalongkorn, whose contact with the Europeans guided Siam into westernization and developed in every aspect. Siamese were so grateful to him that they subscribed a large sum of money and built an equestrian statue for his memory. They also gave him the name of "Pra Piya Maharacha" which means "the great and most beloved king". This was King Chulalongkorn, Rama V of Siam (1868-1910).

PART III

King Chulalongkorn died in 1910 and was succeeded by his son, King Vajiravudh, Rama VI (born 1881). In his boyhood, the King began to learn English with Robert Morant, an imported English teacher. Then in the year 1893, being only 12 years old, he was sent to England to continue his studies, first with a private tutor, then entered the Royal Military College at Sandhurst. After being commissioned he was sent to the Durham Light Infantry. He also had an opportunity to attend the famous School of Musketry at Hythe. In the year 1900 he went to Christ Church, Oxford, to learn history, laws and arts. Shortly before his return to Siam in 1902, he was appointed heir-apparent, of which he carried out the general duties as well as served in the Army on his return home.

When King Vajiravudh ascended the throne, he chose the name "Pra Mongkut Klao" as the new reigning title. The idea came from his grandfather, King Mongkut, who, being so fond of many European ways, had asked King Chulalongkorn to call his heir "Mongkut", so that there would be King Mongkut II as in the European custom. King Chulalongkorn had told this to the Crown Prince Vajiravudh who accepted it¹⁴, because he also liked westernization. But foreigners knew him as King Vajiravudh or Rama VI more than Pra Mongkut Klao.

When Vajiravudh became king, he continued the enlightened policy of his father, but as his father had made many administrative reforms already, he paid much attention to other things else, namely cultural and military reforms.

King Vajiravudh had a great reputation in his distinguished literary ability. It was first shown when he was studying in England. At Oxford University he wrote a thesis on *The War of the Polish Succession*, which was admired by all who read it and this created a literary reputation for him. Later, though he had lot of things to do, as a king, he did not give up his favourite works. He wrote many proses, poetries, plays and did many translations with which he had equal success. These he wrote under the pseudonyms Asvabahu, Ramjiti, and Sri Ayudhaya.

¹⁴Prince Chula Chakrabongse, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

As the King's desire was to reform cultures, and also to encourage nationalism, most of his writings were written for that purpose. Sometimes the writings seemed to be gay and light but they always contained the King's idea about society, education, religion, morality, and militarist, which undoubtedly he got from England during his nine years of studying there. In order to bring western civilization into Siam, he translated many European literature, as well as writings by himself. Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *As You Like It* were translated, together with those of other English and French playwrights. Some he translated as exactly as origin, but some he changed a little so that they would have the Siamese atmosphere. As a result, besides the new era of Siamese literature began, there were a lot of social reforms along the Western line especially in high-class society.

One of the instantly popular and lasting reforms of King Vajiravudh concerned women. During his reign the position of women in society was better than before. The ladies of high class had more liberty and with the King's encouragement, began to show themselves in social gatherings and parties. Many schools with European curriculums were built for them, and some students were sent to continue their studies abroad. Furthermore, the King also persuaded them in his writings to adopt European hair styles and the skirts, in place of short hair, *en brosse*, and the *panung* or waist-cloth. These were quickly in fashion. Besides, these, in order to support their position, the King also declared his favour in the practice of monogamy, which was a European tradition, and also that he wanted polygamy to disappear. This he started with a draft law of monogamy which strangely enough was protested by women themselves so he had to put it away. In spite of his earlier intension in setting an example of monogamy, the King had two queens during the last few years of his life. However he had reputation in introducing this idea to Siam and was followed by the later kings—King Rama VII and IX. These were the things King Vajiravudh had done for women along his westernized idea.

As for men, their position was also changed. Most of them joined either the Wild Tigers Corps or military service because of the encouragement of the King. They wore European uniforms. They had more liberty to speak. Clubs were gradually founded for them to go, play and meet their friends; and sometimes European sports' matches were provided for members such as football, bridge and billiard—football game was the most popular one. Besides these social gatherings and entertainment, occasions were also provided for them to meet young girls who were gradually pushed away from the old custom by the westernization and came out to the new world of civilization.

The last but not least important thing that the King had done for social reforms was the enactment of using surname in 1911. Prior to that date Siamese

families had no surnames at all. So the King, influenced by Europe and seeing how important it would be to society, enacted the law. From then on Siamese had surnames as Europeans.

As for the security of the country, King Vajiravudh, who had been trained in British Army, paid much attention to military reforms as well as in culture. As soon as he ascended the throne, he created a corps known as the Wild Tigers. It consisted of volunteers from among the civil officials, and was under his direct command solely. On the creation he gave the reason that military training of civil servants would be very useful for the country in many ways. The most important of all was that it would make them be good citizens: being trained and having learned some military activities, they would be brave, moral, disciplined and united. The training would also incite their loves for king, country and religion to the extent that they could give their lives in defending them.¹⁵ Besides these, in a war times, if there would be any, the Wild Tigers Corps could join and help the Army whenever they were needed.¹⁶ Perhaps these were the King's real ideas, but there was another reason of his creation of this corps. It was the intent to support his throne and counteract the influence of his elder relatives most of whom had had power in the government since his father's time. The corps had members from all over the country. There were maneuvers every year directed by himself. At the club, he went nearly everyday and gave patriotic lectures. During his reign the corps was very successful, but after he was dead it ended too; because the Army and Navy discontented about it. There even was one attempt in 1912 to assassinate the King, but fortunately Prince Chakrabongse, his brother, knew and could stop it in time. However, the Wild Tigers Corps' junior branch—the Tiger Cubs or Boy Scouts—which the King created in boys' schools was successful and lasted until to-day, and it was one of the best monuments to his memory.

Besides the Wild Tigers Corps, the Army and Navy also had the King's attentiveness. There were many reforms. The use of modern methods and modern armament was introduced into Siamese militarist especially after World War I. British destroyer—Pra Ruang—was bought for the Navy by public subscription and encouraged by the King. During his reign also, the Air Force was established along the French line. All of these reforms the King was helped by his brothers, namely Prince Chakrabongse, Prince Paripatra and Prince Abhakorn who had studied in Europe. During his reign the Thai Army was so much better than before that they could join the Allies' Army in the World War I in Europe in 1918.

¹⁵Prapatana Trinarong, *Chivit Lae Ngan Kong Asvabahu* (Life and Work of Asvabahu), (in Thai), Bangkok, 1963.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 361.

There was another important thing the King had done for Siam, it was her close relation with western countries and her entry into the family of nations as equal status. During King Vajiravudh's reign, foreign policy was a great success. In the year 1911, he sent Prince Chakrabongse to London as his representative at the coronation of King George V and at the same time to invite European royalty to Bangkok for his coronation in December of the same year.¹⁷ This task was successful. On his coronation, King George V of Britain sent his brother-in-law, Prince Alexander of Teck as his representative; the Emperor of Russia sent the Grand Duke Boris; the King of Sweden sent Prince William, his son whose Russian wife was a friend of Chakrabongse's at St. Petersburg; the King of Denmark sent Prince Waldemar who brought two sons with him, one of whom was Prince Axel—ever since then a good friend of the Chakri Family and of Siam. It was the biggest gathering of European royalty ever had in Asia.¹⁸ This proved the King's first success in foreign policy.

The second success was about World War I, When the war broke out in Europe in 1914, King Vajiravudh, though pro-Allies, first declared his country neutral, because he knew that Siamese people still felt resentment against the French and English in taking some parts of Siam territory during King Chulalongkorn's days. The Germans, on the other hand, had never done them any wrong; moreover, most of the officers in the Army had been trained in Germany. So the King dared not to declare war against Germany unless there was best reason to do so. However, during the earlier years of the war, he sent donation and subscription to many Allies' charities. He wrote articles in the newspaper and translated articles from English magazines. This has a great influence, together with the discontent of German's policy of submarine warfare, by 1917 the King received full support in his determination to join the Allies. So he declared war against Germany and sent a small force to France in June 1918. After that Thai flag was often flown in Europe and U.S.A. among those of other nations on occasions of Allied functions.

The Thai flag was another lasting memorial to King Vajiravudh. Before World War I, Thai flag had a white elephant on the red background. But as it was not always well made, the Elephant looked like a pig. So King Vajiravudh. Rama VI, changed it into a flag of five horizontal stripes of red, white, double dark blue, white and red. This has since remained the Thai flag until today¹⁹

¹⁷Before that, there was a quiet religious ceremony on November 11, 1910. There had to be two coronational ceremonies because at the first time he could not do much as he was in mourning. At the second time he wanted to show Thai cultures to other countries., *ibid.*, p. 341.

¹⁸Prince Chula Chakrabongse, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 289.

When the war ended Siam gained much by joining the winning side. We had German shipping as booty which turned out a large sum of money, and thus helped the economic condition of the country, though not much. England and France recognized Siam's independence; and the treaties Siam signed with western countries were revised, which gave her an almost equal status. Last, but not least, Siam became a member of the League of Nations. This was the result of King Vajiravudh's bringing Siam to join the Allies' side during World War I. Thus the hope he had had since his coronation that Siam would "have truly entered and be honoured in the Family of Nations as an equal in every sense of the word"²⁰ was achieved.

Though the King paid much attention to cultural and military reforms, and also to foreign policy, he did not neglect the internal administration. As he was a liberal and democratic himself, he wanted his people to be too. So he tried to teach them bit by bit. First he built a big miniature city in the garden of Phya Thai Palace and gave the name as "Dusit Dhani". There, his courtiers rented houses and there were elections of Mayor and Councillors to run the city as though it were a real city, and constitutionalism was tried. But his good will to the country was misunderstood by the people who thought that the King, was much interested in the doll-town more than governed the country. Some, especially those who had studied abroad and were influenced by westernization, wanted the King to give a constitution as soon as possible. But as they saw that the King did not do anything towards that, in 1917 the criticism of the King became widespread. Prince Chakrabongse, his brother and Heir Presumptive to the throne, was distressed about this. So he wrote to the King, and suggested that the Legislative Council of King Chulalongkorn, which consisted of the King's appointed members and which was more or less like the council of other democratic countries in Europe, should be revived. But the King replied that :

...with his English upbringing, he did not cherish power for its own sake, and he was a constitutionalist at heart. If he had proceeded only by theory, and had not looked at the practical side, he would have granted a constitution already in 1912. But he was advised by eminent Thai, British, and American advisers alike that the bulk of the Thai people were not well educated enough to know how to elect their representatives to a legislative assembly.²¹

The half-way measure suggested by Prince Chakrabongse.

would not solve the problem, for a legislative council

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 272.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 290.

*with members nominated by the King would only be considered a group of his "yes men," and he would continue to be personally criticized. Rama VI thought that if Siam was not yet ready to have a real parliament, it was better to do without an imitation.*²²

This showed that though the King was liberal and wanted to give a constitution to his people, he could not do so because the people had not had enough education. So he promoted education as much as he could. In order to educate all his people, he issued the compulsory elementary educational law in 1921. The first university was also established, in 1917, with the huge surplus of the money subscribed for King Chulalongkorn's equestrian statue, and in his father's memory he gave it the name Chulalongkorn University. He himself also found the Royal Pages School, known as Vajiravudh College, along English public school lines. As for schools for girls, they were founded more and more by the encouragement of the King. It was during his reign that girls were sent to study abroad for the first time, and the number of Thai students abroad, both boys and girls was increased rapidly. These were educational reforms that King Vajiravudh accomplished.

Compared to his father, King Vajiravudh had accomplished few important administrative reforms. Besides military, educational and social reforms, he had also done some in public welfare and finance.

As for public welfare, during his reign the Medical Law was passed. He introduced compulsory vaccination and established the institution of the Red Cross Society, which in turn opened a leper asylum and started an anti-tuberculosis campaign. He also founded the Pasteur Institute with the help of Prince Damrong, whose daughter died of rabies. Besides providing serums against that dread disease, there was also a snake farm for preparing serums against poisonous snake bites. Another one worth mentioning here in helping the King in medical reforms was Prince Mahidol, his half-brother and father of the present reigning sovereign—His Majesty King Bhumibol, Rama IX. Prince Mahidol had studied medicine at Harvard University in U.S.A., and when he went back to Siam, he helped to enlarge Siriraj Hospital and medical school. Furthermore he sent Thai doctors to study abroad with his own money. In appreciation for his medical aid, the Rockefeller Foundation gave support to Siam; and this helped very much to expand medical activities during King Vajiravudh's reign.

From the point of view of finance, though the King tried hard to revive the economic conditions of his country, he was a failure, because of his extravagance, his satellites' corruption and natural disaster—the flood of 1917, and the crop failure

²²*Ibid.*

of 1919-1920. The King spent a lot of money on his coronation to which nearly all European royalty were invited, and on the expenses of the Royal Household. The King claimed that the Court was the centre of the arts and culture of the country, so it had to be well decorated and well organized. This put the finance of the country in critical position. However the King tried hard to mend it. The Board of Commercial Development was instituted; a Financial Commission was appointed; and national savings banks were established. But it was not better. He had to ask for new foreign loans, and when he died in 1925 the economic condition of the country was not improved. Siam was seriously indebted to England and France. This was a great problem for the next king--King Prajadhipok--to solve, and this was another cause for the revolution on 24 June 1932.

During his fifteen years of reign (1910-1925), King Vajiravudh gradually became unpopular. It was because of his extravagance, his incuriosity in administration and his shutting himself off from his family and subjects. He unlike his father, was not enthusiastic in asking for the advice of his elderly and efficient relatives nor of foreign advisers. He liked to modernize the country along the Western line by his absolutism, and sometimes with the help of his favourites who had been abroad and whom he appointed to be in important positions in the government to counteract the influence of his relatives. This caused the discontent of his family. Besides this, the Cabinet of ministers rarely met, the King preferred to work directly with individual ministers, and made individual decisions. He also rarely showed himself to the public except on important ceremonial occasions. He passed his time mostly amongst courtiers and in writing. Sometimes plays written by him were performed, and he always took part in them, which caused much criticism as people did not like their King to act on the stage. The establishment of the Wild Tiger Corps also caused the discontent of the Army and Navy, and they had even tried to dethrone him twice--in 1912 and 1917--but they were not successful. Another thing that caused the unpopularity of the King was that throughout most of his reign he was unmarried; and even when he got married in 1922, he failed to provide an heir male. All of these things caused the King's popularity gradually to wane. However, when he died in 1925 and people looked back to his works again, they found out his ability in literary works, the importance of his introduction of Boy Scouts, his foreign policy and his social reforms. This made him famous, though uncomparable to his father. He was given the name also of "Pra Maha Tirarach Chao" which means the Great Scholarly King, and a statue was built in his memory. That is the end of the reign of King Vajiravudh, the liberal and westernized king of Siam who played the most important role in the changes of Thai culture.

PART IV

The Thai cultures as expressed in her religion, arts and literature, social system and social life, customs and manners, "reveal a unity in a general sense with her neighbours, the Cambodians, the Mons, the Burmese and partly the Malays, but with varied characteristics".²³ But on contact with the Europeans, especially around the turn of the century, Thai traditional culture changed in nearly every aspect and mostly by the initiative and influence of the kings, especially King Vajiravudh.

The Thai culture developed and formed around her religion, Buddhism, which had held a strong position in the Siamese mind. Cristianity which the European had brought along with them, had no influence on the Siamese at all; they still clung firmly to their Buddhism; only a few had been converted. The reason for the unpopularity could be seen clearly from King Mongkut's point of view when he told the American missionaries: "What you teach them to *do* is admirable, but what you teach them to *believe* is foolish."²⁴ That was why Western religion had no influence in converting Buddhists. The only way that Christianity had effected Buddhism was that there were many reforms in Buddhism in order to counteract Christian power. The activity was led by King Mongkut whose 27 years in the Buddhist priesthood made him see clearly how Thai Buddhism was different from the basic teachings and actions of its founder. So he created a reformed sect—Dhammayut—which was strictly bound by the discipline. To effect this essential revival of primitive Buddhism, he organized religious instruction and encouraged *wat* schools. King Chulalongkorn followed his father's policy, and, moreover, reorganized the priestly hierarchy. King Vajiravudh was the third successive king to show an active interest in Buddhism, but in a different way. As he was a nationalist, he proclaimed Buddhism a national religion, so that it would unite the country and support the administrative policy. He wrote many books and gave many lectures on both religion and morality. As a result, Buddhism was stronger than before.

In the area of arts and literature, Europeans had not much influence. Siam still preserved her traditional style. However there had been an introduction of the European style of architecture in to Siam since King Mongkut. King Chulalongkorn's new palace, the Chakri Maha Prasat, was built in the style which was a mixture schools of European architecture, but the picturesque and characteristic Siamese roof, however, being retained.²⁵ This showed that though the King liked Westernization, he also wanted to preserve the culture of his country and this applied to every kind of art. King Vajiravudh also followed his father's idea.

²³Phya Anuman Rajadhon, *The Culture of Thailand*, No. I (Bangkok: The National Culture Institute, B.E. 2496), p. 8.

²⁴Prince Chula Chakrabongse, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

²⁵Bayard Taylor, *Siam, the Land of the White Elephant As It Was and Is* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892), p. 282.

But in literature, there were a lot of changes because of the European influence. Though King Chulalongkorn had not done much about this, his letters to a daughter, Princess Nibha, during his second European tour, which have been published in book form called *Klai Ban* (Far From Home), was the best document on European civilization and culture. The one who had done much in literary development was King Vajiravudh. During his reign western literature had been introduced into Siam by translation. The King was the first Siamese poet to translate Shakespeare's works, such as *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *As You like It*, as well as a number of English and French plays. The essay form was apparently unknown until the King developed propaganda prose. The European idea of drama, *lakhon poot*, was another new thing that the King initiated in Siam, which gave an impetus to a new kind of performance; but this enthusiasm did not last long, and Thais turned their attention back to their traditional ballet. However, through King Vajiravudh's genius and influence, a new era of Siamese literature has evolved and developed. One of the most important things concerning literature took place at the turn of the century. This was the establishment of the national library—the Vajirayana—in 1905, by King Chulalongkorn, who appointed the Crown Prince Vajirvudh, Prince Damrong, and three other nobles to form the National Library Committee. The Committee worked successfully. There were the collection of books, both in Thai and in foreign languages, especially books about Siamese history and Buddhism. When King Vajiravudh ascended the throne, he continued to promote the library, which gradually enlarged became the National Library of today. The printing press, which was introduced into Siam in the early nineteenth century by the missionaries, soon became a potent factor in transforming the language and making literature available to everyone.

In the early days, when foreign advisers flourished and returned students from abroad wanted to show their knowledge of English, the English words and phrases were always put into Siamese sentences. But during his reign, King Vajiravudh, who was a nationalist, tried very hard to stop this imitation and to restore the pure Siamese language. This was another one thing the King had done preserving Thai culture.

From the point of view of social system and social life, the Europeans had a great influence. The social system of Siam consisted of king, aristocrats and lower-class people of which most were slaves. The abolition of slavery by King Chulalongkorn, along the plans of his modernization of the country, made the conditions of lower-class life improved. They then became an independent class free from the ancient thralldom and owned their own lands. The abolition of the public gambling houses by King Vajiravudh also helped them from being indebted, which once was a cause of slavery.

Amongst the higher class also, the spread of European cultures, assisted by the liberal views and acts of King Vajiravudh and his father, caused social changes, especially in the status of women. Before the turn of the century, while the women of the lower-class had always enjoyed greater liberty, appearing in public at all times, and joining with men in all the business and pleasure of life. The ladies of the upper class were kept in the background, seldom appearing at social gatherings. As for their education, they learned mostly about domestic economy, either at home or at a palace. When English education was introduced by King Mongkut, private teachers were hired to teach them there, such as Mrs. Anna Leonowens, but there was no real school for them until King Chulalongkorn came to the throne. He had seen the importance of education, so schools for girls started, though not as those of boys. The curriculum of girls' schools was largely similar to those of the schools in England. The most important school for the girls of nobility was the Sunandulaya School.²⁶ Since then Siamese girls began to become westernized but not as much as during King Vajiravudh's reign.

King Vajiravudh was the one who played the most important part in westernizing Siamese women. During his reign, female education had developed, and the number of girls went to study abroad was gradually increased. Furthermore in the court functions and ceremonies, the ladies of the upper class were encouraged to take part which astonished the public. It was also largely through the King's influence that women adopted European hair styles and the skirt. He persuaded them in his writings²⁷ to wear their hair long in place of short hair *en brosse*, and also to wear the Laotian skirt in place of *ponung*. For the upper part of body, women in the old days did not wear anything except some ornaments. Blouse and *pahom* were first introduced by a decree by King Chulalongkorn.

During King Vajiravudh's reign the Laotian blouses were also introduced into Siam by the influence of the King, but later they were changed into the European way of dressing. Their new way of dressing and hairstyle were given trial first by the Court ladies at the receptions and parties, and at once it was accepted to be the fashion for upper class girls. Another thing that was encouraged by the King was the giving up chewing betel and keeping their teeth white. In the old days, Siamese used to chew betel which caused the blackening of the teeth. However it was one of the chief necessities of life in Siam and the blackened teeth were considered a mark of beauty. But this was to Europeans most offensive. So

²⁶The school was given the name after Somdech Pra Nang (Her Majesty the Queen) Sunanda, a Queen of King Chulalongkorn who was drowned with her children during her boat trip to Bang-Pa-In, near Ayudhaya.

²⁷For example in Ram Chitti (King Vajiravudh), *Hua Jai Chai Noom* (Young Man's Heart), (in Thai), Bangkok, n.d., p. 12.

the King encouraged them to keep their teeth white. They also had permanent-waved hair, manicured nails, and rouged lips and cheeks. Thus during his reign, women changed a great deal. Because of modern education and social life, they were not shy and awkward any more. They had more liberty and went along very well together with men. This was great change in Siamese women and society.

Another thing that the King had done for women was his introduction of monogamy. Unlike his predecessor, King Vajiravudh, who had studied in Europe for many years (1893--1902), had the idea against polygamy. He made it clear that he would favour its disappearance and would like to set an example of monogamy. That was why he was a bachelor until he reached the age of forty, and announced his engagement to one of his cousins in 1920. But unfortunately, they broke their engagement, and the King married her sister, and later two other ladies in spite of his earlier intent. However, early in his reign he drafted an Act of monogamy which, strangely enough, had been resisted strongly by upper class women themselves, so the King "finding the time not yet ripe for so drastic an innovation, consigned the draft to await further developments"²⁸ The encouragement of the King to Siamese women in changing their ways of dressing and hair style was also another attempt by him to abolish the practice of polygamy. He gave the idea that if a woman always dressed herself well and knew how to be a good wife, her husband would find that one wife was enough for him, and that the practice of polygamy was unnecessary.²⁹ King Vajiravudh succeeded in this attempt to women but failed in the encouragement of the practice of monogamy during his reign. However, polygamy was made illegal in 1935 and the King's successors, King Prajadhipok and King Bhumipol have been strict monogamists. So we can say that King Vajiravudh had initiated and had influenced on this as well as on other aspects of reforming concerned women.

Besides polygamy, the King was also against divorce. When Prince Chakrabongse divorced his Russian-wife, he protested against this, though at first he did not like the idea of his brother's getting married to a European. To that kind of marriage he gave the reason that Siamese and European were different in every way-way of living, custom, language, manners and behaviour. Moreover when they came back to Siam, the husband would compare his wife with Siamese girls and would find her weak points, and then it would cause their quarrels and divorce at the end.³⁰ That was why he did not appreciate that kind of marriage; however, he did not like the idea of divorce either.

²⁸W.A. Graham, *Siam* (London: Alexander Moring Limited, The De La More Press, 1924), p. 246.

²⁹Ram Jitti, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 20.

Coming to the position of men, it was also reformed as that of women. But it was done much during the previous reigns. King Mongkut was the first king who improved the way men dressed themselves. He issued the edict that all men in his presence must wear jackets,³¹ and this was followed strictly by King Chulalongkorn, during whose reign European uniforms became popular. During King Vajiravudh's reign this popularity was widely spread.

Since King Chulalongkorn abolished the practice of prostration in the presence of the Sovereign, social intercourse progressed. Persons of slightly different rank could meet on a more or less equal footing, which led to an easier interchange of ideas and sentiments. Men of the upper class could pass their leisure in social gatherings and at clubs where the free discussion of all subjects was permitted, and sports and games were introduced. These activities were encouraged mostly by King Vajiravudh, as he had seen the importance of creating a social spirit while he had been in England. The King's Tiger Club had become a centre where the members met regularly for tennis, billiards, football, and other social diversions, as well as for disciplinary exercises. Another European culture that was adopted by Siamese as a social entertainment was European dance, which was quickly became popular.

As social life developed, the King realized that family name, like in Europe, was really necessary, otherwise in society one could not identify himself nor assume any family responsibility. He could do any thing, good or bad without it being known to which family he belonged. So in 1916, the King decreed a law requiring all families to have surnames. This was another lasting reform of King Vajiravudh along the Western civilization.

From the point of view of customs and manners, inspite of the European influence, they showed but little sign of change. Most of Siamese preferred their oldway. Europeans influence had only effect on the practice of prostration and inaccessibility, that they were finally abolished. But their tradition salutation—*krab* and *wai*—were still kept. They preferred them more than shaking hand and bowing like Europeans.

All of these were Thai culture, some of which were changed a great deal when they came into contact with Europeans; but some only changed a little. The Thais still preserved some of their old-traditional ways. However, kings of Siam, especially King Vajiravudh, had much influence on reforming them, which every year saw an advance of some sort along the path of social development.

³¹Prince Chula Chakrabongse, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

CONCLUSION

King Mongkut, Rama IV, was the first Siamese sovereign to realize that the colonialism by Europe would expand to Siam soon. So as he knew he had not power enough to aver it, he thought perhaps it was advisable to set his house in order and prepare his people for the assimilation of new social conditions. From that time began the modernizational period in Siam, and the initiative in these moves was taken by the kings themselves. King Mongkut met with difficulties in his reforms because they were new things, and the Siamese, especially the old people, wanted to preserve their old traditions and customs. So the King could not do much in modernizing the country during his time. King Chulalongkorn, Rama V, his son, also tried hard to put westernization into the Siamese mind. As he reigned for a long time (1868-1910), he gradually succeeded in persuading them, especially the intelligent princes, to see the value of modernizing the country along Western lines, and they were the people on whom the King relied for assistance in carrying out his wishes. Both the King and his noblemen went abroad to see and study western civilization and returned to modernize the country. So during King Chulalongkorn's reign, most of administrative reforms were accomplished. When King Vajiravudh, Rama VI, his son, who had been studying in England for nine years, came to the throne, he continued his father's policy and paid much attention to culture in which his father had not done much. King Vajiravudh was indeed passionately attached to the traditions of this country, so his attention in persuing Western cultures was only to adopt such foreign customs as might contribute to the happiness and material welfare of his people. That was why most of Thai culture was still preserved and lasted until today. However, one cannot deny that Thai traditional culture changed a great deal around the turn of the century when it came into close contact with European culture, mostly by the influence of kings, especially King Vajiravudh, Rama VI of Siam.
